SHERMAN CENTER

for Early Learning
in Urban Communities

Director's Message

In 2023, we continued with our plan to pause most of our programs in order to focus on research, evaluating our programs, and reimagining our initiatives to maximize our impact on promoting best instructional practices for children. This issue comprises all our accomplishments for the spring, summer, and fall semesters, starting with a summary of the Diverse Books Project and highlighting our most recent partnership with WEE Nation Radio.

Our focus on research was celebrated at the second iteration of the Sherman Center Research Conference (SCRC) in June; the selection of the 2023 Faculty Reserach Awardee, Dr. Mirela Cengher; and two final reports from previous Sherman Center Research fellows, Drs. Sonnenschein and Galindo, and Dr. Young and Ms. Kariuki. We also published our third research report on the evaluation of the Lakeland Elementary/Middle School Dual Language Program, an ongoing research study since 2018.

Lastly, Dr. Karrie Godwin shares the progress on the Sherman Center Program Evaluation Study lead by her, evaluating the outcomes of three of our programs: the Diverse Books Project (DBP); the Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program (ELP); and the Teacher Summer Institute (TSI). This study will provide evidence of the impact our programs have had on teachers, families, and students during the Sherman Center's yeas of operation.

I hope you enjoy reading about our progress as much as we have enjoyed advancing our mission to improve educational practices and learning outcomes for young learners.

Warmly,

Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Associate Professor of Education and Director of the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities at UMBC.

Diverse Books Project

by Eliza Triolo, Graduate Assistant and Master of Arts in Teaching student

The Diverse Books Project was our first and is our longest standing initiative, aiming to ensure that early childhood educators at our partner schools have access to multicultural children's books for their classroom libraries, to enrich their curricula, and positively impact their students' understanding of their complex social environments. In 2023, each quarter educators received a list of 15 books selected from our Sherman Center's Diverse Books Collection and requested up to two titles for their classroom library. In addition, the project encouraged educators to reflect on their use of these books both before and after using them during instruction. On our YouTube channel, we have a growing library of short videos with educators describing how they used these multicultural books in their classrooms and how their students engaged with these texts.

During 2023, the Sherman Center began a new partnership with WEE Nation Radio. Each quarter, authors of the three most teacher-requested books were interviewed by WEE Nation Radio host Uncle Devin. Authors discussed their books, their backgrounds, and provided a read aloud that broadcast live and was archived on the WEE Nation Podcast and YouTube channel. These are resources that teachers can use in their classrooms to enhance lessons using their chosen books. We are excited to continue our partnership with WEE Nation Radio over the coming year.

Educators from all five Sherman Center partner schools participated in the Diverse Books Project for quarters 2 and 3 in the 2022-2023 school year. So far in the 2023-2024 school year, teachers from four schools have participated. In 2023, the Sherman Center distributed **912 books** from the Diverse Books Collection to **56 early childhood educators** at our partner schools (see Figure 1 and Table 1). We offered **13 dual-language titles**, receiving **60 requests** for **301 books in both English and Spanish**. We also expanded our collection with **6 new titles** centering on mindfulness, racism, and father-daughter relationships, **38 requests** were received for **185 books** that were new to our collection.

Figure 1
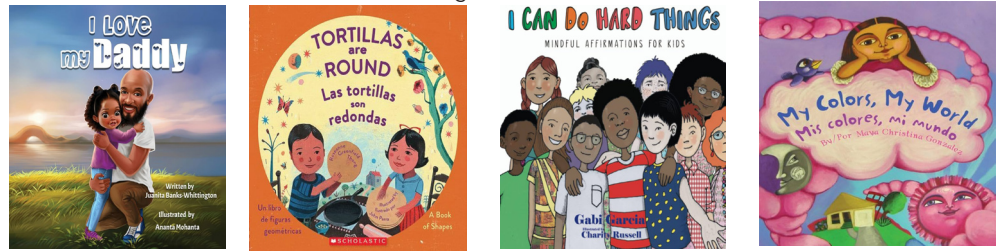
Some of the most requested books in 2023

Educators who selected books from the Diverse Books Collection for their classroom did so to support their students as they related to themselves, their peers, and the books' characters. They mentioned the following when asked to describe their reason for selecting particular books for their students:

"I have ESOL students in my class and love to have books for them that are about them and [that we can] share with their families." -Juanita Eustace, 1st grade teacher, Arundel Elementary School (SY 2023-24, Q1)

"I selected these books because they are relevant for the student population I teach. These books will encourage and inspire my young students." -Kathryn Higgins, Pre-K teacher, Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle School (SY 2023-24, Q2)

"My class and I are working hard on learning more about how to be mindful, how to be present, and how to calm our bodies and learn about our emotions. I think a book on mindfulness would be a fantastic addition to our classroom library and our calm down corner." -Julia Dighe, 1st grade teacher, Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle School (SY 2023-24, Q2)

Table 1. Summary of teacher participation and books requested per quarter

School	SY 2022-23, Q2 Teachers (books)	SY 2022-23, Q3 Teachers (books)	SY 2023-24, Q1 Teachers (books)	SY 2023-24, Q2 Teachers (books)
Arundel	8 (56)	5 (46)	5 (46)	4 (38)
Bay Brook	4 (12)	6 (50)	2 (10)	2 (18)
Curtis Bay	3 (18)	3 (12)	N/A*	N/A*
Lakeland	9 (86)	7 (64)	9 (84)	12 (130)
Maree G. Farring	7 (30)	1 (8)	9 (94)	10 (110)
Totals	31 (202)	22 (180)	25 (234)	28 (296)

*School did not participate this quarter

![Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities logo]

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Sherman Center Research Conference (SCRC)

by Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Director and Associate Professor of Education

In June 2023, we hosted the second iteration of the Sherman Center Research Conference (SCRC), at the Skylight room at UMBC. The keynote presentation by Dr. Christy Tirrel-Corbin, Executive Director of the Center for Early Childhood/Early Childhood Special Education teacher preparation program at the University of Maryland. Her presentation, *Leveraging Research-Practice-Policy Partnerships to Mitigate Inequities, Childhood Trauma, and Educator Secondary Traumatic Stress*, highlighted how a systemic approach is essential in addressing inequitities, childhood trauma, educator mental health, and educator retention.

Six paper presentations, three flash talks, and one workshop were shared at the conference, including topics such as robot-assisted learning, using postmodern picture books, understanding parents and teachers' influence on racial-ethnic socialization, art integration for ESOL learning, fostering math learning through picture books, and nurturing children's spirituality in secular classrooms (see Figure 2). Presentations prompted interesting questions and rich discussions among all participants. The event also offered a networking luncheon in which researchers, practitioners, and partners engaged in explorations of future transdisciplinary collaboration. The event was shared across social media and received high praise from all attendees who completed our exit survey.

Figure 2

Research paper presenter

Publications

by Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Director and Associate Professor of Education

In 2023, we published on our website Dr. Susan Sonnenschein and Dr. Claudia Galino's (FRA 2018-19) final research report, titled *Evaluation of the Literacy Fellows Program and Stakeholders at Bay Brook and Curtis Bay Elementary Schools*, and Dr. Patricia Young and Ms. Deborah Kariuki's (FRA 2019-20) final report, titled *Infusing a Culture-based Computational Thinking Curriculum in Urban Preschools*. As well as, the Sherman Center Research Report No. 3, *Lakeland Dual Language Program Study SY 2019-20 to SY 2020-21* (see Figure 4). With these publications, we continued to advance the field of early childhood education extending upon the knowledge base and research evidence that informs high-quality and equitable instructional practices.

Figure 3
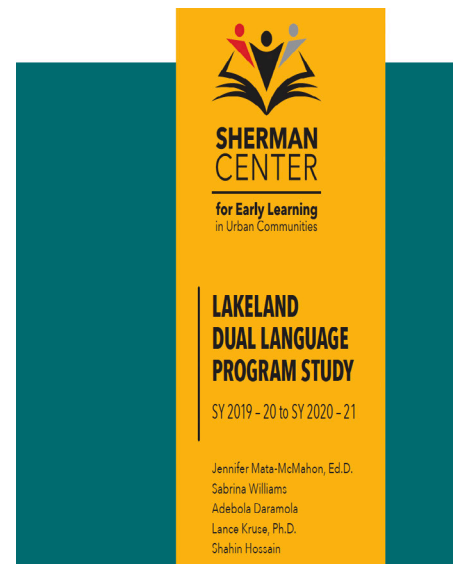

Dr. Mirela Cengher, Faculty Research Awardee

Faculty Research Award (FRA)

by Eliza Triolo, Graduate Assistant and Master of Arts in Teaching student

In the Spring 2023 semester, the Sherman Center awarded its annual Faculty Research Award (FRA) to **Dr. Mirela Cengher** (see Figure 3), Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at UMBC. Dr. Cenger's study, titled *A Comparison of Simultaneous and Sequential Bilingualism in Children with Autism Specturm Disorder (ASD)*, investigates which type of instruction is most effective for children on the Autism spectrum who are learning two languages. With the Sherman Center's support, Dr. Cenger is developing large-scale projects that aim to identify best practices for teaching two languages to children with ASD. Her study is being conducted at Sherman Center partner schools in Baltimore City Public Schools, further strengthening UMBC's commitment to building a strong foundation for lifelong learning among young children attending urban schools.

"The fellowship will allow me to serve the Baltimore City community, as well as advance our scientific understanding of bilingualism."
- Dr. Mirela Cengher

Figure 4

Sherman Center Research Report No. 3