



SHERMAN CENTER

for Early Learning
in Urban Communities

Director's Message

2024 was our last year of operation as the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities; we focused our efforts on research initiatives, organizing the Sherman Center Research Conference, finishing the evaluation studies for our main programs, and continuing to support faculty conducting research to advance the early childhood education field. As well as, completing the seventh year implementing the Diverse Books Project through which we provided diverse texts to many teachers from our five Baltimore City partner schools.

We start the newsletter by sharing our accomplishments through the Diverse Books Project, highlighting how many teachers we supported with diverse children's books from our collection by authors representing a variety of races, ethnicities, themes, illustrations, and genres.

Our research focus was celebrated at the third iteration of the Sherman Center Research Conference in June, and the selection of two research projects advanced by three Faculty Research Awardees, Drs. Godwin, Tondreau and Yang. Also, in our pursuit to advance research, two articles from projects supported by Sherman Center graduate assistants and research faculty, were published as journal articles, further contributing to the field.

Lastly, Dr. Karrie Godwin, spearheading our program evaluation study, updates us on a preview of the findings from studying the impact of three of our major programs: the Teacher Summer Institute, the Diverse Books Project, and the Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program. The final reports are expected to be shared on our website at the end of the fall semester.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to all our partners and supporters who have stood by us over the years. Your dedication has been essential in helping us advance our mission to strengthen the foundation for learning among young children in Baltimore City and to develop exemplary early education practices for urban schools. Our impact would not have been possible without your unwavering support.

Gratefully,

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

Diverse Books Project

by [Patience Kajulo, Doctoral Student of Public Policy and Graduate Assistant](#)

The [Diverse Books Project](#) ensures early childhood educators at our partner schools have access to multicultural children's books for their classroom libraries, enriching curricula and positively impacting students' understanding of their complex social environments. In 2024, each quarter, educators received a list of 15 books selected from the Sherman Center Diverse Books Collection, from which they could request up to six copies of two titles for their classroom libraries.

Educators were encouraged to reflect on their use of these books both before and after instruction. The Sherman Center's [YouTube channel](#) features short videos of educators discussing how they used these multicultural books in their classrooms and how their students engaged with the texts.

In 2024, educators from all five [Sherman Center partner schools](#) eagerly participated in the Diverse Books Project. The Sherman Center distributed **537 books** from the Diverse Books Collection to **53 early childhood educators** at partner schools (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Additionally, in Quarter 3 and 4, **10 dual language titles** were offered and a total of **38 requests** were received for a total **136 dual language books**. The collection was also expanded with **4 new titles** focusing on confidence, diligence, art and creativity, and self-awareness to enhance the content of the mandated curricula. Overall, there were **5 requests** for **27 copies of new books** in the collection.

Figure 1. Some of the most requested books in Q3 and Q4



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:

"These books are beautiful and I feel my students will relate to the text and pictures." - Kathryn Higgins, Pre-K, Maree G. Farring Elementary/Middle School (SY23-24, Q3)

"I will use these book during our morning meeting SEL. This book will help them and encourage them to make a good choices in school and do their best." - Clarissa Evangelista, Kindergarten, Bay Brook Elementary/Middle School (SY23-24, Q3)

"The Diverse Books Project is very helpful with supporting scholars about diversity." - Colethia Williams, Kindergarten, Arundel Elementary School (SY23-24, Q4)

"I appreciate the program. I was able to use the books provided throughout the school year with my students. They also enjoyed reading the stories." - Blair Brooks, Special Education, Lakeland Elementary (SY23-24, Q4)

Table 1. Summary of teacher participation and books requested in Q3 and Q4

School	SY 2023–24 Q3 Teachers (books)	SY 2023–24 Q4 Teachers (books)
Arundel	3 (26)	2 (24)
Bay Brook	5 (45)	3 (24)
Curtis Bay	4 (24)	1 (2)
Lakeland	10 (108)	14 (142)
Maree G. Farring	5 (70)	6 (72)
Totals	27 (273)	26 (264)

Publications

by [Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Director and Associate Professor of Education](#)

In 2024, we were lucky to have two journal articles published on projects supported by the Sherman Center. Our graduate students Sabrina Williams, Adebola Daramola, and Shahin Hossain, worked closely with Dr. Mata-McMahon in advancing the field of children's spirituality and bilingual education.

The articles are titled "[Sustainability of a Dual Language Program During and Beyond COVID-19 Challenges](#)" (International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism) and "[How U.S. Early Childhood Educators Understand Children's Spirituality: A Framework of Essence, Origin, and Action](#)" (Early Childhood Education Journal). The articles can be found and downloaded from our [website](#).

International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism

ISSN (print) (Online journal homepage): [www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijbe](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ijbe)

Sustainability of a dual language program during and beyond COVID-19 challenges

Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Sabrina Williams, Adebola Daramola, Lance Kruse & Shahin Hossain

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To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijbe.12735>

How U.S. Early Childhood Educators Understand Children's Spirituality: A Framework of Essence, Origin, and Action

Open access | Published 19 March 2024
(2024) | [Cite this article](#)

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Research Note

Evaluation of The Sherman Center's Diverse Book Project Study

by [Dr. Karrie Godwin, Associate Professor of Psychology](#)

The Sherman Center's Diverse Books Project (DBP) aims to ensure teachers have access to multicultural children's books for their classroom libraries. For the past 5+ years, participating teachers requested books from the Diverse Books Collection for their classroom libraries. Drs. Godwin, Baker, and Mata-McMahon, and Graduate Assistants Kumaravelan and Aquino evaluated the DBP as part of a retrospective evaluation of the Center's initiatives. The team analyzed archival data and fielded an online survey to teachers regarding their book selection/use and perceived program impact.

The DBP delivered over 1,700 copies of books to more than 100 teachers; 18 teachers completed the follow-up survey. Most teachers (67%) selected books that addressed a DEI theme, with an overwhelming focus on books that centered race (82%). Teachers recommended expanding the collection to include more offerings on specific aspects of diversity such as gender identity, different family structures, and books that depict students with disabilities. Almost all teachers reported using the books for students to read independently and/or for read-alouds. Less than half of teachers planned activities related to the books, and only 17% created lesson plans around the books - highlighting an area where additional resources could be helpful.

Perceived DBP benefits included introducing teachers to diverse stories and increased access to diverse books. All teachers strongly agreed that the DBP helped students feel that difference was okay. Teachers also generally reported that the program helped deepen students' learning about themselves and helped students learn to treat others with respect. The research team shared preliminary findings at the 2024 Sherman Center Research Conference; a final report is being prepared for dissemination. For more information, please contact Dr. Godwin (kgodwin@umbc.edu).

Sherman Center Research Conference (SCRC)

by [Patience Kajulo, Doctoral Student of Public Policy and Graduate Assistant](#)

The 2024 [Sherman Center Research Conference](#) took place on June 14th at the UMBC campus. This year's theme revolved around Innovative Approaches to Advance Early Childhood Education, headlined by a keynote presentation from [Dr. Claudia L. Galindo](#), a professor in the Education Policy program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Her keynote, titled *Taking an Equity Lens: Reconceptualizing Research on Latinxs' Schooling Experiences and Outcomes*, delved into multilingual students' learning experiences tied to social connections, diverse cultures, and home languages.

The conference gathered 21 attendees, including Sherman Center partners, BCPS teachers, school leaders, MECLP fellows, doctoral students, and Sherman Center research fellows. It provided an arena for learning and professional development through engaging workshops and immersive paper presentations.

Workshops presented included *A Love of Learning Begins at Home, Brain Break Preferences Among Children, The Power of an Idea, Racism in Children's Music and Entertainment, and The Role of Feedback and Attention in Learning During Educational Instruction*.

Additionally, six collaborative presentations featured *Archival Analysis and Retrospective Evaluation of the Diverse Books Project, Hands-On STEAM Learning Works for Students and Teachers, Bilingualism: Why and How We Should Teach Multiple Languages to Children with Disabilities, How U.S. Early Childhood Educators Understand Children's Spirituality, Harnessing TPACK to Propel Ethical AI Usage in Early Childhood Education and Supporting Pre-K in Family Childcare*. These presentations sparked interesting questions and rich discussions among participants. The event also featured a networking luncheon, where researchers, practitioners, and partners explored future transdisciplinary collaboration.

The event was shared widely across social media and received high praise from attendees, as evidenced by our exit survey.



Dr. Claudia L. Galindo, Keynote Speaker



Research Paper Presenters

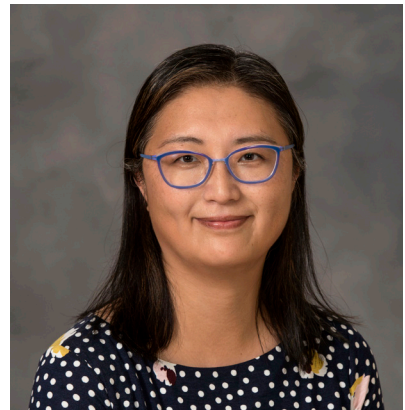
Faculty Research Award (FRA)

by [Patience Kajulo, Doctoral Student of Public Policy and Graduate Assistant](#)

In 2024, two outstanding research projects received the Sherman Center's annual [Faculty Research Award \(FRA\)](#) for their valuable insights and contributions to Early Childhood Education. Dr. Karrie Godwin's research project, *Student-Centered Design: Optimizing Instructional Reading Materials for Beginning Readers*, examines how the design of instructional reading materials affects children's attention to text and reading comprehension. The second awarded project, *Amplifying Asian American Voices: In-Service Teachers' Explorations of Picture Books Centering Asian American Characters*, was led by Drs. Amy Tondreau and Shuling Yang. This collaborative and interdisciplinary effort aims to engage classroom teachers of PreK-3rd grade (with a focus on teachers in Sherman Center partner schools) in professional development cycles. The goal is to support teachers in a replicable process of critically analyzing picture books that center on AAPI characters and integrating those books into their classrooms with an arts integration component.



Dr. Karrie Godwin, Faculty Research Awardee



Dr. Shuling Yang, Faculty Research Awardee



Dr. Amy Tondreau, Faculty Research Awardee

*"We hope the project will expand the participating teachers' capacities in teaching and learning, and they then will be able to bring what they have learned to their colleagues and their students as well."
— Tondreau and Yang*