

BAISL Position Paper

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Collection Development

Position:

The Bay Area Independent School Librarians (BAISL) support the position that K-12 independent school libraries develop a diverse collection of books to foster inclusion and belonging of the population it serves.

BAISL recommends that librarians conduct a partial or full diversity audit of their collection, seek alternate review sources when considering titles for the collection, attend professional development opportunities, and create a personal learning network (PLN) that advances an understanding of DEI.

“When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part.” —Rudine Sims Bishop

Introduction

The independent school library serves all constitutes in the school and is thus an important aspect of our learning communities.¹ School libraries provide equitable access to resources, technology, and expertise.² According to the American Library Association (ALA), school librarians “have an obligation to select and support access to content on all subjects that meet, as closely as possible, the needs, interests, and abilities of all persons in the community

¹ [The school library is a unique and essential part of a learning community.](#)

²

http://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslissues/positionstatements/AASL_Position%20Statement_Effective_SLP_2016-06-25.pdf

the library serves.”³ Therefore, school libraries must create and maintain an inclusive environment where diverse identities are involved and empowered and engagement is fostered.

Definitions and Foundational Concepts

DEI means very different things. BAISL defines diversity as the similarities and differences in a group of people including but not limited to race, gender identity, gender expression, religion or spirituality, sexual identity, political affiliation, body type, ethnicity, place of birth/citizenship status, physical ability, learning ability, age, and more. Diversity often frames differences and similarities in terms of how they diverge from or relate to the “norm;” in American society that typically means posing heteronormative whiteness as the default and marking “diversity” as everything, not that. Inclusion is defined as an environment where diverse identities are involved and empowered and where representation has moved beyond equality to equity. Inclusion both acknowledges those differences and honors and empowers them. Alternatively, as Vernā Myers, VP of Inclusion Strategy at Netflix, put it: “Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”⁴

Windows and Mirrors are a common metaphor used to explain the need for diverse resources for children and teens. A mirror affirms or validates a child’s identity and experience in some way and a window serves to broaden or deepen the reader’s understanding of lifestyles or identities dissimilar to their own. A book may be both a window and a mirror depending on who is reading it. Children and young adults may be encountering new identities or discovering new ways of living their identities, meaning windows and mirrors can be powerful tools for DEI. However, as Rudine Sims Bishop states, “when

³ [An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights](#)

⁴ <https://vernamyers.com/verna-myers-joins-netflix-as-vice-president-inclusion-strategy/>

children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part.”⁵

In addition to windows and mirrors, the authenticity of authorship is an essential concept to avoid a collection replete with problematic tropes, offensive stereotypes, or outdated and potentially harmful terminology. Authenticity ensures an author from an underrepresented group writes from a perspective of someone from that group.⁶ Author Corinne Duyvis coined #ownvoice to describe such books.⁷

It is critical that titles about underrepresented groups are not limited to “problem novels” (as in books only about a group’s struggle and hardships)⁸ and historical representations but instead presents them as fully realized, varied, and intersectional.

Lack of Representation

⁵ Bishop, Rudine Sims. (1990). “Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.” *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, 6(3).

⁶ Yoo-Lee, EunYoung, et al. “Evaluating Cultural Authenticity in Multicultural Picture Books: A Collaborative Analysis for Diversity Education.” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 84, no. 3, 2014, pp. 324–347. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/676490.

⁷ <http://www.corinneduyvis.net/ownvoices/>

⁸ <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/features/ya-or-stfu-got-problem-problem-novels/>

**Children's Books By and/or About People of Color and
First/Native Nations Received by the CCBC*--US Publishers Only
2015 -**

Last Updated: August 20, 2019

Year	Number of Books Received at CCBC from US Pubs	African / African Americans		American Indians / First Nations		Asian Pacifics/ Asian Pacific Americans		Latinx	
		By	About	By	About	By	About	By	About
2018	3,312	192	388	22	34	308	284	186	240
2017	3,500	126	334	18	44	260	286	109	205
2016	3,200	92	267	8	35	195	225	95	157
2015	3,200	106	244	9	28	156	107	56	79

⁹

There has been a push to publish more books of underrepresented people thanks to movements like We Need Diverse Books.¹⁰ However, U.S. publishing skews towards providing ample mirrors for certain populations and almost no mirrors for others. There is also a lack of authentic voices for underrepresented groups like people of color and Native Americans. This is seen in the statistics gathered by the Cooperative Children's Book Center at the University of Wisconsin. The 2019¹¹ statistics have shown an increase books published by and about underrepresented ethnic and racial groups in the United States, but adequate representation is still lacking, especially for authentic voices and perspectives or #ownvoices.

⁹ <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>

¹⁰ <https://diversebooks.org>

¹¹ At the time of publication 2019 statistics have not been released

2018 Percentage of Representation				
	Africa/African American	American Indians/First Nations	Asian/ Pacific Islanders	Latinx
Written By	5.8%	<1%	9.3%	5.6%
About	10%	1%	8.5%	7.2%

Currently, there are no studies or strong statistics on other identities, such as LGBTQ+, ability, or socioeconomic status available.¹²

Librarian’s Role

Because of this power imbalance in publishing for children and young adults, librarians must take an active role to balance the scales when curating their library collections and to avoid a collection replete with problematic tropes, offensive stereotypes, or outdated and potentially harmful terminology. BAISL recommends that librarians conduct a partial or full diversity audit of their collection, seek alternate review sources when considering titles for the collection, attend professional development opportunities, and create a personal learning network (PLN) that advances an understanding of DEI.

- [Diversity Audit 101](#)
- [We Need Diverse Books](#)
- [Reading Without Walls](#)
- [National Ambassador for Young People's Literature](#)
- [San Francisco Public Library](#)
- [SocialJusticeBooks.org](#)
- [CCBC Book Lists](#)
- [GLSEN](#)

¹² Malinda Lo has not published number on LGBTQ+ books from 2017 or 2018. If they are released by the time of the publication of this paper they will be included.

- [Lee and Low's Open Book Blog](#)
- [ALA White Paper on the Importance of Diversity...](#)

In addition, Library programming, both active and passive, should promote diverse and inclusive materials as a matter of course, not only in response to significant holidays, heritage months, and the like. Booktalks, displays, and lessons should include a wide variety of identities and experiences written by a wide variety of authors, with a preference for #ownvoices.

Conclusion

School libraries are an essential part of a learning community and must provide its members with both windows and mirrors from authentic sources to promote inclusivity. The publishing world is improving efforts to provide more experiences of traditionally underrepresented people but has not yet reached a satisfactory level. School librarians, as both literature experts and experts on the school community, are the people who must create and maintain these diverse and inclusive collections.
