

**Children's Literature as a Tool to Facilitate Discussions about Racial and Ethnic  
Diversity**

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## Abstract

Studies show that children's literature can significantly impact the racial and ethnic development of young children. However, research has determined that the lack of existing racial and ethnic awareness amongst educators results in these literacy tools rarely being used to their full potential. This study aims to investigate the perceptions of International Baccalaureate educators with regards to children's literature as a literacy tool. Specifically, it aims to evaluate educators' understanding of racial and ethnic diversity, and its' impact on their ability to facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity using children's literature. This research study adopted a critical, mixed-method approach. An online questionnaire was distributed to 22 participants at International Baccalaureate international schools in Europe. Thereafter, 3 semi-structured interviews with educators from International Baccalaureate international school X in Germany were conducted. The findings suggest that educators require a more thorough understanding of racial and ethnic diversity in order to be able to successfully implement literacy tools to support racial and ethnic identity development. The availability and accessibility of materials, professional development programs as well as curriculum inclusion are all essential to supporting educators in creating an inclusive learning environment.

*Keywords:* Children's literature, race, ethnicity, International Baccalaureate

**Positionality statement**

I am a heterosexual cis-gendered mixed race, Black identifying woman. I grew up in a middle class family in the United States with English and German as the main languages of communication. My personal experiences as a Black women have shaped my beliefs in divesting from harmful white supremacist ideology as well as the decolonization of all spaces with the goal being liberation for all. I recognize the influence my identity has on the lenses applied to this study, however, great care has been taken in order to ensure different viewpoints assist in the analysis of the results in the form of a critical peer supporting the analysis of this research data. It's important to note that the social environment I entered as a researcher was not from a position of power.

## Table of contents

Abstract.....	2
Positionality statement.....	3
Index of abbreviations .....	6
List of figures.....	7
Rationale .....	8
Objectives.....	8
Motivation .....	8
Research questions .....	9
Significance .....	9
Literature review.....	11
Child development .....	11
Racial and ethnic identity development in young children .....	11
Ethnic and racial diversity in the classroom.....	13
International Baccalaureate .....	14
Advantages of children's literature .....	15
Support racial awareness and prejudice reduction .....	15
Language learning and literacy skills .....	16
Empowerment for BIPOC students .....	17
Disadvantages of children's literature .....	17
Educator knowledge .....	17
Racial and ethnic awareness of educators .....	18
Color-blind racial ideology.....	19
Conclusion.....	20
Participants and context.....	21
Research paradigm and methodology.....	22
Methods .....	23
Questionnaire.....	23
Semi-structured Interview .....	24
Results.....	25
Description of data .....	25
Analysis of the data.....	26
Presentation of results .....	27
Questionnaire results .....	27
Children's Literature .....	27
Representation .....	28
Awareness.....	30
Student Engagement.....	30
Racial and Ethnic Awareness.....	31
Interview results.....	36
Dialogue facilitation .....	37

Racial and Ethnic Awareness.....	38
Quality .....	40
Ethics .....	41
Research conclusion .....	42
Recommendations for future research.....	43
Professional development.....	43
Curricular development .....	44
Limitations.....	44
References.....	46
Appendices .....	52

### **Index of abbreviations**

BIPoC Black, Indigenous, People of Color

IB International Baccalaureate

CIS Council of International Schools

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

**List of figures**

- Figure 1 6- point Likert scale
- Figure 2 Questionnaire question 5
- Figure 3 Questionnaire question 10
- Figure 4 Questionnaire question 7
- Figure 5 Overview of questionnaire participants' self-assigned race
- Figure 6 Overview of statement results from questionnaire

## Rationale

### Objectives

The main aim of this research is to explore and highlight the importance of creating opportunities for discussions of racial and ethnic identity with young learners using children's literature. Furthermore, this research aims at understanding educators' perceptions as well as approaches to utilizing children's literature to talk about racial and ethnic diversity. The research is transformative in nature and seeks to highlight areas of growth and improvement in order to inform an equitable and just approach to literacy education for young learners as well as a safe learning environment for BIPOC children. The findings of this research are limited to an undetermined number of international schools (due to the anonymity of the questionnaires) and the replicability is contingent upon the given context.

### Motivation

The misinformed belief that young children are unaware of their racial and ethnic identity and are simply curious about racial differences (Johnson & Aboud, 2012, p. 182) is what influenced the creation of this research project. My own personal experience within the education system was isolating, partly due to the fact that there was minimal representation of people who looked like me in children's literature. This significantly impacted my racial and ethnic identity development and led to the urge to understand educators' perceptions towards using children's literature to facilitate these important discussions. The focus on international schools, specifically those following the IB program, was fueled by the explicit ideology using progressive philosophies. However, in practice, these policies continue to promote Western-centered education while failing to include "language dealing with international power dynamics, privilege, marginalization, justice, or broader coloniality" (Kopsick, 2019). Understanding the system in which these inequities are exacerbated as well as the perceptions

of those working within the international education system is vital in fueling transformative, justice-oriented change in literacy, and racial and ethnic identity development education.

### **Research questions**

The term ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ are used in this paper as follows: Race refers to the social construct of “the perceived common physical characteristics which are thought to be fixed” (Cornell and Hartmann, 2006, as cited in Clair & Denis, 2015, p.1), while the term ‘ethnicity’ is “defined by the perceived common ancestry, history, and cultural practices which are seen as more fluid and self-asserted rather than assigned by others” (Cornell and Hartmann, 2006, as cited in Clair & Denis, 2015, p.1). The children’s literature examined in this study will focus on race-centered picture books with themes of racial diversity, discrimination, history, and freedom as well as inter-racial friendships. The scope of this research project includes educators with experience teaching children between the ages of five and eight years old at International Baccalaureate (IB) international schools in Europe. The main research question that will guide this inquiry is formulated as follows: What are educators' perceptions of using children's literature to facilitate discussions about ethnic and racial diversity at International Baccalaureate international primary schools in Europe? The following two sub questions were selected to help answer the main research question:

1. What are educators' understanding of racial and ethnic diversity?
2. How can children's literature facilitate discussions about ethnic and racial diversity?

This research lends social as well as transformative benefits. The collected data highlights areas of improvement in literacy education as well as professional development in regard to race and ethnicity awareness among educators.

### **Significance**

The European anti-discrimination law, Article 12, prohibits the direct and indirect discrimination of all persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin in all social areas

including education (The Council of the European Union, 2000). The ‘indirect discrimination’ in these laws refers to the established frameworks that serve to disadvantage certain racial and ethnic groups (The Council of the European Union, 2000). Furthermore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes every child’s right to education that aims at the full development of the human personality as well as promote acceptance, tolerance and unity across racial and ethnic barriers (United Nations, n.d.). Therefore, educational institutions must provide students with an equitable learning environment that allows pupils to develop their racial and ethnic identity free of discrimination, this includes the educational curriculum. However, as Gardner McTaggart (2020) explains, International Baccalaureate international schools continue to promote the Western interpretation of ‘internationalism’ which often is the continuation of “Englishness and whiteness, an Anglo-Internationalism steeped in post-colonialism at once derivative and constructive of what it means to be international” (2020, p. 6), that is not inclusive to children of color. The recent altered Council of International Schools (CIS) accreditation standards for international schools resulted in the requirement of the inclusion of diversity, equity and anti-racism standards in various aspects of international education (Durbin, 2021), which further heightens the importance of research of this nature. This research hopes to inform the integration of the new accreditation standards into the IB curriculum of international schools in Europe. Furthermore, there are few studies that examine the implementation of race-themed children’s literature in multilingual learning contexts (Kim, 2014), especially in international schools. However studies, such as that of a bilingual Korean school in the United States, suggest that implementing this literacy tool can help children deepen their understanding of literary texts and better understand and empathize with different human experiences (Kim, 2014, p. 10). This research study aims at informing equitable approaches to international education that support the racially and ethnically diverse society today.

## Literature review

### Child development

#### *Racial and ethnic identity development in young children*

The following paragraph will focus on child development in regard to racial and ethnic identity development. In order to maintain the scope of this research project, the development of children between the ages of three and seven will be considered.

The Piagetian theory of cognitive development has served as a foundation of child development studies and has significantly contributed to the understanding of the acquisition of racial awareness among young learners (Park, 2011, p. 91). According to this theory, children between the ages of two and seven are in what is referred to as the preoperational stage of cognitive development (Arends, 2012, p. 330). Piagetian theorists therefore focused on the cognitive prerequisites that must exist during the preoperational stage that in turn influence racial awareness and the formation of in-group bias (Park, 2011). Piagetian theorists believed that due to the egocentric nature of the preoperational stage of development, children under the age of seven did not possess the cognitive capacity to de-center themselves and thus, in-group bias was difficult to suppress (Spencer, 1988 as cited in Park, 2011). These biases could therefore be regarded as a logical consequence of children's cognitive immaturity during the preoperational stage of development (Park, 2011; Arends, 2012). Most findings suggest that children acquire racial and ethnic awareness between the ages of three and six (Aboud, 2012). Inquiry into the possible correlation between age and the development of prejudice in young children was described in Raabe & Beelmann's (2011) study. They identified a decrease in out-group prejudice during middle and late childhood (ages 9-11), however, they hypothesize that this decrease is largely domain and context dependent (Raabe & Beelman, 2011). The idea that social context and interaction contribute

to the acquisition of racial bias is what fueled later theorists such as Schofield & Eurich-Fulcer (2003). They noted how social contact between groups (in-group, out-group) may not completely eliminate biases, but rather allows children to gain personal experiences of which they are able to more accurately base their evaluations (Schofield & Eurich-Fulcer, 2003). As can be seen in previous research studies (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001 as cited in Park, 2011) the idea that children's racial awareness influences their evaluation of others suggests their active role in their racial knowledge construction. In contrast to these studies, which have largely depended on Piagetian approaches to development, various researchers are now focusing on examining the social constructions of racial and ethnic identity.

While the aforementioned research is vital in beginning to understand racial identity development, it restricts the development to age constrained, cognitive stages of development and tends to miss the socio-cultural influences of development (Park, 2011). In studies conducted by Park (2011) and Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) was used in order to understand children's ability to construct racial and ethnic identities with their peers. It indicates that the level of potential development, as described by Vygotsky as the level in which children are able to function with the support of an expert, can be widened to include peers (Arends, 2012; Park, 2011). The largely ethnographic study observed how social interactions between children (3.9-5.6 y.o.) allowed them to expand their racial knowledge and thus become creative advocates for their own identity work (Park, 2011).

While much focus has been put on children between the ages of three and six, recent studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto show new findings that may suggest the importance of shifting the focus to earlier years of development. The study discovered that infants between the ages of six and nine months expressed racial bias towards different races, most likely due to their lack of exposure to

diverse environments (University of Toronto, 2017). This discovery is vital to informing future educational research that aims at supporting educators in creating an environment in which racial and ethnic identity development is supported and to ensure prejudice reduction among young learners.

### **Ethnic and racial diversity in the classroom**

This section of the literature review is largely based on the work of James A. Banks, often regarded as the ‘Father of Multicultural Education’, as his work shapes much of the research done in the field of multicultural education and serves as a foundation for the current research today.

Globalization has rapidly shifted our societies and supported the fusion of a multitude of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds in countries across the world (Banks, 2020). The diversity in classrooms has resulted in the necessity of nations to begin to address the complex issues that arise from their multicultural student population (Banks, 2020). Multicultural nations are therefore forced to reevaluate their societal structures as well as their concept of citizenship in an effort to integrate the racially, culturally and ethnically diverse members of society (Banks, 2007, as cited in Banks, 2020). Kymlicka (1995, as cited in Banks, 2020) argues that in order to fully include immigrants in society, multicultural citizenship should be adopted which allows immigrants to preserve important aspects of their cultural and linguistic identity while enjoying all rights as citizens. As declared in the Convention of the Rights of a Child (1989) article eight, the child’s right to preserve their identity (cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic) is ensured which further strengthens the claim to multicultural citizenship. However, as Banks (2020) points out, members of historically marginalized groups are often outcast in both their national culture as well as community culture as they struggle to navigate both. Therefore, Banks (2020) argues the importance of educators creating a community in which children are able to cultivate their

connection to their cultural, national, and global identity. Stornaiuolo & Nichols (2019) offer a different approach based on Barbara Nussbaum's concept of cosmopolitanism education which encourages collaboration across boundaries and bridges cultural differences while striving for global citizenship. A number of scholars have since been influenced by Nussbaum's work and highlight the impact that art and literature could have in creating spaces in which individuals can experience realities through various perspectives which in turn could cultivate cultural awareness, empathy and greater global awareness (e.g., Campano & Ghiso, 2011; Choo, 2016 as cited in Stornaiuolo & Nichols, 2019). Finally, Banks (2020) appeals to the importance of creating an environment that nurtures, supports and affirms "the identities of students from marginalized cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups" (p. 124). According to him, this is necessary in order to ensure students become active citizens who internalize the values of human rights education and contribute to their local, national and global communities.

### **International Baccalaureate**

International Baccalaureate (IB) international schools began appearing across the globe in the 1950s and 60s due to the post World War II employment spike of diplomatic staff, employees of multinational corporations and NGO workers (Refai, 2020). At the time, international schools used the national curricula of their host countries which soon proved to be problematic as the diplomas were not easily transferable to their countries of origin (Peterson, 1972 as cited in Refai, 2020). This led to the creation of the transdisciplinary, inquiry based curriculum that is known as the IB curriculum today. The curriculum, developed and influenced by white, Western men, however, had the aim (and continues) to fit the needs and requirements of Western institutions (Refai, 2020).

This is especially noticeable when examining the spread of IB international schools worldwide. Kopsick (2019) argues that the IB presence in the global South creates a dynamic

in which Northern institutions are certifying students in the South. This has led parents and students, especially in the global South, to view international education as a gateway to Western education. Additionally, this contributes to the difficulties faced by international recognition for certification programs in the global South. In the position paper created by former general director of IB, George Walker, the longest serving director general of the IB Roger Peel admitted that the curriculum's "European ancestry is still dominant" (Peel, 2009 as cited in Walker, 2010). As pointed out by Refai (2020), the appeal of international IB schools is not their promise of educating about local culture and cultivating 'international mindedness' but rather the innate Westernness of the institutions. As Gardner-McTaggart suggests, IB international schools "provide an environment where whiteness-power (Picower 2009) is de-urbanised, de-nationalised, sophisticated and in demand" (2020, p. 5). However, Refai (2020) cautions critique without a transformative approach as she argues there is a large capacity for growth and development in the IB curriculum.

### **Advantages of children's literature**

In the previous sections, the developmental and educational outcomes of racial and ethnic diversity that inform the study were discussed. The following section will begin to examine the current discourses about the advantages and disadvantages of children's literature as a teaching tool. The following definition of multicultural children's literature will be used: "books that emphasize and celebrate the experiences, histories, and cultures of diverse groups of people in society" typically written by a member of the same cultural, ethnic or racial identity (Husband, 2019,p. 1069).

#### ***Support racial awareness and prejudice reduction***

As established, racial identity development starts as early as three years (Aboud, 2012; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001 as cited in Park, 2011) and racial bias has been detected in infants as young as six months of age (University of Toronto, 2017). In an attempt to

combat racial prejudice among young learners, researchers have studied how literacy education could be used in order to encourage a critical awareness of race (Kim, 2014). The study conducted by Kim (2014) is especially important to this study as it examines a bilingual learning context, an area which does not provide a lot of research specifically concerning issues of ethnicity and race. Additionally, the findings suggested that the implementation of multicultural children's literature is not only a powerful tool to examine social inequalities and injustices but also aids children's understanding of other perspectives and cultures. In her study, which examined literary discussions about race themed children's literature, she observed the evolution of racial attitudes among young Korean bilingual students resulting in a reduction of prejudice towards Black individuals.

Another study conducted by (Kim, Wee & Lee, 2016) supports the findings of Park (2014) as it demonstrates the value of social interaction with peers in the process of constructing their own racial awareness and while creating meaning from multicultural children's literature. Additionally, studies conducted by Husband (2019) suggest that the implementation of multicultural children's literature can foster empathy between children of different races. However, Husband (2014) cautions that the success of the implementation of multicultural children's literature to discuss topics of ethnic and racial diversity will be largely context dependent.

### ***Language learning and literacy skills***

As previously established, research in the context of bilingual education is limited (Kim, 2014). However, Kim (2014) suggests that the literary talks in two languages, that evolved from the implementation of multicultural children's literature, allowed learners to speak more freely and deepened their thoughts on texts. This discovery could inform educators on how to cultivate an environment in which multilingual learners are able to develop deeper understanding of topics of race and ethnicity (Kim, 2014). Researchers Kim,

Wee & Lee (2016) indicate the value of multicultural literature and language development. Their studies showed how race-centered children's literature can facilitate discussions about complex concepts using advanced language which results in the language development of young learners (Kim, Wee, Lee, 2016). While the replicability of these results may vary in different cultural, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and linguistic contexts, they still provide important data for future research in multilingual classrooms.

### ***Empowerment for BIPOC students***

Sims-Bishop (1990) highlighted the importance of representation in children's literature in her work and advocated for the inclusion of multicultural children's literature with "Mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors". These books provide children from ethnically and racially diverse environments to be able to have shared experiences of different perspectives while also being affirmed in the books they read (Husband, 2019). Children's exposure to diverse children's literature plays a crucial part in the development of children's self image and their adjustment to social society in which they live (Leahy & Foley, 2018). As Piper (2019 ) argues, when children are able to openly and critically discuss social justice issues that impact their development both educators and students benefit.

### **Disadvantages of children's literature**

#### ***Educator knowledge***

Research aimed at understanding educator's knowledge of multicultural children's literature demonstrated the need for professional development for preservice and inservice educators to increase their knowledge of multicultural literature (Brinson, 2012), due to the lack of multicultural knowledge. Another study conducted by Iwai (2013) examined the perceptions of educators towards multicultural children's literature and showed their lack of knowledge about multicultural children's literature and the importance of its implementation. One can speculate that due to the lack of knowledge about children's literature, educators may

not make a conscious effort to include multicultural children's literature in their teaching as discovered by Baratz (2015, as cited in Leahy & Foley, 2018). According to Leahy & Foley (2018) educators often are not given the professional development needed in order to adequately prepare them to use materials in the classroom. Furthermore, Leahy & Foley (2018) argue, including diverse children's literature in the library must entail discussion about the books in order to ensure the messages are received.

### ***Racial and ethnic awareness of educators***

Educators' life experiences significantly influence their racial and ethnic understanding and consequently their ability to comprehend their student's unique experiences (Picower, 2009, p. 200). While IB international schools boast diversity and inclusion, Charles Gardner-McTaggart, (2020) highlights the stark contradiction the institution's racially monotone personnel displays (p. 12). Therefore, it is imperative that whiteness and its relation to (international) education be examined (Picower, 2009, p.197). Within the education system, 'whiteness' is defined as "the ideology and way of being in the world that is used to maintain White supremacy" (Picower, 2009, p. 198). As Ladson-Billings (2001) underlines, white educators' lack of ethnic and racial awareness and their unwillingness to examine the power structures they help uphold directly contributes to the perpetuation of white supremacy. However, Leonardo (2009) cautions the adaptation of the idea of *white ignorance* as it suggests a passivity amongst whites that fails to acknowledge their full and active participation in race relations (p.107). Leonardo (2009) suggests that this avoidance of responsibility should not be mistaken for whites' lack of complacency in the racialized order, but that it in fact demonstrates their direct role in perpetuating the hegemonic racial order by "turning their cheek" (p.108). As a result of the underlying assumption in literature surrounding whiteness and white ignorance, white educator's feel justified in their lack of commitment to teaching about racial and ethnic diversity due to the

idea that ‘they can’t teach what they don’t know’ (Leonardo, 2009, p.107). Moreover, white educator’s lack of racial knowledge often leads to them exhibiting *white guilt* when confronted with topics of racism. This results in whites feeling personally at fault for racism and in turn becoming overly concerned with preserving their reputation and not ‘looking racist’, while failing to understand the structural impact of racism (Leonardo, 2009, p. 79). In order to successfully support young learners with their own racial and ethnic identity development, it is crucial for white educators to begin developing a critical consciousness of their own racial and ethnic identity in relation to power and oppression (Picower, 2009, p. 199). How can educators teach children about racial and ethnic diversity without a critical awareness of their own identity? Without this prerequisite, white educator’s who navigate these educational spaces will not be successful in their use of children’s literature to facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity.

### ***Color-blind racial ideology***

As described by Bonilla-Silva (2001) ‘ideology’ is understood as an established framework used by social groups to understand the world, and right from wrong. Therefore, ‘racial ideology’ refers to an individual’s views about race, what role race plays in society, and the interpretation of racial information (Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013 as cited in T. DeCuir-Gunby, M. Allen, & Boone, 2020). As argued by DeCuir-Gunby, Allen, & Boone (2020), the racial ideologies held by educators “serve to maintain the racialized social structure in our society” (p. 2). The most prevalent racial ideology is the ‘color-blind racial ideology’ which actualizes the belief that racism and discrimination are a problem of the past and therefore rationalizes the racial status quo (DeCuir-Gunby, Allen, & Boone, 2020). Additionally, color-blind racial ideology works to decentralize race, racism and racial discrimination from all social, political, historical and economic spaces thus actively suppressing the racialized experiences of historically marginalized peoples (Bonilla-Silva,

2001). Psychologists have developed a Color-Blind Racial Ideology framework (Neville et al., 2000) in which two aspects of color-blind racial ideology, color-evasion and power-evasion, are explained. Color-evasion as a color-blind strategy is understood as the race-neutral perspective in which beliefs such as “we are all the same,” or “I don’t see color” are adopted. Instead of eliminating racism, this ideology can actually reinforce and perpetuate racism (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020). The second dimension of color-blind ideology is power-evasion which diminishes the influence power relationships have on racial inequalities. Individuals using this strategy believe the ‘boot-strap theory’ which assumes that everyone has equal opportunity to succeed, and is based on hard work and determination (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020). This belief navigates a false framework of equality and neglects to take into account the power relationships, specifically racism, that significantly influence a person’s lived reality (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020). While anyone, no matter their racial background, can assume a color-blind ideology, it “allows white individuals to protect themselves from critical, self reflective, and unpleasant emotions” (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020, p. 3). As racial ideology, beliefs and emotions are impossible to separate from the educational field (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020), it heightens the importance of the development of racial and ethnic awareness among educators.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the existing research, past studies have proven that children’s understanding of race and ethnicity starts far earlier than previously thought (Aboud, 2012; Park, 2011; Raabe & Beelmann, 2011). Although children’s racial and ethnic development requires ongoing research, scholars such as Kim (2014) have outlined the importance of supporting children in their development of their racial and ethnic identity. Multicultural education scholars such as Banks (2020) emphasize the need for international institutions to create a space that is inclusive of the racially and ethnically diverse student body.

As already mentioned, scholars highlight the impact children's literature can have on supporting and promoting the racial and ethnic awareness of young learners, prejudice reduction, empathy development, empowerment and language and literacy development. However, one of the main obstacles to the successful implementation of literacy strategies which facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity is white educator's lack of racial and ethnic awareness.

### **Participants and context**

The initial context intended to solely include IB international school X in Germany. However, due to the circumstances of COVID-19 and the increased workload educators are faced with, the scope had to be expanded in order to provide enough necessary information. Therefore, the scope was expanded to include IB international schools in Europe. A non-probability sample was used for this research. Due to the theoretical knowledge underlying the early development of racial and ethnic identity, a purposive sample was established aimed at gaining access to English educators with experience teaching children between five and eight years of age. As Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018) state purposive samples are often used to gain access to especially knowledgeable participants (p. 219). Additionally, a non-probability purposive sample is thought to be suitable for small scale research projects (Wellington, 2015). In order to cultivate a qualitative dialogue between participants in the research, a mixed method approach was adopted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 53). The conducted research not only aims at understanding the perceptions of participants but rather also strives to contribute to the construction of a more just and equitable society for all (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 51). The data collected consists of an online base-line questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were distributed to several IB international schools within Europe and responses were received from 22 educators with experience teaching children between the ages of five and eight. As the focus of the research

was to obtain the perceptions of educators, the questionnaire collected both quantitative as well as qualitative data.

### **Research paradigm and methodology**

As this research project's aim was to inform transformative, equitable, justice-oriented practical change in literacy education, a critical educational research paradigm was adapted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 51). Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018) to highlight how critical educational research is able to provide a more accurate representation of social contexts through the examination of the political and ideological contexts in which the data is collected. Furthermore, this paradigm is especially suitable as it not only intends to understand social contexts but also to change them.

As stated in Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018), a mixed method approach is the most suitable to cultivate a qualitative dialogue between participants in the research. Methodological triangulation or in this case 'between method' triangulation ensures the conclusions being drawn from the research to be on much firmer footing (Austin, 2016). As Wellington (2015) argues, using a mixed methods approach can provide a study with more richness and color as well as provide structure (p. 29). The following table displays the methodological procedures of the conducted research study. First the literature review provided the necessary secondary data. Then the questionnaire was distributed to the participants in order to collect primary data. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted.

**Table 1**  
*Methodological overview of research procedures*

Main Question			Sequence
Methods	Sub question 1	Sub question 2	
Literature review	X	X	1
Questionnaire	X		2
Semi-structured interview	X	X	3

### Methods

The primary sources of data collection in this mixed-methods research project were an online questionnaire (Google Forms) as well as semi-structured interviews.

#### *Questionnaire*

Quantitative as well as qualitative data were collected with the questionnaire (GoogleForms) as one of the primary research tools. The questionnaires were conducted anonymously. Wellington (2015) describes the benefits of anonymous questionnaires and the potential they offer in producing rich qualitative data as participants may be more expressive in writing and share more than they would in an interview (p.198). The questionnaire began with closed questions to gather personal information about participants and concluded with open-ended questions in order to maximize participant comfort and participation as suggested by Neuman (1994, p.237 as cited in Wellington, 2015, p. 195). Furthermore, the questionnaire was divided into sections based on themes in order to provide a cohesive structure for participants (Wellington, 2015, p. 195). Due to the sensitivity of the chosen topic, a six point Likert scale was used in order to ensure participants' response. Omitting the ‘neither agree nor disagree’ category serves the purpose of enriching the data and hinders participants from satisficing, self-protection, and indecision (Cohen et. al, 2018, p. 481).

1 <i>Strongly disagree</i>	2 <i>Disagree</i>	3 <i>Slightly disagree</i>	4 <i>Slightly agree</i>	5 <i>Agree</i>	6 <i>Strongly agree</i>
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Figure 1. 6 -point Likert scale.

Before distribution, the questionnaire was tested and refined with a selected peer group in order to avoid ambiguity and identify extraneous variables. The international school network of the researcher's supervisor was used to distribute the questionnaire to international schools in Europe. The distribution of the questionnaires occurred online which increased the rate at which the questionnaire reached a large number of participants (Wellington, 2015).

### ***Semi-structured Interview***

Individual, semi-structured interviews were included as the second primary research instrument and allowed the further collection of qualitative data. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to get an insight into participants' practical use of children's literature in their classrooms. A semi-structured interview was chosen as a research tool due to its structure as well as flexibility in pursuing emerging ideas and themes all of which are especially suitable for inexperienced researchers (Austin, 2016). In addition, interviews allow access to participants' unobservable views and perspectives (Wellington, 2015). The interview guide created for this research study is attached in the appendix (appendix C).

In an attempt to minimize the researcher effect as well as preserve the wellbeing of the researcher, all interviews were conducted via telephone. As stated by Cohen Manion & Morrison (2018), telephone interviews can reduce the interviewer's effect, neutralize power dynamics between the researcher and interviewee and encourage increased disclosure from participants about sensitive topics. However, the lack of non-verbal, visual and contextual cues is an acknowledged limitation of this interview approach.

Before the commencement of the interview, the purpose and format of the interview was explained so as to establish trust. The interview started with one opening question which

offered interviewees the chance to get comfortable and allowed the researcher to establish rapport (Austin, 2016). As suggested by Wellington (2015), the interviews were audiotaped using a “Phillips Voice Tracer 1000” in order to ensure the accuracy and quality of the collected data. To aid the transcription process, the platform otter.ai was used.

## Results

The following section will detail the results of the aforementioned research study.

### Description of data

The questionnaire was distributed electronically to all primary school educators at IB international school X as well as to multiple IB international schools in Europe. Which IB international schools participated is unknown due to the anonymity of the questionnaire. The questionnaire received 22 responses. The questionnaire was split into three sections (Children’s Literature, Race & Ethnicity, and Personal Information). There were a total of 6 open-ended questions (including 3 demographics questions) and 16 multiple choice questions. After the expansion of the research scope, a consent question was added to the beginning of the questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire was to understand the general perceptions of educators towards using children’s literature to facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity as well as their racial and ethnic awareness. The data is presented in tables and pseudonyms for the questionnaire participants (P1-P22) as well as the interviewees (Teacher A,B,C) are used to protect the identity of participants.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with three educators at the IB international school X. The purpose of the interviews was to understand educators’ practical experience using children’s literature in the classroom. This aimed at answering the second sub question “How can children’s literature facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity?”.

## **Analysis of the data**

The following section will detail the analysis process of the questionnaire as well as the semi-structured interview. An inductive approach to coding was adopted for this research study.

The analysis of the questionnaire involved several steps. For the quantitative portion of the data, the platform Google Forms automatically sorted the collected responses into charts, tables and diagrams providing a clear overview of responses. In order to analyze the open-ended questions from the questionnaire as well as the interviews, Denscombe's (2014, as cited in Cohen et. al, 2018, p. 675) six-stage process of content analysis was applied:

1. Selection of necessary data samples in a table.
2. Breaking down the texts into smaller units to be analysed.
3. Developing categories to analyze the data with.
4. Coding the data to fit the categories.
5. Conducting frequency counts of the occurrence of a category.
6. Analyzing the unit frequency in relation to other units of data.

The data gathered was examined from multiple perspectives, answers were compared and analyzed with the aim of identifying themes, similarities, and discrepancies (Austin, 2016). Additionally, the open-ended questions were analyzed by closely examining the language used to select certain buzzwords that suggested a category or misunderstanding (Austin, 2016).

As recommended by Wellington (2015), the analysis of the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews occurred in the following steps: immersion, reflecting, analysing data, and synthesizing data. First, the retrieved audio recordings were listened to multiple times and the transcripts were re-read whilst notetaking in order to get a feel for the data. Next, the researcher took time away from the data to allow a fresh approach in the next

stage of analysis. Due to the closeness of the researcher to the retrieved data, this stage was especially important. Then, data was filtered and divided up into useful units of data. Thereafter, the data was coded and categorized to highlight important themes and recurring ideas. Finally, the data was recombined at which point categories, themes and codes were compared and checked. A critical peer was included in the process to practice reflexivity and to ensure the accuracy of the developing categories.

### **Presentation of results**

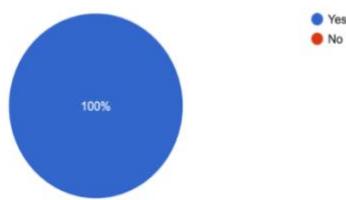
In the following section the data collected with the aforementioned methods will be presented and discussed.

### **Questionnaire results**

#### **Children's Literature**

The first section of the questionnaire intended to gather participants' opinions about children's literature and its usefulness in facilitating discussions about race and ethnicity. As shown in Figure 2, all 22 participants believe that children's literature can be used to discuss racial and ethnic diversity. These results are similar to previous studies conducted by Iwai (2013) which showed educators general enthusiasm towards learning about and using

With your understanding of race and ethnicity, do you feel children's literature can be used to discuss racial and ethnic diversity with young learners (5-8 y.o.)?  
22 responses



*Figure 2. Questionnaire question 5.*

multicultural children's literature to support children's learning about ethnic and racial diversity. The findings obtained from the written responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, regarding advantages in the use of children's literature, established the

categories listed in Table 2. The following categories were found to be the most influential a) representation b) awareness and c) student engagement.

### ***Representation***

As previously mentioned, using racially and ethnically diverse children's literature can serve as mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors (Sims-Bishop, 1990). In line with Husband's (2019) account, one participant emphasized the necessity for children to have "books that are windows (looking into the life or perspectives of someone from a different culture, context) and mirrors where they see people who look like them" (P14, Personal Communication, May 2nd, 2021). Another participant added, "I think reading opens different

<b>Table 2. Educators' perceptions of children's literature</b>		
<b>Method</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Interview</b>
<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>
<b>Representation</b>	Identify with characters Curriculum inclusion	
	Diversity	
<b>Awareness</b>	Racial & ethnic Systemic impact	
<b>Empathy</b>	Empathy development Commonality	
<b>Acceptance</b>	Racial & ethnic diversity	
<b>Student engagement</b>	Student wellbeing Increases approachability of topic	
<b>Safe place</b>	Creating a safe learning environment	
<b>Open mindedness</b>	Expansion of worldview Promotes open-mindedness	
<b>Visual learning</b>	Images support learning	
<b>Dialogue</b>	Promotes dialogue	
<b>Literature selection</b>	Literature selection difficulties Literature content	

Note: The grey area represents the overlapping categories found in both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews.

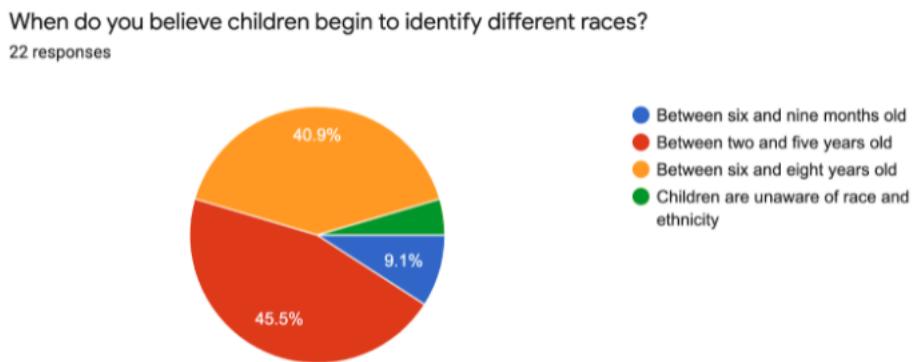
worlds for children. Reading can take them to places they might not be able to see or reach or understand in their day to day experiences" (P16, Personal Communication, May 3rd, 2021). Several participants gave similar answers, all of which were placed in the sub-category

“identify with characters” (see Table 2). These results might suggest that educators are aware of the important role representation of different racial and ethnic identities plays in children’s literature. However, despite this, studies conducted by Brinson (2012) indicate that when asked to identify literature with representation of racially and ethnically diverse identities, educators are often unable to do so. Based on findings from Brinson (2012), while participants recognized the importance of representation, the majority of the sixty-one participants in her study were unable to identify children’s literature that represented more than one cultural group. Leahy & Foley (2019) make further comment that while educator’s may be aware of the importance of representation in children’s literature, this does not mean they are trained “to be culturally responsive through the use of children’s literature” (p. 175). Therefore, in order to gain a better insight into the pedagogical approaches to children’s literature selection and application, questions of this nature were included in the semi-structured interview.

Interestingly, two participants commented on the influence representation in children’s literature could have on students feeling like they are “included in the curriculum” (P6, Personal Communication, April 18th, 2021). These results were placed under the sub-category “curriculum inclusion” (see Table 2). The responses suggest a current lack of inclusion of racially and ethnically diverse identities or experiences in the curriculum. It may also suggest participants’ recognition of the importance of the integration of racially and ethnically diverse experiences and materials across the curriculum as suggested by Picower (2009). These responses could be a reflection of the influence of a Eurocentric environment cultivated by IB schools as commented on by Gardner-McTaggart (2020). However, more research would need to be done in order to further explore these theories.

### **Awareness**

This category presented results in the sub-categories a) racial and ethnic and b) systemic impact (see Table 2). In line with the findings from Kim (2014) participants indicated how racially and ethnically diverse children's literature could promote awareness of



*Figure 3. Questionnaire question 10.*

racial and ethnic diversity. Interestingly, despite these findings, 40, 9 % of participants believe that children do not begin to identify different races until they are between the ages of six and eight (see Figure 3). This is in contrast to the findings from the University of Toronto (2017) which indicates children begin to develop racial bias as early as infants (6-8 months) suggesting the onset of racial and ethnic awareness is much earlier than previous studies indicated. Reason for this may be due to the belief that children are too young to talk about and understand race and ethnicity, a belief in line with studies conducted by Husband (2010).

### ***Student Engagement***

A category that was prevalent in both the questionnaire and the interviews was the student engagement category. This category was split into the following subcategories: a) student wellbeing b) increased approachability of topic. The student wellbeing category

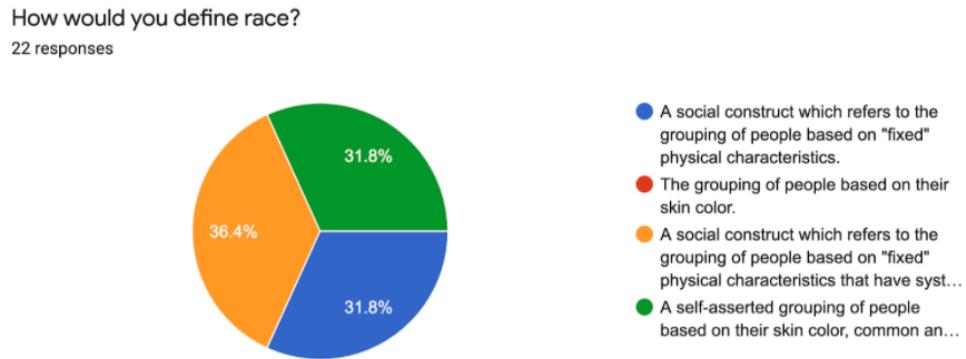
largely focused on the feelings of students. In line with themes that were discovered in studies from Iwai (2013), educators recognized the important role diverse children's literature can play in ensuring students feel empowered. One participant described the influence representative and diverse children's literature can have on children's self-esteem by saying, "For children who are not white, it's important for them to see themselves reflected and celebrated in the books read in the classroom" (P13, Personal Communication, May 1st, 2021). Another participant expressed how racially and ethnically diverse children's literature has the ability to make children "feel as if they are members of our community" (P19, Personal Communication, May 3rd, 2021). These results suggest educators' awareness of the importance of diverse literature specifically for the positive identity development of children. This analysis supports the findings of Leahy & Foley (2018) who suggest that exposure to diverse children's literature can significantly impact children's self-image.

The second subcategory "increase approachability of topic" focused on the aspects that make children's literature attractive for discussions about race and ethnicity. Participants were enthusiastic about using children's literature as a tool as one mentioned how it can "help younger children understand diversity in an open and fun way" (P1, Personal Communication, April 11th, 2021). Further comments included that it's a "child friendly approach of discussions about racial and ethnic diversity" (P7, Personal Communication, April 18th, 2021).

### **Racial and Ethnic Awareness**

The second section of the questionnaire focused on educators' racial and ethnic awareness. As emphasized by Leahy & Foley (2018), educators are unable to promote inclusivity in their classrooms before properly understanding racial and ethnic diversity themselves. While there are several definitions of race, the definition used in the

questionnaire is the same definition that was used in this paper. Interestingly, only 36,4 % of participants identified the aforementioned definition (see Figure 4). A reason for this could be



*Figure 4. Questionnaire question 7.*

due to the similarity of the definitions that could have led to careless mistakes by participants. However, based on the findings of Ladson-Billings (2001), a more plausible explanation could be the lack of willingness to understand the systemic impact of racial identity. Leonardo (2009, p. 107) suggests “that whites do not grow up with a race discourse, do not think of their life choices in racial ways, and do not consider themselves as belonging to a

racial group" (Leonardo, 2009, p.107). This theory is supported by the participant's self-assigned race (see Figure 5) in which participants were given the opportunity to answer the open-ended question "What race/s do you identify with?". 18, 2% of participants responded "Caucasian" as their self assigned race and one participant (4,5 %) responded Caucasian European. The term Caucasian has a long history and many different interpretations (Westby, 2020). The term itself is derived from the racist classification system created by Johann Blumenbach in the late 1700s which created an extremely harmful racial hierarchy. Blumenbach categorized humans into five human races based on perceived beauty and value: Caucasian, Mongolian, Malayan, American, and Ethiopian (Westby, 2020). The literal meaning of the term is people deriving from the Caucasus mountain region. However, today it is often used to describe those labeled as white by society despite their lack of connection to the Caucasus mountain area (Westby, 2020). As argued by Mukhopadhyay (2008) "language is one of the most systematic, subtle, and significant vehicles for transmitting racial ideology" (p. 12). Therefore, using the term Caucasian reinforces scientific racism, the

<b>Self- assigned race</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Black</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>Black biracial</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>9,0 %</b>
<i>Latina</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>Indian</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>White</i>	<b>8</b>	<b>36,3 %</b>
<i>White european</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>Caucasian</i>	<b>4</b>	<b>18,2 %</b>
<i>Caucasian european</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>European</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>Human</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>World citizen</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>
<i>All</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>4,5 %</b>

Figure 5. Overview of questionnaire participants' self- assigned race

false belief that races are naturally occurring and Caucasians are the superior race. The use of this term not only prioritizes the comfort of white people (Westby, 2020), it also reinforces an old racialized worldview (Mukhopadhyay, 2008). Furthermore, 22,5 % of participants classified themselves as a non-existent race (see highlighted grey area, Figure 5). Instead of identifying their race, participants stated their ethnicity or even ‘world citizen’, a term that has no connection to race at all. These findings suggest a strong discomfort with race and the implementation of the color-blind or color-evasive strategy, both stemming from a mentality that “we are all the same” (DeCuir-Gunby, Allen, & Boone, 2020). These results build on existing evidence of a lack of ethnic and racial awareness among white educators (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020; Ladson- Billings, 2001; Leonardo, 2009; Picower, 2009). The aforementioned significantly impacts educators’ ability to facilitate conversations about race and ethnicity.

The findings from the statement “I believe every child can reach their goals through hard work and determination” (see Figure 6) show that the majority of participants selected strongly agree (36,4 %), agree (31,8 %) or slightly agree (18,3 %). This indicates participants' tendency to use the color-blind strategy power-evasion (DeCuir-Gunby, Allen, & Boone,

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am aware of my race and its impact on how I navigate the world.	1 4,5 %	2 9,0 %	0	2 9,0 %	12 54,5 %	5 22,7 %
I believe my race gives me certain privileges.	1 4,5 %	2 9,0 %	3 13,6 %	3 13,6 %	5 22,7 %	8 36,4 %
I believe my race influences the way I teach.	1 4,5 %	5 22,7 %	0	5 22,7 %	8 36,4 %	3 13,6 %
I believe race and ethnicity should not be discussed in a school setting due to its political nature.	15 68,2 %	7 31,8 %	0	0	0	0
I believe my race influences the teaching materials I choose.	1 4,5 %	4 18,3 %	2 9,0 %	6 27,3 %	7 31,8 %	2 9,0 %
I believe my race and ethnicity influences the educational decisions I make.	1 4,5 %	6 27,3 %	1 4,5 %	7 31,8 %	6 27,3 %	1 4,5 %
I believe my racial and ethnic identity helps me understand the experiences of students of color.	2 9,0 %	8 36,4 %	6 27,3 %	0	0	6 27,3 %
In planning my lessons I keep the following questions in mind: whose voices are centered? Who is missing? Who will this affirm and who will this silence?	0	5 22,7 %	3 13,6 %	7 31,8 %	5 22,7 %	2 9,0 %
If I don't have any children of color in my classroom it is not necessary to have conversations about race and ethnicity.	15 68,2 %	4 18,3 %	0	0	1 4,5 %	2 9,0 %
I believe all students at my school are given equal opportunities to learn regardless of their race and ethnicity.	1 4,5 %	4 18,3 %	0	2 9,0 %	8 36,4 %	7 31,8 %
I believe every child can reach their goals through hard work and determination.	0	2 9,0 %	1 4,5 %	7 31,8 %	4 18,3 %	8 36,4 %
I do not see color, all of my students are the same to me.	6 27,3 %	4 18,3 %	4 18,3 %	1 4,5 %	2 9,0 %	5 22,7 %

Figure 6. Overview of statement results from questionnaire

2020). These findings are significant as they indicate the evasion of racial analysis by educators and the perhaps unwillingness to acknowledge the structural nature of racism (Leonardo, 2009). Furthermore, as the study with preservice teachers conducted by

psychologists DeCuir-Gunby et al. (2020) shows, educators who actively engaged in color-blind ideology were less likely to be able “to address their stigmatizing thoughts about race which includes the process of acting on racial stigma” (p. 9). Educators’ use of color-blind ideology has a direct negative impact on their students (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2020), and therefore educators’ racial and ethnic awareness must be a requirement before discussing racial and ethnic identity with young children.

Findings from the following statement, “If I don’t have any children of color in my classroom it is not necessary to have conversations about race and ethnicity” show that surprisingly, there were participants who strongly agree (9,0 %) and agree (4,5%) with the aforementioned statement. While there are still a large percentage of educators who strongly disagreed (68,2 %) and disagreed (18,2 %) with the statement, these outliers still play an important part in understanding educators’ perceptions. The results contradict the claims of Husband (2019) who bases his claims off Sims-Bishop’s (1990) studies, which emphasizes the fact that, besides providing BIPOC children with affirmation, racially and ethnically diverse literature play an important role in sharing the experiences of different perspectives for non-marginalised children. The findings suggest these participants’ lack of comprehension of how “race affects, and is fundamental to, all our lives, including white lives”(Aanerud,1997 as cited in Leonardo, 2009). These outliers in the collected data are important to acknowledge as they show some educators’ selective participation in racial dialogue rather than a true commitment to combating racist systems (Hurtado, 1996, as cited in Leonardo, 2009, p. 117).

### **Interview results**

The following section will examine and discuss the findings from the semi-structured interviews.

## Dialogue facilitation

The main part of the semi-structured interview aimed at understanding educators' approach to dialogue facilitation during a read aloud in their classroom. The main sub-categories that surfaced are listed in Table 3. All three educators described starting

**Table 3.** Pedagogical approaches to dialogue facilitation during read aloud

Method	Interview	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
Category	Sub-category	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C
<b>Dialogue facilitation strategies</b>	Personal accounts	x	x	x
	Plot prediction	x	x	x
	Author		x	
	Illustration	x	x	x
	Deconstructing misconceptions		x	
	Character exploration	x	x	

their read-alouds with a common strategy: plot prediction, personal connections and talking about illustrations (see Table 3). Teacher B described their strategy as follows, "I would probably start with just the front cover, or maybe with older children, like the blurb and, and get their opinions on what they think the story might be about?" (Teacher B, Personal Communication, May 7th, 2021). This educator used a common strategy amongst educators to get children interested and involved in constructing meaning and predictions. Teacher C as well describes "if it's a picture book, show them the cover or either way and just have predictions, see what's going to happen? Why, what does the title of the book tell us about what we're going to be reading?" (Teacher C, Personal Communication, May 12th, 2021). These results show that all interviewees were aware of basic strategies to use during read-aloud, however, there was a lack of steps taken to promote critical thinking amongst learners. Possible reasons for this could be a lack of knowledge due to educators not being provided with the proper training as Teacher B recounts, "I feel that my initial like teaching training

wouldn't have given me enough to sort of, to really use a book to its fullest potential and get a good dialogue going with the class (Teacher B, Personal Communication, May 7th, 2021).

These findings are in line with research conducted by Baratz (2015) that found that educators identified a lack of professional development and training that could support their development in these areas. In turn, these results contribute to a clearer understanding of areas in which educators are in need of support.

### **Racial and Ethnic Awareness**

As determined in the questionnaire, racial and ethnic awareness of educators continues to be imperative to successful implementation of children's literature as a tool to discuss race and ethnicity. The findings of this research study further underline the paucity of educators' racial and ethnic awareness. Instead of critically discussing and analyzing racial structures through children's literature as suggested by (Kim, 2014), educators choose to further promote color-blind ideology in their conversations about race and ethnicity. When asked how they interpret the expectations of the IB curriculum with regards to facilitating conversations about racial and ethnic diversity, Teacher C described, "You don't focus on it [race] but you always try to show kids the commonalities and how we are all one human race, so to say, and everybody has the same needs and wants" (Teacher C, Personal Communication, May 12th, 2021). This was a common theme found in both the questionnaire

**Table 4. Racial and ethnic awareness of educators**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Questionnaire</b>	<b>Interview</b>
<b>Category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>	<b>Sub-category</b>
<b>Color-blindness</b>		Personal racial and ethnic awareness Systemic impact
Human race		

Note: The grey area represents the overlapping categories found in both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews.

as well as the interviews (see Table 4) as participants focused on the idea that “Children should see children from all races in literature to understand that we are all the same” (P5, Personal Communication, April 18th, 2021). These findings suggest educators’ intentional avoidance of directly addressing race and ethnicity, which according to Leonardo (2009) demonstrates their direct role in perpetuating the hegemonic racial order by “turning their cheek” (p.108). It also indicates that despite educators’ understanding the importance of including diverse children’s literature in their classrooms, they do not feel comfortable discussing it. When asked about what tools and strategies they use to facilitate dialogue about difficult topics during read-aloud, Teacher B recalled a situation in which they used a ‘social story’ with a child that displayed misconceptions about race. Teacher B explained, “We came up with our own kind of little story about how people can be different and just did it in a way that he could kind of understand”(Teacher B, Personal Communication, May 7th, 2021). In this situation, the teacher attempted to combat racial misconceptions without specifically addressing race in its entirety. Reason for the avoidance of a critical approach to these conversations could be *white guilt* (Leonardo, 2009), as white educators become concerned that directly addressing race and racism could be considered racist. In taking a color-blind approach when discussing misconceptions of racism, educators fail to address “the privilege that is granted or denied to individuals on the basis on racial identification” (Husband, 2012, p. 365). This results in children gaining a distorted consciousness of race and racism in educational institutions as well as society (Husband, 2012). Another reason for these results could be a lack of racial and ethnic awareness and understanding. All three teachers displayed discomfort in their voices when asked which race they identify with, while Teacher A responded “What is that for white Europeans? Caucasian? What do you- what are you like, are you the same or are you? Like, what do people I don't know. I don't think about these things so much.” (Teacher A, Personal Communication, May 7th, 2021). These results could

be linked to IB schools' tendency to be uncritical of whiteness and power (Garnder-Taggart, 2020), which cultivates an environment in which racial identity is not explored amongst educators. In turn, this highlights the importance of the examination of the role the IB curriculum plays in maintaining color-evasive strategies in their curriculum.

### **Quality**

According to Wellington (2018), validity is the demonstration that the selected research instrument measures what it intends or claims to measure. Methodological triangulation helped ensure the validity of this research project. As mentioned by Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2018) "Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity" (p. 265), as using a mixed methods approach allows for multiple independent tools to measure the same objective. The methodological triangulation used in this research is 'between method' triangulation, where different methods are used to study the same issue (Wellington, 2015). In this instance, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were the selected methods of data collection. Moreover, in order to minimize bias as well as the researcher effect, the interviews were conducted via telephone, as studies have shown the impact the ethnic and racial identity of the researcher can have on the participants (Cohen et al., 2018).

Due to the adaptation of a mixed methods approach which incorporates both quantitative as well as qualitative data, a more comprehensive and complete understanding of the studied phenomena is ensured (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Additionally, the use of mixed methods can increase the reliability and value of the collected data as it allows insight into the processes and explanations of certain phenomena. While it is impossible to achieve total reliability (Wellington, 2015, p.43), this research is based on previous studies and is exploring a field in which there have been few studies. Prior to the distribution of the questionnaire, it was piloted by a group of 6 critical peers, which enhanced the reliability of

the research method. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire was supported through the level

Reliability of the semi-structured interview was established through the creation of an interview guide (appendix C) that ensured the same format and sequence of questions was used for each participant (Cohen et al., 2018). The interview guide was piloted with critical peers in order to determine the functionality and clarity of the chosen research instrument. Additionally, as suggested by Silverman (1993), the interviews were rehearsed and prepared accordingly.

### **Ethics**

This research project was guided by several ethical considerations. First, the consent of the internship coordinator through a consent form was ensured before commencing the research process (Austin, 2016, p. 68). In order to ensure voluntary informed consent, research participants were informed of the purpose of the research, the importance of their involvement, the possible risks and benefits involved and how the data will be used and stored (BERA, 2011). The aforementioned information was given to the participants in a consent form (appendices A & B) in which they were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time for any or no reason (BERA, 2011). Participants were encouraged to approach the researcher at all times with questions or concerns and adjustments will be made should any problems arise (BERA, 2011).

In order to ensure anonymity of the participants, the shared information was kept completely confidential, no personally identifiable information or contact details were captured without the consent of the participant. In order to ensure accurate representation of participants and their lived realities which may influence their answers, participants were asked to disclose their race. The data collected was securely stored with restricted access for third-party members unless the participant formally (i.e., in the form of a consent form)

agreed to disclose necessary information (BERA,2011). The participants were also asked for their permission to audio record the interview. Furthermore, confidentiality and anonymity was maintained throughout the research process and no personal information of participants was disclosed in the research paper.

### **Research conclusion**

This study explored perceptions as well as approaches of educators with regard to the use of children's literature to facilitate discussions about racial and ethnic diversity. It also examined their racial and ethnic awareness. Furthermore, the aim of this research was to explore and highlight the importance of creating opportunities for discussions of racial and ethnic identity with young learners through the use of children's literature. The purpose of the research project was to answer the following research question: "What are educators' perceptions of using children's literature to facilitate discussions about ethnic and racial diversity at International Baccalaureate international primary schools in Europe?"

The results showed that the racial and ethnic awareness of the selected educators was poorly developed. However, participants showed great enthusiasm towards using children's literature as a tool to foster children's understanding of diversity, as well as promote acceptance, respect and inclusion across subjects. Despite the enthusiasm, educators admitted their lack of critical literacy training which significantly contributed to the lack of implementation of such strategies. When asked in the interviews, educators struggled to describe strategies to support a critical dialogue about racial and ethnic identity, most likely due to their own lack of racial and ethnic awareness.

While this study argues the importance of children's literature as a central tool to supporting conversations about race and ethnicity, severe gaps in knowledge as well as curricular limitations should encourage caution. Before these conversations can be conducted

and this tool utilized, educators must express their willingness to critically reflect and examine the ways in which “race, racism, and racial privilege exist and operate in the larger society and within their own personal lives” (Milner, 2010 as cited in Husband, 2019). Without first establishing an awareness and understanding of the systems BIPOC students have to navigate, educators risk further perpetuating color-blind racist ideologies (Husband, 2019).

### **Recommendations for future research**

Due to the small sample size of this study, it would be beneficial to conduct a similar study in a larger context. Doing so would help establish a larger data set while simultaneously supporting a better understanding of educators' perceptions towards using children's literature to facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity. Conducting this research in other international IB schools would support the further development of IB institutions and their staff towards creating a more just and equitable learning space.

Furthermore, due to the restrictions of COVID-19 and the internship during which the research was conducted taking place mostly online, the originally planned artefact analysis was unable to be administered. An additional artefact analysis could lend valuable insight into what children's literature can be found in the classrooms of educators. Brinson (2012) who researched educators' knowledge of multicultural children's literature, recommends more research into this area as it could help the formation of professional development programs that could support future educators.

### ***Professional development***

The findings of this research project highlight a dire need for professional development in the areas of racial and ethnic identity development as well as critical literacy education. Participants who filled out the questionnaire were asked to give their input regarding the support they need. As shown in Table 6, all participants signified the need for

further professional development in various areas of anti-racism education. As suggested by Leahy & Foley (2018), research should focus on specifically investigating teacher knowledge

<b>Table 6. Overview of questionnaire question 16</b>	
<b>Statement</b>	<b>Respondent percentage</b>
Professional development in the area of anti-racism education, white privilege, racial and ethnic identity development, critical literacy education, etc.	<b>14</b> 63,6 %
Support and access to anti-racist teaching materials.	<b>12</b> 54,5 %
Support in curriculum integration.	<b>10</b> 45,5 %
Support in lesson planning and the integration of racial and ethnic concepts.	<b>10</b> 45,5 %
None- I do not feel these conversations are necessary.	<b>0</b>
Other:	
That my learning community is explicit and intentional about the need and desire to have these conversations	<b>1</b> 4,5 %
None, there are plenty out there, I use it when I need it	<b>1</b> 4,5 %

including the widespread lack of awareness in order to better understand the necessary support, before developing comprehensive professional development frameworks to support educators' needs.

### ***Curricular development***

The paucity of research in the field of IB education hinders the curricula's ability to progress. Further research should examine the ways in which IB curricula contribute to the perpetuation of color-blind ideologies. The collected data could in turn inform IB institutions of strategies that could support the integration of racial and ethnic identity development in the curriculum.

### **Limitations**

The study asserts the importance of the implementation of children's literature to support racial and ethnic identity development. However, while the findings offer valuable

insights into areas in need of improvement, limitations can be identified. First, given the small sample size, the extent to which the collected data is transferable to another context is limited. Thus, further research is needed in different IB international school settings. Additionally, the conducted research was unable to circumvent sampling bias due to the chosen research methods. Another limitation is that due to the lack of existing data regarding the IB curriculum, the results cannot confirm the direct impact of the curriculum on the collected results. Finally, while steps were taken to limit the researcher effect, participants may have hid their genuine emotions about the issue due to the sensitivity of the topic. However, despite the limited number of participants, this project offers valuable insight into IB international school educators' perceptions of racial and ethnic diversity, awareness, and dialogue facilitation. The findings of this research project add value to a field with limited research thus far.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Questionnaire Consent Form



#### Research Informed Consent Educator

##### **TITLE OF STUDY**

**Children's literature as a tool to facilitate discussions about racial and ethnic diversity**

##### **PRIMARY RESEARCHER**

**Name:** Anka Clark

**Department:** NHL Stenden University ITEPs

**Email:** clark.anka@student.nhlstenden.com

##### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

This research aims at understanding educators' perceptions towards using children's literature to facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity. This is an exploratory research project that will hopefully inform and support further development in the area of literacy education and race and ethnicity development in an international context.

##### **PROCEDURES**

You, as educators, are at the center of this research as I am trying to understand your views and thoughts. Therefore, the research will begin by collecting data from first and second grade English educators, anonymously, through a questionnaire. After the data from the questionnaire has been analyzed, possible follow up interviews will be conducted. Meanwhile, artefacts that could inform the research further could be collected from classrooms with your consent.

##### **RISKS**

The study will not cause any physical harm. However, it may involve some form of discomfort as questions may be considered sensitive as exploring the topic of race and

ethnicity can bring up complicated emotions. If you feel any discomfort from the study, or require any information please contact the researcher via email.

## BENEFITS

Although no immediate benefits derive for participants, the results of the collected data could potentially inform the school on how to support educators in facilitating discussions about race and ethnicity in their classrooms.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses to this questionnaire will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

## COMPENSATION

After the completion of the research study, the administration will receive recommendations for further development in the area of race and ethnicity development.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Researcher directly by telephone at +1 (734) 272- 7112 or at the following email address [clark.anka@student.nhlstenden.com](mailto:clark.anka@student.nhlstenden.com).

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

---

## CONSENT

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask

questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

**Participant's Signature**

Date:

**Researcher's Signature**

Anka Clark

Date: 26.03.2021

## Appendix B: Interview Consent Form



### Interview Consent Form Educator

#### TITLE OF STUDY

**Children's literature as a tool to facilitate discussions about racial and ethnic diversity**

#### PRIMARY RESEARCHER

**Name:** Anka Clark

**Department:** NHL Stenden University ITEPs

**Email:** clark.anka@student.nhlstenden.com

#### PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

This research aims at understanding educators' perceptions towards using children's literature to facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity. This is an exploratory research project that will hopefully inform and support further development in the area of literacy education and race and ethnicity development in an international context.

## PROCEDURES

This interview is meant to serve as an opportunity for me to collect more in-depth information regarding your views and opinions about using children's literature to facilitate discussions about race and ethnicity. The questions will be open-ended in nature mainly aim at understanding

## RISKS

The study will not cause any physical harm. However, it may involve some form of discomfort as questions may be considered sensitive as exploring the topic of race and ethnicity can bring up complicated emotions. If you feel any discomfort from the study, or require any information please contact the researcher via email.

## BENEFITS

Although no immediate benefits derive for participants, the results of the collected data could potentially inform the school on how to support educators in facilitating discussions about race and ethnicity in their classrooms.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses to this questionnaire will be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names/numbers for participants that will be used on all research notes and documents
- Keeping notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher.

## COMPENSATION

After the completion of the research study, the administration will receive recommendations for further development in the area of race and ethnicity development.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about this study, or you experience adverse effects as the result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided on the first page. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the Primary Researcher directly by telephone at +1 (734) 272- 7112 or at the following email address [clark.anka@student.nhlstenden.com](mailto:clark.anka@student.nhlstenden.com).

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take

part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Withdrawing from this study will not affect the relationship you have, if any, with the researcher. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

---

## CONSENT

- I confirm that my participation in this research project is voluntary.
- I understand that I **will not** receive any payments for participating in this research interview.
- I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
- I confirm that the research interview will last approximately 20-30 minutes.
- I understand that the researcher **will not** identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
- I have read and understood the explanation provided to me.
- I have been given a copy of the consent form.
- I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research interview.
- I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

I have read and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

**Participant's Signature**

Date:

**Researcher's Signature**

Anka Clark

Date: 22.04.2021

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide**

### **Interview Guide**

**Research Question:** What are educators' perceptions of using children's literature to facilitate discussions about ethnic and racial diversity at International Baccalaureate international primary schools in Europe?

#### **Sub Questions:**

What are educators' understanding of ethnic and racial diversity?

How can children's literature facilitate discussions about ethnic and racial diversity?

**Intro:** Thank you so much for being here today and for deciding to participate in my research study. Today's interview will be recorded and stored securely for the duration of the research project. I understand that this is an unusual situation and that this may feel a bit uncomfortable- I too am not looking forward to hearing my voice over and over again in order to transcribe our talk together. This interview will be different from a normal conversation as I will be less talkative but rather listen to what you have to say. Most importantly, I will not be evaluating what you are saying- there is no right or wrong answer- everything you tell me is important and interesting to me. This is an opportunity for me to get a little bit more in depth information that is not as easily shared in written text. Should you feel uncomfortable for whatever reason or not wish to proceed please let me know and we can terminate the interview immediately. Before we get started do you have any questions for me?

<b>Focus area</b>	<b>Possible questions</b>	<b>Possible probes</b>
<b>General</b>	Could you tell me about the role children's literature played in your childhood?	-How would you describe children's literature's influence on your identity development?
<b>Read aloud</b>	Can you describe to me what a read-aloud would look like in your classroom?	-Do you talk about what book you chose? Or do you dive right into storytelling?  -From your experience, what have you found is a useful strategy to use in order to support the understanding of children when dealing with difficult topics?
<b>Dialogue during read-aloud</b>	Can you describe to me how you support a dialogue with children during read-aloud?	-From your experience, have you found guiding questions to be a useful tool to facilitate discussions? If so, can you describe what type of questions you tend to use? (Comprehension, character empathy, factual prompts, inferential, opinion, connection, vocabulary)

		<p>-Can you tell me about a time where children asked a question possibly displaying misconceptions? How did you react? Did you feel equipped with the tools you needed to guide this discussion?</p> <p>-Could you tell me a bit about what kind of environment you try to create for the children in order to support these dialogues?</p> <p>-Can you tell me about a time where you were faced with challenges and how you were able to facilitate a discussion among the young learners?</p>
<b>Book selection criteria</b>	Could you tell me about what criteria you use in order to select a book?	<p>-Can you think of a time you read a book to your class that centered a character representative of your or your children's racial or ethnic identity? If so, can you elaborate?</p>
<b>Book selection given examples</b>	Based on your criteria, which of the following books would you select in order to talk about race and ethnicity with your students?	<p>-Can you describe to me why you chose this book?</p> <p>-Can you describe to me what you look for? What would be some possible red flags?</p> <p>-How would you envision introducing the book you have chosen?</p> <p>-What questions can you imagine arising when reading this book?</p>
<b>Lesson planning</b>	Can you describe to me how you plan lessons that involve children's literature?	<p>-Tell me about the goals you have in mind when planning a lesson or read-aloud?</p>
<b>Preparedness</b>	Based on your past experiences using children's literature would you say you feel you have received proper training to facilitate these discussions?	<p>-If not, can you elaborate as to what you feel is missing?</p>
<b>Demographics</b>	What race do you identify with?	

