

Diverse Students Need Diverse Resources

Four ways to ensure diversity in your school library program.

By Deborah Ford

Between 1994 and 2012, only 10 percent of published children's books contained multicultural content, yet 37 percent of Americans were people of color, according to a study by the Cooperative Children's Book Center. Educators are faced with the challenge of linking the diverse students they serve and arming them with tools for life beyond academia. Schools can nurture their students' literacy development by ensuring that the library is a welcoming place, reflects the way students learn, and features resources and tools that accommodate their needs.

In 2014, a grassroots social media campaign started the hashtag #WeNeedDiverseBooks, now the name of a group that advocates essential changes

in publishing to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people. Also in 2014, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) published the report "The Importance of Diversity in Library Programs and Material Collections for Children," which emphasizes "developing print and digital library collections that reflect cultural diversity" and shows librarians how they can "promote cultural understanding through library programs that embody the diversity of their communities and the larger world."

Awareness is one key to ensuring diversity in your school community. Broadening the horizons of your students enables them to accept other cultures and validates the differences within your school population. Here are four ways you can ensure diversity at your school.

1. Improve Classroom and School Library Collections

It's difficult to evaluate the diversity of a library collection without literally sorting it by hand, but librarians can run catalog searches to evaluate the number of books on a topic. Deficits can be eliminated and funding directed to the gaps. Junior Library Guild has a new



multicultural books category, as well as city categories that are also diverse. Be sure to purchase books that have won American Library Association Youth Media Awards such as the Schneider Family Book Award, the Pura Belpré Award, and the Coretta Scott King Book Award, all of which recognize diverse books, authors, and illustrators. Some additional tips:

- Use your library circulation system to create themed resource lists.
- Use ready-made lists of diverse books from *School Library Journal*, Junior Library Guild, and The Horn Book.
- Weed out denigrating and stereotypical titles from classroom and school libraries. Librarians can use the CREW method, which gives specifics, or refer to the California State Department of Education’s *Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children’s Books for Racism and Sexism*.

2. Shake Up Your Programming

Many schools celebrate Black History and Women’s History months, so consider expanding celebrations to National Autism Awareness Month (April), Jewish American Heritage Month (May), and Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month (May), for example. DiversityBestPractices.com lists national monthly and daily celebrations. In addition to celebrating diversity throughout the year—not just during the national celebration month:

- Encourage your community to be involved by inviting guests to read, demonstrate a skill at your makerspace, or speak at an assembly.
- Participate in reading challenges such as Diversity on the Shelf, which encourages kids to read books by and about people of color.
- Invite diverse guests. If your school is homogeneous, consider inviting guests who differ from your school population.
- Promote STEM/STEAM to your girls: Invite women to speak.

3. Evaluate Your Strategies

Children learn in various ways. Provide audio and video with your presentations to assist students with undiagnosed learning issues. Show captions when available. Provide materials and signage in more than one language to bridge communication gaps and validate cultural differences. In addition:


- Move around the room to keep everyone’s attention.
- Use technology learning platforms, like Kahoot, to evaluate comprehension and create data.
- Differentiate instruction by using online informational text with varying Lexiles, such as TweenTribune or Newsela.
- Allow choice in book selection for reading level, content, and length.
- Accommodate children who wiggle, chat, and cause other distractions. Allow them to multitask, which often increases their attention span.
- Use ebooks on a Whiteboard so everyone can see.

4. Use Marketing Techniques

Once you have implemented diverse strategies, make sure everyone knows. If you have books in multiple languages, or useful databases—but no one knows—it’s a terrible waste of resources. Your efforts for a child are worth it. To promote the resources:

- Create video tutorials of how a database article can be translated or read to students.
- Evaluate every book display with an eye for diversity.
- Include pictures in your social media to inform parents and teachers about resources.
- Be sure your librarian has a curated diversity website for teachers and parents. Free sites include Pinterest, Edu.Symbaloo, and LiveBinders.
- Inform district personnel and local media about your commitment to diversity.

Now What?

Diverse, culturally authentic library collections and programs allow children to accept themselves and develop an appreciation for other cultures. To stay on top of the initiative, ask your librarian to collaborate with your teachers on these strategies. Expand your book budget to strengthen your diversity efforts. Search #WeNeedDiverseBooks for additional ideas. Follow Junior Library Guild’s Pinterest board, We Need Diversity. Finally, inquire about the Junior Library Guild’s free professional development workshop, which is available for districts. 

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