

Child care books perpetuate racial stereotypes ^[1]

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Source: Perth Now

Format: Article

Publication Date: 2 Oct 2017

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Child care centres could be helping to create racial discrimination in children by failing to provide books with non-white characters, research suggests.

Edith Cowan University researchers surveyed more than 2300 children's books in Perth day care centres and found that just 5 per cent contained non-white characters.

Most of the books that did have non-white characters promoted out-dated views or stereotypes, such as Aboriginal characters portrayed in a semi-naked state while playing didgeridoos or American Indians wearing traditional head dresses.

The study, published today in the *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, said the lack of exposure to different races was concerning because children formed attitudes to racial identification in their earliest years.

"This can give children the impression that whiteness is of greater value and importance and this can contribute to discrimination and prejudice," the report said.

Lead researcher Helen Adam said children needed to see their own culture represented in authentic and contemporary ways to develop their own sense of identity and respect for others.

"Children who do not see representations of themselves reflected within book collections may begin to doubt their self-worth in the centre and in society in general," she said.

"Additionally, Caucasian children in the centres would be equally restricted in their engagement with books that represent races other than their own."

"Unfortunately, it is unlikely educators would be able to engage with children in meaningful discussions about other cultures with such a restricted choice of books."

Ms Adam said day care centre educators needed more guidance on selecting and using books.

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