The Representation of White Antiracism Activism in Children's Picture Books

Abstract
This study looked at how white antiracism activism is portrayed to children through one of the most popular literacy tools, the picture book. Both written text and images in children's literature can contribute to understandings of race, especially in the context of a social justice curriculum. Stories of white allies are often silenced in society, even though they can provide valuable role models for inspiring collaborative resistance to racism. Critical Race Theory and Anti-Racist Education provided ways to view social structures, institutions, and personal responses to the awareness of social injustice. An initial investigation identified ninety-one books from a ten-year time parameter, which contained two or more representations of a white antiracism activist. Ultimately, only five books which portrayed substantial representations of a white activist as the main character were selected for deep analysis. A Critical Discourse Analysis of these books' texts located critical factors in the actions and situations of the white activists. These factors included critical incidents as well as other factors within a longer continuum of situations and experiences, which helped orient the character towards antiracism activism. One hundred ninety-eight text entries were reported as frequency counts and percentages within ten critical factor categories and two sub categories. Findings revealed five trends indicating which factors were most significant according to the highest frequency of occurrences within the corpus: (1) critical factors experienced in childhood, (2) critical factors involving cross racial interactions, (3) personal experiences of injustice, (4) teaching and advocacy as a resistance strategy, and (5) civil disobedience as a resistance strategy. Conversely, two additional trends revealed by the lowest frequencies of occurrences were: (1) learning about injustice in school, and (2) learning about injustice independently. Study limitations and implications for further research are discussed.

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