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## **Exploring the representation of Black autistic characters in children's picture books**

[Presentation at the Advance HE Race Equality Colloquium, 2022.]

### *Abstract:*

*In 2019, 441 children's and young adult's books were published that featured a Black person as a primary character representing 11.9% of all children's books published (CCBC, 2020). Similarly, representations of autistic characters in children's books remain rare and disproportionate to the demographic (Azano, Tackett, & Sigmon, 2017). Indeed, books that contain a Black, autistic character remain even rarer. This presentation explores the initial stages of a project that examines the representation of Black autistic characters in children's picture books. It samples four children's books with a main character who is Black and autistic, exploring the representation of their Blackness and their autism.*

*This project is predicated on the concept of books as mirrors (Bishop, 1990), with smaller mirrors showing smaller and more imperfect reflections. Whilst white, neurotypical children have a variety of different versions of themselves represented in fiction, the underrepresentation of Black autistic characters in children's books means that Black, autistic students may arrive at university having never seen characters they can identify with represented sufficiently. This has implications for educators and learning support departments in HE who may be able to use our findings to better understand Black autistic students' experience prior to arriving at university and tailor their provision accordingly.*

### References:

- Azano, A. P., Tackett, M., & Sigmon, M. (2017). Understanding the puzzle behind the pictures: A content analysis of children's picture books about autism. *AERA Open*, 3(2), 2332858417701682.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Windows and mirrors: Children's books and parallel cultures. In *California State University reading conference: 14th annual conference proceedings* (pp. 3-12).