



# Literacy for Social Justice, Equity Diversity, and Inclusion: Curriculum Audit & Book Review Audit

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# Executive Summary



Throughout the school year of 2021-2022, the Center for the Ecology of Early Childhood Development (CEED), worked in partnership with Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI), to pilot a curriculum audit tool used to evaluate their Pre-K curriculum, *Blueprint for Early Learning*<sup>®</sup>, and the curriculum's accompanying language and literacy resources (i.e., storybooks). This work resulted in the refinement of methodology used by Franco-Jenkins, Iruka, and Curenton (2021) to evaluate Jumpstart's preschool curriculum.

From that work, the researchers at CEED learned the potential benefits of engaging in a curriculum and literacy resource audit for all schools and early learning programs, leading to a reconceptualization of a framework focused on culturally responsive, anti-bias and anti-racist (CRABAR) learning principles and instructional values. From that framework, Curenton and Franco-Jenkins

(2023a, 2023b) developed two new audit tools that can be used by educators and education leaders in Head Start, childcare, or public elementary schools to provide data about the quality of their teaching and learning resources as it relates specifically to themes related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI).

This work resulted in two publicly available audit tools for reflecting on curricula and detailed criteria for reviewing the features of storybooks. These tools can be used by teachers, education leaders, and administrators working with children in early childhood and elementary school, and are called *Reading for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI): Storybook Audit Tool* (Curenton & Franco-Jenkins, 2023a) and *Learning for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI): Curriculum Audit* (Curenton & Franco-Jenkins, 2023b).

# Purpose of Work



The Center for the Ecology of Early Childhood Development (CEED), worked in partnership with the Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI), to pilot a curriculum audit tool used to evaluate their Pre-K curriculum, *Blueprint for Early Learning*<sup>®</sup>, and the curriculum's accompanying language and literacy resources (i.e., storybooks). This work resulted in a refinement of the original methodology Franco-Jenkins, Iruka, and Curenton (2021) used to evaluate Jumpstart's preschool curriculum. The resulting products included an audit tool for reflecting on curriculum and criteria for book review audit tool used to rate storybooks. These audit tools use a framework that is culturally responsive, anti-bias, and anti-racist (CRABAR). These tools can be used by teachers, education leaders, and administrators working with children in early childhood and elementary school, and are called *Reading for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI): Storybook Audit Tool* and *Learning for Justice, Equity Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI): Curriculum Audit*.

## Children's Literacy Initiative, *Blueprint for Early Learning*<sup>®</sup>

Children's Literacy Initiative (CLI) seeks to dismantle structural racism by providing Black and Latine children with the early literacy instruction, support, and advocacy

needed to create equity in education. CLI believes that systemic change is the only way that the public education system will become equitable for children of color. They have a vision of a world where every child possesses the power of literacy and the opportunity for a lifetime of success. CLI is an industry leader in shifting the system of reading pedagogy, unlocking the power of its integrated literacy model, and working every day with school partners to eliminate an inequity-driven gap. CLI's proven approach, now enriched by culturally responsive instruction, shows that teachers can become exemplary instructors when they receive the right combination and intensity of training and coaching. A key to effective coaching is having ready access to student learning and teacher practice data.

CLI has spent the last 30 years working side by side with teachers to improve education. This experience has provided us with the unique expertise needed to create a Pre-K curriculum infused with authentic learning experiences and engaging lessons. *Blueprint for Early Learning*<sup>®</sup> provides a comprehensive set of evidence-based, detailed teaching plans, expertly organized following a detailed scope and sequence to deliver engaging, intentional, and responsive Pre-K instruction.

## Need for Audit Tools

Racially marginalized learners (RMLs) are those learners who are Black or African American, Latine, Native American, or Asian American, and they are projected to represent the majority of public-school-age students by 2030 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022b). Yet, the lived experiences of RMLs are not central to the American schooling system. RMLs often do not see their realities reflected in their learning environments; instead, their cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and communication styles are frequently silenced, and they may experience racism in the form of microaggressions, inequitable disciplinary actions, and disparities in opportunities (Camera, 2019; Hill & Torres, 2010; Humphries & Iruka, 2017). It is important for children to be able to see themselves represented in what they are learning because it will help them better engage in the learning process.

In addition to being able to see themselves represented, children also need to be able to hear the voices of their families and communities depicted in their learning materials. About 32 percent of young children (ages 0 to 8) living in the United States report using two or more languages. The majority of students come from Latine Spanish-speaking homes (75.7%), followed by Arabic, English, Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Russian, Haitian, Hmong, and Korean (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a). Previous research has established effective practices to provide high-quality early education to multilingual learners (Castro et al., 2017; Gillanders et al., 2014; Zheng et al., 2021) including adding intentionality to the curriculum and providing language and literacy resources in the children's home language. Research has shown limited use of the home language in the classroom and that when the language is used is mostly for behavior modification (Franco et al., 2019). Studies focusing on exploring language, and literacy representation in early childhood classrooms have found that children's books are overwhelmingly white (Crisp et al., 2016). It is critical that multilingual learners see themselves represented in their early learning environments.

Children with disabilities—visible and invisible—are also underrepresented in children's learning materials. Students with specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, developmental delays, among other disabilities, make up approximately 15% of public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022c), with almost half a million of those students being 3- to 5-year-old children (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Further, Head Start programs are required to ensure that at least 10% of enrolled students are eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Office of Head Start, n.d.). Despite this, disability has not generally been embraced as an important identity category within children's learning materials. Even curricula that purport to be social-justice oriented neglect disability-relevant content, reinforcing non-disabled normativity and "otherness" of disabled children (Lalvani & Backon, 2019; Sapon-Shevin, 2017). Further, issues related to ableism are not typically incorporated into children's learning materials, presenting a missed opportunity to disrupt systems of oppression and prejudice against people with disabilities.

Other identities often under- or misrepresented in children's learning materials are sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (SOGIE). Research shows that curricula consistently reinforce the concept of gender binary and heterosexuality (Gansen, 2017; Gunn, 2011; Nguyen, 2022). Given that gender identity begins developing early in childhood (Steensma et al., 2013; Zucker, 2004); neglecting to embrace diversity in SOGIE within curricula may further stigmatize these identities, disrupt healthy gender and sexual identity development, and lead to minority stress (Coleman et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2022). Further, learning materials often lack inclusion of lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) identifying parents or family members, and this lack of representation has impacts that extend beyond children themselves, leaving LGBTQ families feeling unsupported by their children's schools (Watson & Russell, 2015).

## Defining Curriculum

The definition of curriculum by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) National Center for Education Evaluation (NCEE), describes a curriculum as a cohesive set of principles, activities, and materials to help children learn and thrive. Often, curricula:

- Specify learning objectives and the content children are to learn
- Offer guidance on how the content should be taught (including, educator training or technical assistance)
- Can be implemented in classroom settings or group learning environments (i.e., used by those other than the curriculum developers)
- Demonstrate positive results on child outcomes that have been replicated.

Education scholars criticize that curricula used in public schools uphold the dominance of White, Christian, non-immigrant, American culture, and that RMLs are either not represented in the learning environment, curriculum, or materials (e.g., storybooks) or only regulated to minor or stereotypical roles (Gay, 2000; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995).



# Foundational Principles for the Tools



The tools adopt a culturally responsive, anti-bias, and anti-racist (CRABAR) framework. CRABAR framework draws from an asset-based perspective to shift the lens away from a deficit view of children and families of color and those experiencing poverty and disadvantages. Overall, the CRABAR framework that inspired this work sought to provide a tool that teachers could use to evaluate whether the curriculum and literacy materials they were using within their classroom could be used to transform classroom literacy interactions into liberatory and anti-oppressive interactions.

**A CRABAR framework is grounded in anti-racist pedagogy which can be described as being:**

“grounded in an anti-oppressive focus on teaching [and] . . . designed to foster critical thinking skills around structural inequalities within society and to promote social awareness and self-awareness and identity. In anti-racist pedagogy, educators view children as co-creators of knowledge and active in the learning process where they construct—and reconstruct—meaning in a way that is useful to their lives. (Curenton et al., 2022, p. 682).”

Yet, a CRABAR framework expands beyond anti-racism by also including culturally responsive and relevant values, which we describe as recognizing, elevating, and emanating the cultural attributes of historically and systematically marginalized children. The framework also highlights the strengths and assets of people of color and other diverse people. CRABAR places emphasis on the inclusion of marginalized learners' diverse communication styles and cultural backgrounds into the learning environment commonly referred to as culturally responsive pedagogy (Hammond,

2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Research on the subject has demonstrated that culturally responsive teaching, along with anti-bias work and social justice-oriented curriculum, is critical to breaking down systems of oppression and creating equitable learning opportunities for racially and culturally marginalized learners (Hammond, 2015). The time is ripe for a culturally responsive instruction because the population of the U.S. is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Table 1 shows how more than half of the U.S. public school population are for children who are RMLs.

**Table 1. Diversity of PreK-12 Public School Children**

	Number	Percent of Student Population
<b>White</b>	<b>22.4</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>14.1</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Black</b>	<b>7.4</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>Asian</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Multiracial</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>American Indian/Alaskan Native/Pacific Islander</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.4%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>49.5</b>	

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 1999-2000 through 2020-21 and 2021-22 Preliminary.

This ethnic-racial diversity also gives rise to another form of diversity within our schools—increasing linguistic diversity. Linguistic diversity is an indication of the variety of languages that are spoken within a country, and this variety can include languages (e.g., Spanish, English, Telugu) as well as dialects/vernaculars of English (e.g., Standard American English, African American Vernacular English [AAVE]). Our nation's linguistic diversity presents the opportunity to retrain educators on how to prepare children from all language backgrounds to be academically successful (see Curenton, 2011; Castro et al., 2010). Children from homes where multiple languages are

spoken are described as dual language learners (DLLs) in the early childhood years and English Language Learners (ELLs) in elementary school. For DLLs and ELLs, their home language environments can span a spectrum of the exclusive use of a heritage language (e.g., Spanish) to a code-switching household (e.g., where Spanish and English are used interchangeably). It is common knowledge that many Latine children speak Spanish. However, many Black immigrant children are multilingual (Capps & Fix, 2012), and many native-born Blacks are fluent in Standard American English as well as AAVE (Craig & Washington, 2006; Manning & Baruth, 2004).



The CRABAR framework also speaks against bias in all its forms, including disability and SOGIE. As discussed above, this approach elevates the strengths and assets of individuals with historically marginalized identities as is uniquely positioned to address identities not typically attended to in early childhood education learning materials, even those that claim to be social justice-oriented, such as highlighting the value of students with varying disabilities and disrupting hetero- and cis-normativity. Intentionally addressing disability from a strengths-based perspective will help educators, students, as well as their families and communities, understand disability as an important form of diversity to be embraced and celebrated. In addition, this framework helps normalize the SOGIE spectrum, and thus proactively works to de-stigmatize these identities. Given that students with disabilities and sexual and gender diverse students experience higher rates of bullying than their nondisabled, heterosexual, and cisgendered peers (Kosciw et al., 2018; Marshall et al., 2009), this approach can help to promote safe environments in which children feel supported through increasing sensitivity and acceptance toward individuals with these identities. Ultimately, the CRABAR framework promotes critical thinking about intersecting and interrelated identities for those with multiple historically minoritized identities and promotes social justice for these children and future generations.

## Importance of JEDI Oriented Curriculum & Storybooks

When teachers read storybooks that have a social justice theme and that represent the lived experiences of RMLs and all their various identities, all the children in the classroom are exposed to knowledge that will build their understanding about the diversity of the world. In particular, reading such storybooks can enhance children's racial literacy (Curenton et al., 2022). Racial literacy is the ability to understand racism as a structural and systemic problem in which the social construct of race is used as an instrument of social, political, economic, and geographic control (Guinier, 2004). Traditional literacy instruction, which is often only focused on developing

children's abilities to read and write, does not intentionally and actively focus on building children's racial literacy skills; in fact, traditional literacy instruction is often silent around the issues of justice, racism, or oppression (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003). Even when teachers frame literacy instruction in terms of multiculturalism, they often do so without actually confronting issues of structural or systemic racism (Banks, 2003; Nieto, 2003). Ladson-Billings (2003) criticizes that even when teachers use books about race, they still fail to engage children in discourse about how race is a sociopolitical and socioeconomic construct that frames the hierarchy of American society. Nevertheless, Nieto (2003, p.205) explains:

*Racism is a problem that must be confronted in research, in classroom practice, in the assumption and beliefs that researchers and teachers have about the intelligence and capabilities of children of color, and even in the very way we understand literacy.*

It is especially important for teachers to begin to address racial equity issues during their literacy practices because Smitherman and van Dijk (1988) explain that humans learn and unlearn racism via text and talk, and Godley (2003) explains that children's social identities are tied to how their social groups are depicted in literature and their assessments of their own reading abilities.



# How To Use the Audit Tools

The audit tools were designed to inform practitioners, education leaders, and program administrators and ease their decision-making when selecting and adopting a language and literacy curriculum and materials and resources. They will help early childhood programs or schools identify improvement plans for diversifying their existing resources. In addition, the audit tools have the potential to support parents, teachers, students, and community members in assessing whether the pre-k to Grade 5 curriculum, particularly the language and literacy resources, used in early childhood classrooms are culturally responsive, anti-bias, and anti-racist and whether it is inclusive of all the strengths, challenges, and intersectional identities that children of color bring to the classroom.



## Methodology: Literature Review

In an effort to ensure the audit tools were informed by research, a comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify research articles that critically examined existing curricula for social justice and inclusion (see Appendix for details about the methodology). A key objective was to identify papers and curricula that intentionally draw on concepts such as anti-racism, multiculturalism, cultural humility, diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity, ability, and other social justice-

related issues. This search strategy yielded several curricula, lessons, or programs that align with aspects of the CRABAR framework. Four of the curricula that specifically address cultural and linguistic diversity are highlighted in the following sections. Of the literature that emerged from the search for curricula focused on social justice and inclusion, three curricula focused on dual-language learning, and one set of lessons had an explicitly anti-racist framework.

## Read-it-Again Dual Language Curriculum

The Read-it-Again Dual Language curriculum (RIA-DL) was developed based off the well-established Read-it-Again Pre-K curriculum (RIA Pre-K) and consists of 60 lessons that utilize Spanish and English-language books that include culturally relevant themes (Duran et al., 2016). Examples of books include *Is Your Mama a Llama? / Tu Mamá es una Llama?* By Deborah Quarino, *Curious George Visits the Aquarium / Jorge el Curioso Visita el Aquario* by Margret and H.A. Rey, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar / La Oruga Muy Hambrienta* by Eric Carle. RIA-DL targets key areas of language and literacy skill development, such as print and phonological awareness, oral vocabulary, and narrative development. Similar to RIA Pre-K, the curriculum involves scaffolding and use of explicit examples; however, RIA-DL is adapted to include even more specific and direct vocabulary strategies that emphasize “rich, repeated, and varied exposure to new vocabulary that is scaffolded” (Duran et al., 2016, p. 453).

RIA-DL aligns with the CRABAR framework because it promotes dual-language learners’ skill-building with culturally relevant materials. The structure of the curriculum aligns with evidence-based practices for learning (e.g., scaffolding) and supports the development of skills to communicate with peers and teachers through instruction. However, the culturally-relevant material appears to be limited to books, many of which were originally written in English, and it is not clear if explicit examples used by teachers are meaningful to all students in a diverse classroom. Finally, although RIA-DL incorporates important cultural elements for dual-language learners, the curriculum does not appear to address racial, gender, ability, or other identity issues through lesson content or the books utilized.

## Spanish Version Literacy Express Preschool Curriculum

A version of the Literacy Express Preschool Curriculum (Lonigan et al., 2005) was created for an experimental study that examined the impact of a targeted literacy intervention that transitioned students from Spanish to English (Farver et al., 2010). Students received a version of the Literacy Express activities and materials—either English-only or Spanish-English transitional—in addition to the instruction-as-usual curriculum, High/Scope. Literacy Express consists of 10 scaffolded units that focus on oral language, literacy, math, and science skills, as well as social-emotional learning and emphasizes small group activities to support skill development. Students in the Spanish-English transitional group received the curriculum in Spanish for nine weeks and then were transitioned into receiving English instruction over three to four weeks.

This study demonstrated promise for this intervention, particularly in terms of targeted small-group instruction for Spanish-speaking dual-language learners (Farver et al., 2010). However, aside from providing instruction in Spanish, this intervention does not appear to incorporate other meaningful multicultural aspects that may enhance learning for dual-language students. In addition, similar to RIA-DL, the curriculum does not appear to address racial, gender, ability, or other relevant identity topics through lesson content. Notably, this curriculum was developed for a specific study, and the feasibility of implementation and scalability is unclear.

## Family Reading Intervention for Language and Literacy in Spanish

The Family Reading Intervention for Language and Literacy in Spanish (FRILLS) program was designed to support at-home reading skill development for Latino children and increase the range of language strategies for low-income, low-education Latino parents when reading to their children (Mesa & Restrepo, 2019). This program focused on training mothers on different reading strategies through modeling, coaching, and practicing with a trainer, and subsequently, the mother would read with their child three times per week utilizing their newly learned strategies. Training for mothers was delivered in their native language, and all books were in Spanish or bilingual Spanish and English. Examples of books included *Se Venden Gorras* by Esphyr Slobodkina, *¡Qué cosas dice mi abuela!* By Ana Galán, *El Patito Feo* by Mercè Escardó, and *Juan y los Frijoles Mágicos* by Carol Ottolenghi. FRILLS proved to be effective for building mothers' skills around language strategies and appeared to impact some language skills for children.

Although FRILLS is not a curriculum, this program aligns with several aspects of the CRABAR framework. Importantly, the FRILLS program design considered participants' social and economic circumstances and created space for mothers to incorporate cultural beliefs and strategies into the process. This program supported both mothers' and their children's ability to facilitate conversations that ultimately promote language development for children. However, aside from family experiences or beliefs that may be woven into the mother-child reading sessions, this program lacks intentional integration of social justice and inclusion concepts.

## Anti-Racist Pedagogy and Early Childhood Social Studies

Although we did not find an anti-racist curriculum per se, Husband (2010) described a series of social studies lessons that focused on various aspects of African American history, beginning with the enslavement of Africans, and ending with racial inequalities and racism in contemporary contexts. This set consisted of nine lessons that lasted approximately 30-45 minutes long. The instructor began lessons by providing introductory and contextual information, and then moved into reading and discussing texts as a class. The next part involved drama activities in which students participated, building on the text and materials, which were debriefed with the students. The lessons ended with an independent language arts assignment. Examples of lesson titles include *Origins, Beginnings of Slavery; Slave Resistance and Escape; Jim Crow; and Desegregation and Freedom Acquisition*. In designing and implementing these lessons, the instructor faced four key challenges, including (1) balancing breadth and depth of content, while avoiding perfunctory representations of African American history; (2) underestimating the extent of students' knowledge of African American history; (3) helping students to recognize racial injustice; and (4) White parents' discomfort with the lesson content.

The content of these lessons aligned with several key CRABAR concepts. The content focused on African American history, with hands-on student activities that incorporated reflection and debriefing. In addition, the lessons were intentionally designed to be anti-racist, focusing on racial injustice and emphasizing non-stereotypical imagery, language, and stories that more accurately reflect this history than mainstream education. These lessons also appealed to different learning styles, with the incorporation of different types and formats of activities (e.g., independent work time and play-acting). These may provide students with a sense of agency within the context of learning. While these lessons uniquely and creatively address racial injustice in the United States, they appear to neglect other forms of injustice that often intersect with race, such as gender and cultural issues.

While these are just a few examples of curricula and lessons that may address topics related to social justice and inclusion, and there are likely other curricula that may address related issues, the literature search results suggest that most curricula are not framed using social justice and inclusion as guideposts for curricular development. Curriculum developers should consider how to intentionally conceptualize their curricula within anti-bias, multicultural, and social justice frameworks. For instance, curricula that emphasize racial injustice could also focus on gender inequities present throughout the history of enslavement of African Americans, the Civil Rights movement, and contemporary racism.



In addition to empirical papers, the literature search yielded a number of conceptual and discussion papers that addressed topics such as anti-racist education (Escayg 2018), anti-racist pedagogy (Galligan & Miller, 2022), anti-bias curricula (Bullock, 1996), and culturally responsive curricula (Smith-Maddox, 1998). For example, Escayg (2019) offers a conceptual framework for early childhood education that is rooted in critical race theory and anti-racism; Kimura et al. (2022) make the case that anti-bias curricula can be successfully implemented in early education settings; however, none of these papers discuss specific curricula that represent these important topics. This body of literature could be strengthened by grounding discussions in, and critiquing, specific curricula that are widely adopted.

The results of the literature revealed notable gaps in the literature were curriculum content relevant for Native American or other Indigenous groups, languages other than English and Spanish, sexual orientation and gender identity, (dis)ability, or varying socio-economic circumstances. Further, no literature was found that discussed curricula that could support multiple learning modalities for neurodivergent students or students with disabilities. Finally, the literature found rarely focused on the role and implications for intersecting identities for developing curricular content; understanding and embracing students as whole people living within complex socio-ecological systems is imperative for designing curricula that seek to address social justice and inclusion.

## Need for Future Research

This literature review highlights some key areas for future research. First, a systematic review that utilizes more targeted search terms—e.g., focusing on specific populations or content areas—may reveal more curricula that focus on promoting social justice and inclusion. A comprehensive, systematic literature search may reveal locally developed curricula that promote social justice and inclusion for students. Overall, more research on the existence of curricula

that incorporate content on anti-racism, multiculturalism, cultural humility, diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity, ability, and other social justice-related issues are needed. There is a need for a better understanding where evidence exists and where gaps in research can help guide research endeavors that seek to examine curricula that focus on social justice and inclusion.

# Implications for Practice

The JEDI audit tools would not only fill gaps in the literature but would also be incredibly useful in practice for school systems and administrations, teachers, and families. On an institutional level, inclusive and anti-bias pedagogy may be beneficial to cultivate equitable classrooms and programs. However, in recent years anti-bias teachings have become prominent in public discourse as numerous states have sought to restrict their use (Schwartz, 2021). In the light of this, the JEDI audit tools could be useful for school systems to both evaluate their current curricula for existing bias as well as identify new curricula to promote socially just and vibrant learning communities. This framework was developed with accessibility for school administrators and educators in mind so that curriculums and books can be easily assessed for their adherence to social justice principles. Using this framework, schools can be more equipped to foster educational experiences for children and families that accurately reflect and empower their many identities.

In the classroom, teachers may utilize this framework to assist them in promoting inclusive conversations with children as well as auditing their own classroom libraries with an anti-bias lens. This framework highlights the need for adequate direction for teachers in facilitating classroom dialogue that address injustices in society, the importance of diversity, respect for others, and affirmation of self-identity. As such, these discussions are twofold in their benefit for children, and as they may afford teachers an opportunity to introspectively examine their own biases and reevaluate existing teaching practices. With a CRABAR-aligned curriculum, teachers could feel liberated in having explicit guidance for navigating these conversations, thus creating additional space for richer classrooms interactions.

Moreover, the JEDI storybook audit tool allows teachers to assess their classroom libraries and literary experiences for presence of bias or discrimination. The

children's book audit tool is constructed by a series of questions on a dichotomous scale that creates a streamlined process for teachers to evaluate each book in their library and generate an overall score. As teachers are juggling multiple responsibilities in a fast-paced environment, this tool is an efficient mechanism to accomplish the important goal of cultivating an inclusive classroom library. Children's books act as mirrors of their own experiences as well as windows into the experiences of others. By providing children with a library that addresses social justice issues and is inclusive in represented identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, culture, gender, ability, etc.), classroom communities are strengthened through their understanding of themselves and others. Likewise, teachers can make genuine connections to their students and gain a more robust understanding of children's families and homelives.

Additionally, the JEDI tools could be used by families at home. Similar to classroom libraries, parents and caregivers can assess their books at home to affirm their child's own identities as well as their classmates. Furthermore, parents and caregivers can evaluate curricula and children's books utilized at their child's school to attain a better understanding of what they are learning in the classroom. Ensuring that school materials are truly anti-bias should require more participation and awareness from families, especially those of minoritized backgrounds. This entails families obtaining a copy of the materials which in turn holds teachers and classrooms accountable. Indeed, this can be a collaborative experience for families to be able to vouch for curricula and children's books taught at their children's school, and to potentially offer books that represent their own family's unique experiences. This framework has the potential to spark conversations within families and to enhance teacher-parent relationships with nuanced understanding of one another.

# Implications for Funders

Private funders are in an ideal space to push the narrative around social justice learning because they are not beholden to the sway of political opinion or popularity. At a time when rights are being taken away from children regarding their ability to name and live in their identities and when racial violence is on the rise, there is a need more than ever for curricula and learning materials that can represent different opinions and ideas. In order to be a well-rounded thinker, children have to be able to read a variety of literature and be able to engage in thoughtful discussion and learning around those materials. At a time when we know that public investment will not encourage this, philanthropic funders and foundations can lead the charge to expand children's knowledge of social justice.

Not only is private funding critical in the creation of the content for such audit tools, but also funders have the ability to disseminate this knowledge on a wide scale. For instance, since we have begun developing the audit tools, Head Start programs and elementary schools have been willing to pilot test the tools within their schools. In order to engage in pilot testing across several programs and schools, we would need an efficient way to collect the data and house the data about the storybooks and curricula. The scholars at CEED believe that the next step for this work is to make the tool available on a public website that can be used by teachers, parents, and school leaders. As part of the pilot study, the CEED team could work with education staff within the schools and programs to train them on how to rate the books and help them input the books and curricula into a website. Eventually the data from that website could inform future publishers and curriculum developers.







## Conclusion

To address this injustice and build a more equitable education system, our teachers and school leaders must commit to invest in curricula and reading materials that reflect the identity and lived experience of the majority of children in our public schools. A critical part of teachers' work should incorporate the cultural knowledge, communication styles, and lived experiences of marginalized students into the classroom

environment and the curriculum. When teachers and school leaders create more equitable interactions and learning opportunities for all students, we see marginalized students' outcomes improve (Curenton, 2022), and this could be because students feel more valued, safer, and freer to explore and grow academically and socially.

# Appendix 1:

## References

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# Appendix 2: Reading for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI): Storybook Audit Tool

## Reading for Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (JEDI): Storybook Audit Tool (Curenton & Franco-Jenkins, 2023a)

### Instructions:

The purpose of this book review criteria is to provide a guide for selecting books that are affirming to children's identities and that feature themes of social justice. The ultimate goal is to be able to select books that are culturally responsive and that are anti-bias and anti-racist, and the design of the criteria is grounded in the inter-disciplinary research on literacy and child development. The criteria have been created for books targeted for children from early childhood to the elementary school. This book review criteria can be used by educators, librarians, parents, or other practitioners/clinicals working on children's literacy.

### Key Scoring Components:

Higher scores means the book has greater diversity, social justice themes, or cultural responsiveness.

Variables	Values	Comments
<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>		
Book Title		
Author, Illustrator		
Publisher, Year, Published		
Grade (check all that apply)	1 = I/T, 2 = Pre or K, 3 = Elementary grades	
Developmentally Appropriate	1 = 0-3, 2 = 3-6	
Gender (select all that apply)	1 = Male 2 = Female 3 = Non-Binary	

<b>DIVERSE REPRESENTATION</b> <i>Answer these questions based upon whether the book has . . .</i>		
Diverse Cultural Representation (select all that apply)	0 = No, 1 = Yes	<b>If Yes</b> , then specify with the number indicated 1= American Indian or Alaska Native 2= Native Hawaiian or another Pacific Islander 3= Black or African American 4= Asian 5= White 6= Hispanic/Latino 7= Middle Eastern 8= Indigenous Groups 9= Multiracial Characters (are there characters from different race groups represented?)
Diverse gender roles or identities	0 = No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the character in the book does not fit commonly held notions of gender stereotypes or gender identities (e.g., non-binary identities)
Diverse Family Structures (stated in narrative)	0 = No, 1 = Yes If yes, describe	Yes, means the family structure varies from the nuclear heterosexual norm. For example, the family structures could include families that are same-sex, single parent, multi-generation, adopted/foster, or extended kin (including cousins, uncles, etc.)
Children with Disabilities	0 = No, 1 = Yes	<b>If Yes</b> , select all that apply: Specific learning disability (Dyslexia), Other health impairment (ADHD), Autism, Emotional disturbance (depression, anxiety), speech or language impairment, visual impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, dead-blindness, orthopedic (cerebral palsy), intellectual disability (down syndrome) traumatic brain injury, multiple disabilities (when more than one)
Characters in the books represented by people from different race and ethnicity groups?	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the characters are depicted as people, <b>not</b> animals, video game characters, or non-human beings
Characters have multiple identities	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that features of a person's identity are duplicative (e.g. black boy, Latine immigrant girl, white girl with a disability, etc.). It shows that people can be "more than one thing"
<b>TOTAL = _____</b>		

**POSITIVE SELF-IDENTITY & EMOTION UNDERSTANDING**

*These next items consider whether the book positively promotes children's understanding of identity and emotions related to race, ethnicity, or culture. Answer based upon whether the book can help readers to . . .*

Feel proud about their racial, ethnic, or cultural group	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means characters are presented in the book in a way that shows their sense of agency, strength, determination, or uniqueness in a positive way
Understand the feelings and life experiences of people from other racial, ethnic, or cultural groups	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book explains the thoughts, feelings, opinions, ideas, etc. of the story character or that it provides a description of what the character is experiencing
Understand the commonalities among people from different racial, ethnic, or cultural groups	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book draws similarities between the story character and members from other racial, cultural, ethnic groups. Examples of commonalities can be in terms of food, experiences, likes/dislikes.
Understand a range of emotions represented among the characters	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book depicts characters that show and/or talk about primary emotions (happy, sad, scared, mad) or complex emotions (disappointment, worry, surprise)
Understand the situations and relationships that give rise to positive or negative emotions	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book describes situations or relationships among characters that result in either positive emotions (joy, comfort, love) or negative emotions (conflicts, arguments, violence)
Present the emotions of characters in ways that are not stereotypical for their role or social status	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means characters are not presented to have emotions that are stereotypical for their gender or race (e.g., black girls being angry)
Understand relationships and connections among people from different racial, ethnic, or cultural groups	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book shows diverse people as having an emotional connection to each other. Examples of relationships can be friendships, allyship, being neighbors, being helpful to each other
Character represents a role model of mental health and wellbeing	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the character represents the traits associated with being able to overcome emotional challenges, think positively, and show resilience
Characters that are not depicted in stereotypical ways	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that the characters are not display in stereotypical behaviors, emotion displays, or social roles;

**TOTAL = \_\_\_\_\_**



**SOCIAL JUSTICE**

*These next items consider whether the book has complex storylines or characters related to social justice, emotions, and relationships . . .*

Recognize and stand up against bias, prejudice, and injustice targeted toward some racial, ethnic, or cultural groups	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book has characters that stand up against injustice or it talks about what people can do when they encounter injustice
Understand structural inequality (e.g., power dynamics) related to social status or roles	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that the book has a story that describes power dynamics in society, such as power due to race, gender, ability, or other forms of identity. Power dynamics can be displayed by themes of unfairness, prejudice, bias, discrimination.
Understand bias and prejudice targeted against some racial, ethnic, or cultural	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that the book shows images of or talks about issues related to prejudice or bias
Has complex Story Lines/Plot about social issues	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that the book has a narrative that is linked by a theme, moral, or common problem linked to a social justice issue
Shows diverse and dynamic relationships that change or grow over time	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that characters are engaged in relationships that explore interpersonal issues related to bias or prejudice, violence (such as bullying), or love (friendships, families). The nature of these relationships may change or deepen throughout the story.
Describes the reasons behind social conflicts	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book provides information about the actions, social situations, or feelings that led to conflict
Depicts characters resolving conflicts or potential solutions to conflicts in a healthy way	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book shows evidence of the a conflict that was resolved or provides examples for how to resolve it in a healthy way
Discuss the feelings and thoughts of characters who have been treated unfairly or unkindly or in an unjust manner	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that the book explicitly describes what the characters are thinking or feeling; this can be done through dialogue, descriptions, etc.

**TOTAL = \_\_\_\_\_**

**LANGUAGE DIVERSITY**  
These next items consider whether the book has language diversity. Answer based upon whether the book has . . .

Phrases, words, or sentences in a language or dialect other than English	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book has words, phrases, or sentences in other than English. The other languages or dialects could include Spanish, Korean, African American English, Haitian Creole, etc.
Embraces Bilingualism	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means that the use of these languages or dialects is shown in a positive way
Characters that speak another language besides English	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book has a character that speaks another language or dialect
Punctuation, grammar, or symbols used in other languages	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book might use punctuation such as accents, Spanish tilde, Roman numerals, Greek letters, etc.

**TOTAL = \_\_\_\_\_**

**STEAM REPRESENTATION**  
These next items describe how the book depicts characters involved in STEAM related fields (science, technology, engineering, art, or math) . . .

Human characters are depicted representing a STEAM activity	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the characters is doing something related to math, science, technology, engineering, or art
Characters interest in STEAM is articulated within the context of personality, social situation, or motivation	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the reason why the character is interested in STEAM is described
Story inspires readers to become excited about or interested in STEAM	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book is inspirational and leaves the reader with a sense of "I can do that" or curiosity about the subject matter
Describes the significance of STEAM in within the storyline	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book talks about why its STEAM topic is important or interesting
Shows non-stereotypical characters involved in science, technology, engineering, or math	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means women and minorities are represented in science, math, technology or engineering,

**TOTAL = \_\_\_\_\_**

<b>CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS</b> <b>These next items consider whether the book has information that will facilitate conversations or understanding of the book related issues of social justice, ethnicity, race, or culture . . .</b>		
Provides suggestions to facilitate social justice conversations	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book contains a example questions the teacher might ask students or suggestions for peer conversations among students or conversations students can have at home with their families
Provides suggestions for classroom activities that facilitate children's exploration of social justice issues	0 =No, 1 = Yes	Yes, means the book has suggestions for learning activities that children can do deepen their understanding of the books content. Such activities might include book reports, play acting, crafts, etc.
<b>TOTAL = _____</b>		

**OVERALL TOTAL SCORE = \_\_\_\_\_ (RANGE 0-34)**

# Appendix 3: Learning for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI): Curriculum Audit

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## Learning for Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (JEDI): Curriculum Audit Tool (Curenton & Franco-Jenkins, 2023b)

### Instructions:

The purpose of this curriculum review criteria is to provide a guide for reviewing early childhood curriculum and early elementary curriculum in order to determine how well they support social justice, diversity & inclusion. This curriculum review can be used by teacher, education leaders, administrators, or curriculum developers working in Pre-K to Grade 5.

### Key Scoring Components:

Answer these questions to determine if the curriculum does (or does not) respond to the criteria. The evidence must come directly from the written guidance, materials, or activities described in the curriculum. This review happens by reading the curriculum materials, not through observations of teachers who are using the curriculum.

You will assign a score of 0 = No (No evidence) or 1 = Yes (Evidence is present). For each score, you must have at least one example of evidence.

Higher scores mean the curriculum has a greater diversity, social justice themes, or cultural responsiveness.

Criteria	Value	Evidence
<b>Answer these questions based upon whether curriculum...</b>		
Provides opportunities to support dual language learners' (DLLs) ways of communicating with peers, teachers, and with instructional activities	0 = No 1 = Yes  Yes, means there are opportunities to support DLLs such as specific guidance about how DLLs learn or communication and strategies to support their growth and learning. DLLs can be speakers of African American English, American Sign Language, Spanish, and/or other any language systems.	
Has content and activities that include cultural events and traditions that occur in the children's communities and the larger world	0 = No 1 = Yes  Yes, means the curriculum provides examples of these events and traditions and suggestions and strategies for how to incorporate them in the classroom	
Include both child and teacher-initiated activities that are focused on social justice	0 = No 1 = Yes  Yes, means the activities focus on social justice, equality, and fairness, social empathy and are anti-racists or anti-bias in nature	
Provide non-stereotypical imagery, language, or stories	0 = No 1 = Yes  Yes, means the content of the curriculum does not align with social stereotypes	
Any follow-up home activities intended to support the lesson includes supplies that are accessible to families either free or at very low costs	0 = No 1 = Yes  Yes, means the materials are common materials that nearly all families would have access to or could purchase for a small fee. For example, not all families have a computer at home or other school supplies readily available (e.g., notecards, sticky notes, etc).	
Activities and instructions consider multiple learning modalities or sensory materials to scaffold children with disabilities or differing ability levels	0 = No 1 = Yes  Yes, means there is guidance about differentiated instruction for each activity and there are hands-on/experiential learning materials	

Activities center on positive racial, cultural, religious, linguistic, and gender identity, as well as being inclusive of diverse family structures	0 = No 1 = Yes	Yes, means the learning activities represent racial, cultural, religious, linguistic, and gender identity	
Show diverse racial, cultural, and/or religious, children in positions of authority and having agency	0 = No 1 = Yes	Yes, means there are images of people depicted throughout the curriculum that are diverse	
Material is presented in diverse linguistic backgrounds in positions of authority and having agency	0 = No 1 = Yes	Yes, means it has examples of how to adjust the lesson for children of different languages	
Show gender-diverse children in positions of authority and having agency	0 = No 1 = Yes	Yes, means gender-diverse children are depicted in ways that show them as active, socially accepted, and capable. For example, it might provide suggestions for encouraging mixed-gendered play groupings or how to talk about pronoun use	
Guides teachers' awareness of and responses to children's social and emotional capabilities, especially around bullying, trauma, or social exclusion or isolation	0 = No 1 = Yes	Yes, means it provides guidance for how the teacher can talk about trauma or bullying or lessons around this topic	
Includes content or activities related to Black/African American and Latine age-appropriate social issues, history, or cultural events	0 = No 1 = Yes	Yes, means it includes lessons related to these social groups	
Provide guidance and strategies for how to facilitate conversations that encourage children to share their ideas and opinions about content that is related to their identity, heritage, and personal experiences	0 = No 1 = Yes	Yes, means it provides conversation guides.	

**OVERALL TOTAL SCORE = \_\_\_\_\_ (RANGE 0-13)**

# Appendix 4:

## Methodology

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The search parameter for this review was identified by the authors and guided by the CRABAR framework used. The searches included published quantitative and qualitative peer-reviewed articles as well as gray literature. The searches were not restricted to a time period because some of the work related to anti-bias curricula surged a few decades ago. The focus of the search included reviews of early childhood curriculums as well as early childhood books, anti-bias and anti-racist approaches that promote cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Search terms were grouped into the following categories: grade (e.g., preschool, PreK, early childhood, elementary school), language background (e.g., Spanish, bilingual, multilingual, African American English, African American vernacular English, American Sign Language, dual language learners, English learners, dialects), children's race/ethnicity (e.g., Black, African American, Latinx, Latine, Latino/a, Hispanic, Indigenous, Latin,), diverse gender roles and family structures, children with disabilities and topic terms (e.g., culturally responsive, intersectionality, structural inequality, ethnic-racial socialization, stereotypical ways, racial awareness).

An exhaustive search of the literature involved a full-text search of all applicable research databases using all search terms and combinations of terms generated by the CEED team. Additional search procedures consisted of using titles and keywords, the advanced search options, the "find similar articles" feature, as well as cross-referencing articles in selected studies. Applying these procedures, the following databases were searched: JSTOR, Academic Search Premier, PsycArticles, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Google Scholar. This searched resulted in 37 number of pieces of literature for the review.

A summary table was created for the book and the curriculum review (see Appendix 4 for methodology) and included the following study elements: purpose, the framework used, outcome measures/methods, and key findings. To access the summary tables, scan the QR code below.



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