FEATURES

12  Shifting Lenses on Youth Literacy and Identity
    Kafi Kumasi and Sandra Hughes-Hassell

22  When Worlds Collide
    Recent Developments in Children’s Literature
    Debbie Reese

28  #MdlPwriters
    Fourteen Powerful Voices
    Julie Stivers

38  When We Listen
    Using Student Voices to Design Culturally Responsive and Just Schools
    Teresa Bunner

46  Libraries as Facilitators of Coding for All
    Crystle Martin

54  Considering Cultural Competence
    An Annotated Resource List
    Nicole A. Cooke and Renee F. Hill

ARTICLE

62  Making Friends and Buying Robots
    How to Leverage Collaborations and Collections to Support STEM Learning
    Cassandra Kvenild, Shannon M. Smith, Craig E. Shepherd, and Emma Thielk
Librarians must support the literacy development of racialized youth not only to close the achievement gap, but also because literacy is a powerful tool of voice and agency.

Shifting Lenses on Youth Literacy and Identity — pg 12
"An effective school library program has a certified school librarian at the helm, provides personalized learning environments, and offers equitable access to resources to ensure a well-rounded education for every student." So begins AASL’s “Definition for Effective School Library Program” position statement (AASL 2016a). In the context of the theme of this issue of Knowledge Quest, I’d like to unpack this sentence, focusing on some of its critical key words: “resources,” “well-rounded education,” “equitable access,” “certified school librarian,” and “every student.”

**Resources**

As school librarians we are responsible for developing the collections of our libraries. It is our professional responsibility to provide informational, instructional, and recreational reading resources that meet the needs of our patrons. We are called upon to practice purposeful and thoughtful collection development so that children are able to see themselves in the books they read as we support the concept of books as mirrors. The We Need Diverse Books initiative has highlighted the challenge that we face (We Need Diverse Books n.d.). For example, according to statistics provided by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center (CCBC), of the approximately 3,200 picture books, novels, and nonfiction works the CCBC received from U.S. publishers in 2015, 243 were about Africans or African Americans; 28 were about American Indians or First Nation members; 107 were about Asian Pacific residents or Asian Pacific Americans; 78 were about Latinos—in total, 456 books out of 3,200, less than 15 percent (CCBC 2016). Extending the concept of books as mirrors, our collections should not only represent but also broaden the horizons of those we serve, providing a window into the lives of those who are different from us and doors that connect us and foster understanding. Developing collections that accomplish these objectives is challenging given the limited number of books available with characters of certain races and ethnicities.

**Well-Rounded Education**

As school librarians, we are first and foremost teachers, responsible for providing our students with instruction across literacies that will allow them to be successful in college, career, and community. If we are to engage students in learning, we need to design instruction that is culturally responsive. “Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning, enriching classroom experiences and keeping students engaged” (Southern Poverty Law Center 2016). To drill down even further, we can look at the “Students’ Six: Teaching Strategies that Work for Students of Color,” six evidence-based strategies that students identified as effective: visibility by consciously including every student in instruction; proximity by effective use of physical space; connection of learning to students’ lives; engaging and incorporating students’ cultures; acknowledging racial dynamics; and connecting to the larger world and students’ future selves (Meyer and Davis n.d.; School Improvement Network 2016). When we use strategies such as these and practice culturally responsive teaching, we foster learning and contribute to students’ well-rounded education.
Equitable Access

The difference between “equal” and “equitable” is the topic of much discussion lately. Simply put, we might define “equal” as “same” and “equitable” as “fair.” Equal might mean providing every child with a device to take home to use to complete required work for school, while equitable would mean ensuring that every child has adequate connectivity at home to use that device. Providing equitable access to resources for all children is a challenging proposition. As we structure our library schedules, we work to ensure that students have equitable access to our facilities, collections, and services. Many access issues, however, are not within our direct control. Overly restrictive filtering of legitimate educational websites, for example, disproportionately disadvantages those who do not have adequate Internet access outside of school. Working for equitable access is an ongoing task.

Certified School Librarian

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive impact that a certified school librarian has on student learning (Gretes 2013). Yet, we know that many school districts have eliminated school librarian positions. For example, as the 2016–2017 school year began, only one in four Chicago public schools had a certified school librarian on staff (Ward and Cox 2016). The Los Angeles Unified School District has restored some library positions, but the ratio of school librarians to students is 1:5,784, far below the recommended California standard of one librarian for 785 students (Szymanski 2016). For the 2016–2017 school year the Shawnee Mission School District in Kansas hired “innovation specialists” instead of school librarians to lead their school libraries (Collie 2016). As noted in AASL’s “Instructional Role of the School Librarian” position statement, “school librarians are instructors as well as collaborators with fellow educators in the pursuit of student learning in school libraries, classrooms, learning commons, makerspaces, labs, and virtual learning spaces” (AASL 2016b). Certified school librarians play a critical role in student learning.

Every Student

Every student means every student, each and every one. Every student deserves the services of a certified school librarian. Every student deserves equitable access to library resources, print and electronic. Every student deserves instruction that is not only effective but also culturally responsive. Every student deserves resources that reflect and honor differences. As implementation of the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act moves forward to the state and local levels, we must be visible and vocal. Every student deserves an effective school library program.

Audrey Church is a professor at Longwood University in Farmville, Virginia, where she is coordinator of the School Librarianship Program. In 2015 she received the Longwood University College of Graduate and Professional Studies Faculty Research Award and Longwood University’s Maria Bristow Starke Faculty Excellence Award. She is the author of “Performance-Based Evaluation and School Librarians,” published in School Library Research in May 2015. Her newest book is Tapping into the Skills of 21st-Century School Librarians: A Concise Handbook for Administrators (Rowman and Littlefield 2016).

Works Cited:


This themed issue comes at a critical juncture in our nation’s history as racialized people continue to fight for protection of their human and civil rights, many of which were legally gained only with passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voter Rights Act. Despite decades of legislative promises to end discrimination in educational opportunities, employment, housing, and the judicial system, racialized youth are more likely to attend schools that lack quality resources, including credentialed teachers, rigorous courses, qualified guidance counselors, and extracurricular activities; to face harsher disciplinary actions; and to drop out of school (U.S. Office for Civil Rights 2015). The unemployment rate for Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans is consistently higher than for whites (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016). Discrimination against Blacks, Latinos, and Asians looking for housing persists in subtle forms like being refused an appointment to see a home or being shown fewer available units than whites with similar qualifications (Dewan 2013). African American youth are about 16 percent of the U.S. youth population, yet they make up 26 percent of juvenile arrests; 37 percent of their cases are moved to criminal court, and 58 percent of convicted African American youth are sent to adult prisons. In the federal system Black offenders receive sentences that are 10 percent longer than white offenders for the same crime (Sentencing Project 2016).

Compounding the inequities represented by these statistics, racialized youth have seen an increase in social injustices as demonstrated by the recent killings of unarmed young Black men and women by police officers, the decision by an oil company to build a pipeline across indigenous people’s sacred land, the burning of mosques, and deportation raids that specifically target families who have come to America to escape violence and extreme poverty. All of these actions create the framework through which racialized youth experience and judge their world, including schools and libraries. And they are watching to see how we deal with these civil rights issues as a nation.

1 “Racialized” is a term used in place of the more-outdated and inaccurate terms like “racial minority” and “people of color” or “non-white.” The term racialized recognizes that race is a social construct initially developed by Europeans during colonialism to mark certain groups for subjugation based on perceived physiological differences and potential for slave labor, and on Europeans’ desire to acquire land and resources on other continents. Although these labels were initially imposed onto racialized groups, members of these groups have since adopted these same labels for themselves (e.g., Black, Latino, Native American, Asian, etc.) as a way to build a sense of collective identity.
as institutions, and as individuals. Students are looking for actions, not platitudes, to affirm our commitment to diversity and equality, and to address the daily social injustices they experience.

What Can We Do?

So what is the role of today’s youth services professional in combating these social justice issues and better serving our nation’s culturally and linguistically diverse children and youth? Our roles are multifaceted and include theoretical, research-based, and practical responses, each covered in this issue of Knowledge Quest.

Theoretically, our feature offers a diverse set of lenses for looking at issues of literacy and identity among youth from racialized backgrounds. We challenge librarians and educators to adopt more-constructive lenses that change how we see (and, consequently, support) the literacy and identity needs of marginalized youth.

On the practical side, Nicole A. Cooke and Renee F. Hill provide an annotated bibliography of recommended resources for helping youth services professionals become culturally competent and equity literate. In addition to this annotated bibliography, we also recommend that you consult two wikis on cultural competence that have been developed by members of the Young Adult Library Services Association (see “Recommended Resources” at the end of this column).

In two separate articles, Teresa Bunner and Julie Stivers highlight youth programs built upon research-based teaching and learning strategies that have been proven effective with racialized youth. Research is prominently featured in a piece by Crystle Martin that describes experiences and perceptions of participants in a project at eight public libraries that held Scratch coding workshops for a diverse group of Black and Latino youth participants and public librarian facilitators.

Debbie Reese’s article discusses recent incidents related to portrayals (in children’s and young adult books) of members of a race or of traditional practices of Native Americans. These portrayals have caused several books to be criticized and even recalled or revised due to backlash expressed on social media. Reese offers supplemental resources for librarians looking for book reviews written from perspectives different from those traditional review journals might offer.
Combined, these articles provide a collective response to the youth who are watching how we as a profession are addressing not only their literacy and identity needs, but also their rights as humans to culturally responsive education, library programs, and books. As library and information science professionals, we have an important role to play in making the institutions and people we serve live up to our nation’s creed of liberty and justice for all. We hope this issue provides a template for the ways we can work to better serve, understand, and envision the possibilities of success for racialized youth.

As a bonus, this issue also contains an article by Cassandra Kvenild and colleagues at the University of Wyoming and the UW Lab School. A collection of kits and other hands-on resources has been developed at the UW Lab School, a tuition-free charter school with a diverse student body selected by lottery. The article focuses on how the collection was developed and collaborations leveraged to support STEM learning for all students at the Lab School.

Kafi D. Kumasi is an associate professor of library and information science (LIS) at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, where she teaches in the areas of school library media, urban librarianship, multicultural services and resources, and research methods. A Laura Bush 21st Century scholar, she holds a PhD from Indiana University, Bloomington, and a master’s degree in LIS from Wayne State. Her research interests revolve around issues of literacy, equity, and diversity, particularly in urban educational environments spanning K–12 and graduate school contexts. She has received numerous awards, including the University of Michigan’s National Center for Institutional Diversity “Exemplary Diversity Scholar Citation” and the Association for Library and Information Science’s 2011 Best Conference Paper Award. Her work has been published in numerous journals including (among others) Library and Information Science Research, Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults, School Libraries Worldwide, School Library Research, and Urban Library Journal. Her service commitments are extensive, ranging from editorial board member of Library Quarterly journal to mentor for Project Lilead, an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant-funded project aimed at studying, supporting, and building community among school library supervisors.

Sandra Hughes-Hassell, PhD, is a professor in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is president-elect of the Young Adult Library Services Association. Her research focuses on social justice issues in youth library services, diverse youth literature, and the role of school librarians in education reform. Her latest book Libraries, Literacy, and African American Youth: Research and Practice (Libraries Unlimited 2017), coedited with Pauletta Brown Bracy and Casey H. Rawson, serves as a call to action for the library community to address the literacy and life outcome gaps impacting Black youth. With funding from an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant, she and her team are currently developing a comprehensive research-based professional development curriculum that focuses on cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy, and equity literacy. To learn more visit <http://projectready.web.unc.edu>. She served on the AASL Underserved Student Population Task Force and currently serves on the School Library Research Editorial Board.

Works Cited:


Recommended Resources:
Shifting Lenses on YOUTH LITERACY & IDENTITY

Kafi Kumasi
Ak4901@wayne.edu

Sandra Hughes-Hassell
smhughes@email.unc.edu
Racialized youth, especially those who attend chronically underperforming schools in our nation's poor and urban communities, can be likened to singing canaries. These young people risk their lives by entering educational institutions that are not equipped to properly prepare them for the future. Historically, the canary served to warn coal miners of the presence of dangerous gases. When the canary stopped singing or was found dead, the miners knew a serious problem required immediate attention. Like canaries, racialized youth in inner-city schools are a litmus test for the health of the entire educational system in the United States. They are the indicators of how well we as educators and concerned citizens are providing quality education for our future generations. Thus, the struggles of racialized youth should be viewed as warnings that there is something wrong with the institutions themselves, not with the youth. As Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres (2003) suggest, "It's not the canary—it's the mine!"

It is important for us, both individually and as a profession, to take time to stop and reexamine how we see people and the world around us. This fresh look is especially important for school librarians whose decision-making power and interactions with children and young adults in and out of library spaces can shape the trajectory of their literate lives in significant ways. Youth from racialized groups comprise nearly half of all children in the U.S. (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2016).

Too often, these young people are labeled as "at risk" or "high risk" by mainstream educational institutions, including schools and libraries. In this article we first offer a diverse set of lenses for looking at issues of literacy and identity among racialized youth. By shifting our gaze beyond the concepts of risk and failure we challenge school librarians to adopt more-constructive lenses that change how we see (and consequently support) the literacy and identity needs of marginalized youth. We then offer a set of eight guiding principles that reflect the statistical lens, however, it is important to contextualize the numbers in ways that do not further reify stereotypical tropes about these groups. One way to contextualize these numbers is to discuss the statistical outliers or instances where racialized youth have exerted a level of agency and surmounted the odds that predict negative outcomes for their lives.

Another important angle requires us to look more closely at statistics to see what groups or issues are hidden beneath the surface of the numbers. For instance, middle- and upper-class youth from minority backgrounds often get overlooked in the larger achievement gap narrative. The focus tends to be on low-income "poor" students who provide an easier answer for how to address the problem of school inequities. The argument goes, if we simply provide more resources to students in low-income communities, then their academic achievement and life outcomes will inevitably increase. What's hidden from this statistical view is the fact that racialized youth from middle- and upper-class backgrounds often also face numerous kinds of obstacles and experience lower academic performance and life outcomes compared to their white counterparts.

For example, studies show that racialized youth often experience what is known as stereotype threat when they enter high-stakes testing scenarios (Steele 1997). This threat involves carrying into the testing environment the burden of the prejudices other people have about one's race, leading to self-fulfilling low-performance outcomes. Also related to the racial achievement gap but hidden by statistics are racial identity development theo-

---

1 “Racialized” is a term used in place of the more-outdated and inaccurate terms like “racial minority” and “people of color” or “non-white.” The term racialized recognizes that race is a social construct initially developed by Europeans during colonialism to mark certain groups for subjugation based on perceived physiological differences and potential for slave labor, and on Europeans’ desire to acquire land and resources on other continents. Although these labels were initially imposed onto racialized groups, members of these groups have since adopted these same labels for themselves (e.g., Black, Latino, Native American, Asian, etc.) as a way to build a sense of collective identity.
ries, which suggest that nonwhite students (e.g., African American youth) often develop oppositional identities in direct resistance to the larger cultural framework that conceptually links notions of "acting white" with academic success (Ogbu 2004). The racial achievement gap statistics also do not account for the "cognitive dissonance" that racialized students experience in classrooms where the curriculum focuses on Eurocentric figures and perspectives, a focus that marginalizes and silences non-Europeans' contributions to history, literature, science, and other areas (Carter 2007).

Overall, we should carefully consider how we frame the numbers and not rely on one-dimensional views that project deficit perspectives onto racialized youth. The statistics are powerful only insofar as we use them to dismantle oppressive systems.

Critical Lens

The next shift involves stepping back and examining youth identity and literacy through a critical lens. This lens comes with a screen filter complete with a set of rhetorical questions that should be asked as we view and interact with the world around us. These questions derive from Beverly Tatum’s ABC framework of inclusive learning, which includes A, affirming identity; B, building community; and C, cultivating leadership (Tatum 2000).

We adapt Tatum’s ABC approach to our goal of creating inclusive

The struggles of racialized youth should be viewed as warnings that there is something wrong with the institutions themselves, not with the youth.
school library spaces for all youth by offering a critical lens to guide our practices. This lens requires us to keep the following ABC questions at the forefront of our minds:

A: Ask: Who is left out of the picture in our collections and services? Likewise, who is being misrepresented or under-represented in our services and resources?

B: Bridge: How might we bridge the disconnects for those whose voices and cultures are missing or underrepresented in our services and resources?

C: Cultivate: How might we cultivate new voices or be agents of change who challenge the status quo of cultural hegemony in libraries?

Refracted Lens
Through social media, we are seeing and hearing directly from youth about how they see themselves and how they believe the mainstream world sees and positions them. This next lens is the refracted lens, which affords us the ability to see the world in the way racialized youth perceive they are portrayed by mainstream media, including television, social media, and movies. This lens allows the viewer to see both how youth see themselves and how they believe others see them.

According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, refraction is “the observed altered location, as seen from the earth, of another planet or the like due to diffraction of the atmosphere” (Merriam-Webster 2006). The refracted lens can help us push back against mainstream (altered) depictions of youth that present only stereotypical viewpoints and replace them with more generative views. For example, the hashtag #iftheygunnedmedown was created in response to the negative media portrayals of young Black men such as Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, who were unarmed and yet killed under spurious circumstances (see figure 1). Not only did this hashtag push back against police brutality, but it also spoke to the unique vantage point racialized youth possess—a vantage point that shows how they are often seen and portrayed by the mainstream media stereotypically as thugs, unqualified, lazy, and so forth, even when evidence to the contrary exists.

Historical Lens
The final lens is the historical lens. This lens helps viewers see today’s racialized youth as part of a broader legacy of people who have constantly fought for their linguistic rights to attain literacy and be taught in their native tongue. This fight has been mounted over a range of issues, including laws that once forbade Black slaves from reading and extend to bilingual-education laws today (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000).

One way to honor the literate legacies of racialized youth is to promote inquiry into their “textual lineages.” Doing so can help us look deeper through the historical lens. According to Alfred Tatum (2009), our textual lineages include the things we have read that have been significant in shaping our identities. For youth from historically underrepresented racial groups, these texts are often rooted in stories about life in a particular
era or context that reflects their own cultural experiences and ethnic group histories.

Guiding Principles

Once we’ve begun to view the literacy and identity development of racialized youth through multiple lenses, we are ready to embrace the following eight principles to guide our work:

1. Keep our focus on the purpose of literacy in young people’s lives.
2. Explicitly acknowledge race, ethnicity, and tribal status.
3. Adopt an asset-based approach.
4. Set high expectations.
5. Use culturally relevant teaching strategies.
6. Use materials that are authentic and relevant to the lives of Native American youth and youth of color.
7. Form strong authentic partnerships with parents and the community.
8. Be there and be available.

The first principle is captured by this quote from Ernest Morrell, who is a professor at Columbia University: “Literacy is not just about decoding text. It is about becoming a superior human being that can act powerfully upon the world” (quoted in Hughes-Hassell et al. 2012, 6). As Morrell pointed out, we must keep our focus on the purpose of literacy in students’ lives. Too much of the discourse about literacy and racialized youth is focused on raising test scores (Tatum 2009). When we focus only
on test scores, we neglect the real reason we want youth to be literate: to be able to speak out and make a difference in their own lives, in their communities, and in the broader society. Librarians must support the literacy development of racialized youth not only to close the achievement gap, but also because literacy is a powerful tool of voice and agency. All libraries must be spaces where young people are encouraged and supported to develop their voices, to tell their stories, and to share their unique perspectives on how we can create a more-just world.

As Tyrone C. Howard argued, race and its manifestations have played, and continue to play, an integral role in education practice. Howard challenged educators to "recognize that race, racism, and their complexities are present in school curriculum, teacher expectations, teacher-student interactions, disciplinary practices, GATE (gifted and talented education) recommendations, AP and Honors course opportunities, college preparatory courses, instructional practices, and special education referrals" (2010, 103). Adherence to principle two requires school librarians to not only explicitly acknowledge race, ethnicity, and tribal status, but to recognize the inequities racialized youth experience in our schools, and to respond by intervening when biases and inequities occur, advocating against inequitable practices and policies, and creating bias-free and equitable learning environments (Gorski 2014).

The third principle challenges us to adopt an asset-based approach
to our work. We need to focus our attention on the strengths, assets, and resilience demonstrated by racialized youth, their families, and their communities (Cabrera 2013; Moll et al. 1992). We need to get to know students as individuals so that we are aware of the capabilities they bring to the classroom, capabilities that are not evident if we focus on the dominant deficit-oriented narrative or the one-dimensional picture painted by statistics.

Low expectations have been cited as a major contributing factor to the achievement gap found between racialized youth and others because low expectations undermine learners’ sense of competency and increase their learned helplessness (Boykin and Noguera 2011). One survey of Latino teens, for example, found that those who reported low expectations from their teachers and counselors during high school were more than three and a half times as likely to report being dropouts as youth who believed their teacher/counselors had high expectations when it came to school performance (Wildhagen 2012). Similarly, Danielle Hornett (1990) suggested that Native American youth may perform poorly in school because their motivation suffers as a result of their teachers’ low expectations. Thus, the fourth principle challenges us to set high expectations for all learners and to provide the support they need to be successful.

Howard Gardner noted, “The biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual and thus to feel justified in teaching them all the same subjects in the same way” (quoted in Siegel and Shaughnessy 1994, 564). Instead, we should be using culturally relevant teach-

ing, “a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings 2009, 20).

Culturally relevant teaching uses the backgrounds, knowledge, and experiences of racialized youth to inform library programming and services. It values and uses multiple literacy practices, not just those of mainstream, primarily middle-class, white families (Edwards, McMillon, and Turner 2010). By embracing principle five, librarians create a bridge between students’ home and school lives, while still meeting the expectations of district and state curricular requirements.

Principle six reminds us that, in general, racialized youth prefer and are more likely to engage with literature and other instructional materials that portray people or characters that look like them and their families, friends, and peers, and include the accomplishments of members of their cultural community (Heflin and Barksdale-Ladd 2001). Using materials that are authentic and relevant to students’ lives leads to positive literacy outcomes such as increased motivation to read and write, increased engagement in literacy activities, improved recall and comprehension, and increased phonological awareness and fluency (Bell and Clarke 1998; McCollin and O’Shea 2005; Garth-McCullough 2008). Use of authentic, relevant materials also leads to improved life outcomes because classroom learning is connected to real-life activities, connects youth with role models from their communities, and supports positive racial and ethnic identity development (Tatum 2009). This last point is critical: current research shows that positive racial/ethnic identity is a precursor to academic achievement for racialized youth (Hanley and Noblit 2009).

Tyrone C. Howard (2010) found that in successful schools for culturally diverse students, parents and other community members were valued as important stakeholders in the school’s mission of achieving academic success. Parental involvement is associated with a number of positive outcomes for racialized youth, including increased academic performance (Dietel 2006), higher grades (Freng, Freng, and Moore 2006; Muller and Kerbow 1993), a greater likelihood of aspiring to attend college and actually enrolling (Cabrera and La Nosa 2000), and enhanced student self-esteem (Marschall 2006). Similarly, creating school-community partnerships has been found to be critical for improving the literacy education of racialized youth (Freng, Freng, and Moore 2006). Principle seven, thus, challenges us to be proactive and create authentic partnerships with parents and the community.

Finally, principle eight demands that we be present and make ourselves available to youth. Pedro Noguero has written, “...this may be what Black male youth need most of all: adults who are willing to open up lines of communication, to engage in dialogue, and to listen” (2013, x). School librarians must establish caring relationships with racialized youth, but we must realize that what a caring relationship looks like will vary across cultures—that is, youth will interpret caring from the perspective of their culture, which may differ from the librarian’s cultural definition (Hughes-Hassell and Rawson 2017).
Concluding Thoughts

We believe the literacy education and improved life outcomes for racialized youth are critical social justice and civil rights issues in American society, issues on which the library community can potentially have a tremendous impact. By shifting our gaze beyond the concepts of risk and failure, and acting in accordance with the eight principles presented here, school librarians can create inclusive library spaces that support the literacy development of all students.

Kafi D. Kumasi is an associate professor of library and information science (LIS) at Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, where she teaches in the areas of school library media, urban librarianship, multicultural services and resources, and research methods. A Laura Bush 21st Century scholar, she holds a PhD from Indiana University, Bloomington, and a master’s degree in LIS from Wayne State. Her research interests revolve around issues of literacy, equity, and diversity, particularly in urban educational environments spanning K–12 and graduate school contexts. She has received numerous awards, including the University of Michigan’s National Center for Institutional Diversity “Exemplary Diversity Scholar Citation” and the Association for Library and Information Science Education’s 2011 Best Conference Paper Award. Her work has been published in numerous journals including (among others) Library and Information Science Research, Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults, School Libraries Worldwide, School Library Research, and Urban Library Journal. Her service commitments are extensive, ranging from editorial board member of Library Quarterly journal to mentor for Project Lilead, an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant-funded project aimed at studying, supporting, and building community among school library supervisors.

Sandra Hughes-Hassell, PhD, is a professor in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and is president-elect of the Young Adult Library Services Association. Her research focuses on social justice issues in youth library services, diverse youth literature, and the role of school librarians in education reform. Her latest book Libraries, Literacy, and African American Youth: Research and Practice (Libraries Unlimited 2017), coedited with Pauletta Brown Bracy and Casey H. Rawson, serves as a call to action for the library community to address the literacy and life outcome gaps impacting Black youth. With funding from an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant, she and her team are currently developing a comprehensive research-based professional development curriculum that focuses on cultural competence, culturally relevant pedagogy, and equity literacy. To learn more visit <http://projectready.web.unc.edu>. She served on the AASL Underserved Student Population Task Force and currently serves on the School Library Research Editorial Board.

Works Cited:


Recent Developments in Children’s Literature

Debbie Reese
dreese.nambe@gmail.com
IT IS A COLLISION OF MEDIA, BUT IT IS ALSO A COLLISION OF THE POINT OF VIEW AND CRITICAL LENS THAT NATIVE PEOPLE AND PEOPLE OF COLOR BRING TO OUR ANALYSES OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE. AND IT IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE.

Something unprecedented is happening in children's and young adult literature. Within the space of a year, three different publishers recalled books that were criticized on social media. Within that same period, second printings of several other books were revised, and two children's literature review journals took action to address the way they write reviews. Additionally, writers and editors for several journals, as well as bloggers at those journals' online sites, wrote about issues specific to diversity.

I see these developments as worlds colliding. In short: Native people and people of color are using social media and content-area blogs to review books that misrepresent us. This effort is, in essence, more than one kind of collision. It is a collision of media, but it is also a collision of the point of view and critical lens that Native people and people of color bring to our analyses of children's and young adult literature. And it is making a difference.

Book Recalls and Revisions

In late August 2016 the University of Minnesota Press recalled Sky Blue Water: Short Stories for Young Readers (edited by Peterson and Morgan 2016) days before its launch date because its foreword included a paragraph with the line "Columbus discovered America." Shannon Gibney, one of the authors who has a story in the collection, took a photo of the page with that line, put it on her Facebook page, and wrote to the editors. Within a few days, the four thousand copies of the book were recalled, and the book will be reprinted without that line (Hertz 2016).

On August 4, 2016, an editor at Candlewick sent out an e-mail stating that When We Was Fierce would not be released as scheduled on August 9, 2016 (Barack 2016). During the summer months, librarian Edith Campbell and writer Jennifer Baker, both of whom are African American, had written extensive critical analyses of the depiction of African American youth in When We Was Fierce. According to the e-mail, the book's author, E. E. Charlton-Trujillo, and publisher are reflecting on the critiques. It is unclear if the book is being revised.

On January 17, 2016, Scholastic issued a statement that it was withdrawing its picture book A Birthday Cake for George Washington by Ramin Ganeshram. In the weeks prior to that decision, Scholastic had received a great deal of criticism for the book’s whitewashing of the lives of the enslaved people in George Washington’s home. The book will not be revised.

The next printing of Ashley Hope Pérez's Out of Darkness (Carolrhoda Lab 2015) will have a small but significant revision. Her story, set in 1937 in East Texas, is about two teens who fall in love. One of them is Black. On page 98 of the first printing, a character uses "low man on the totem pole" to refer to his status. Although that phrase is commonly used that way, it is a misrepresentation of totem poles and their significance to the Native peoples who create them. Given our relationship (we worked together on an article for Booklist), I wrote to the author about the line and asked if it might be edited. Perez responded immediately, and the line is not in the second printing of the book (Reese 2016).

In August 2016 Julie Murphy, author of Dumplin’ (HarperCollins 2015), wrote that she is revising the passage in her book in which she used "spirit animal." This revision, she said, is in response to her lack of understanding of problems associated with use of that phrase (Murphy 2016).

In Murphy’s and Pérez’s books the problematic phrases can easily be revised because neither book is about Native peoples. As these authors realized, the same ideas can be communicated without using phrases that are microaggressions (seemingly innocuous phrases that denigrate or demean a person or culture of a marginalized community).

Review Journals Respond to Societal Change

On May 4, 2016, Vicky Smith, the book review editor at Kirkus Reviews, wrote about a recently instituted change. Her article "Unmaking the White Default" is aptly titled. Reviews in Kirkus now identify the race of all major characters, including white ones. Prior to this, the race of major characters was mentioned only if they were not white. Over the summer of 2016,
Kiera Parrott of *School Library Journal* offered its reviewers an eight-week course designed to increase their awareness of issues specific to depictions of marginalized peoples and how reviewers can improve their skills in describing and reviewing books (Miller 2016).

After several online discussions of Lane Smith’s picture book *There Is a Tribe of Kids* (Roaring Brook Press 2016), *School Library Journal* ran a story on the differing positions people have taken about it (Barack 2016). I had seen the cover of Smith’s book, but it was Sam Bloom’s 2016 review of it at *Reading While White* that prompted me to take a look at the ways the children are depicted adorned in leaves. Some

This effort is, in essence, more than one kind of collision. It is a collision of media, but it is also a collision of the point of view and critical lens that Native people and people of color bring to our analyses of children’s and young adult literature. And it is making a difference.
suggest it is harmless play, while Sam and I argue that the children are playing Indian; debates related to the picture book occurred on multiple online discussion forums. In the article Barack (2016) cited librarians who felt that, in their defense of the book on the Association of Library Service to Children (ALSC) online discussion list, their “neutral” point of view was being attacked. Uncomfortable with the discussion, one librarian decided not to renew her membership in ALSC and the American Library Association. Her decision is, of course, unfortunate; however, the stories and art in books we give to children are not neutral or apolitical. If a book’s agenda aligns with one’s own, it is seen as neutral or the norm. What those who are uncomfortable are experiencing is a collision in which their worlds are being challenged in ways they’ve not seen before.

Librarians’ Perspectives
In 2015 ALSC revised its “Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries” to include competencies related to diversity. In section I, “Commitment to Client Group,” the first two items are about respect for diversity and the need to recognize “racism, ethnocentrism, classism, heterosexism, genderism, ableism, and other systems of discrimination and exclusion,” and to interrupt those systems by providing culturally competent services (ALSC 2015).

Resources That Provide a Critical Lens for Evaluating Children’s and Young Adult Literature
Most librarians use the major review journals to select and deselect materials, but as recent developments show, their reviewers may not have the critical lens to identify problematic content. For that critical lens, see the resources listed below.

American Indians in Children’s Literature <https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com>
Crazy Quilt Edi: Promoting Literacy for Teens of Color, One Book at a Time <https://campbele.wordpress.com>
DeColores: The Raza Experience in Books for Children <http://decoloresreviews.blogspot.com>
Disability in Kidlit <http://disabilityinkidlit.com>
Reading While White: Allies for Racial Diversity & Inclusion in Books for Children & Teens <http://readingwhilewhite.blogspot.com>
Rich in Color <http://richincolor.com>
The guidelines for some of ALA’s award committees were also revised in 2015, and, in a meeting with committee chairs, Kathleen T. Horning (2015) recommended that committee members recognize their personal and experiential limitations and seek out content-area blogs like mine (American Indians in Children’s Literature), Latinxs in Kidlit, and Rich in Color to improve their competency in examining books under consideration for ALA awards. See the sidebar for resources that provide a critical lens for evaluating children’s and young adult literature.

Moving Forward

All of the developments I’ve described are significant. The racial and cultural demographics of the United States are changing. It follows, therefore, that the content of books will change, too. Native children and children of color deserve the mirrors that white children have had for literally hundreds of years (see figure 1). I’m using social media to create new understandings among writers, editors, reviewers, teachers, professors, librarians, and parents. As this glimpse into worlds colliding shows, others are here to do that, too.

Debbie Reese, a former elementary school teacher and assistant professor in American Indian Studies, publishes the blog American Indians in Children’s Literature. Tribally enrolled at Nambe Pueblo, her book chapters and articles are taught in university classrooms in English, education, and library science across the U.S. and Canada. She is frequently invited to deliver keynote lectures and workshops at major universities and for tribal associations and organizations.

Works Cited:


writers

POWERFUL VOICES
Authors are image makers (Adichie 2009). As school librarians serving diverse student populations, we know this truth can have multiple meanings. In addition to the incredible power of color wield to craft authentic characters, defy stereotypes, and provide counterstories, the authors themselves embody images that give students affirmation—affirmation that they also have stories worth telling. Bringing authors of color—image makers—to our schools to speak to, and work with, our students of color is a vital piece of culturally relevant library practice.

The benefits of using authentic, reflective literature are well documented. All the reasons we collect and use diverse books also apply to bringing diverse authors to our schools. What messages are we sending to our students of color if the only authors we invite to visit our schools are white? Just as having only books with white characters on our shelves implies to our students of color that they do not exist, the same harmful message is perpetrated by having only white visiting authors. As school librarians, we must spearhead efforts to ensure that visiting authors reflect the culture and lived experiences of our students.

My school—a public alternative middle school in Raleigh, North Carolina—had the pleasure and honor of hosting Matt de la Peña for a week-long Writer-in-Residence workshop in the spring of 2016. Matt’s residency was funded by the Steinfirst Artist-in-Residency Program, created by the School of Information and Library Science (SILS) at the University of North Carolina to provide local youth with the opportunity to engage with internationally acclaimed authors and illustrators. Clearly, we were stratospherically lucky to have a Newbery Award-winning and New York Times best-selling author visit our school, but the effect Matt had on our students was not due to his well-deserved awards or commercial success. His impact was a result of his powerful stories, his skills as a writing teacher, and his incredible ability to connect with teens—all teens.

Our Matt de la Peña Writer-in-Residence week was particularly meaningful because we are an alternative school. In speaking about alternative schools, #EduColor founder José Vilson has stated, “We should start rebuilding the students who our system has failed” (2016). It is precisely these students “that need to sit in panels, write white papers, and have photo ops” (Vilson 2016). I would add that it is precisely these students who need to be chosen to participate in writing workshops led by popular authors. Vilson went on to say, “We need to do right by all kids, but, when we only work through the average student, we don’t actually address the needs of all kids” (2016).

In this article, I describe how we prepared for Matt’s visit with both whole-school instruction and dedicated activities for the fourteen students participating in his writers’ workshop. I explore what I learned about the importance of engaging in extensive culturally relevant groundwork prior to Matt’s visit, and about allowing the focus of the Writer-in-Residence week to be on the students and their interactions with Matt. Finally, I share how we leveraged this opportunity to benefit students beyond the author’s visit.

Preparing for Matt’s Visit

The Plan

To maximize the impact of Matt’s visit, I organized our preparations along two main threads. The first was introducing Matt and his work to all our students. Even though only fourteen students would be intensely working with Matt in the week-long series of writing workshops, I wanted all students to be exposed to him—as an author, as a teacher, as an image maker. Additionally, since Matt’s visit would coincide with our school’s Career Day, I wanted each student to not only get face time with Matt, but to be able to discuss his books with him.

Selecting the Books

Recognizing the importance of book ownership, SILS not only purchased sets of Matt’s books for our school, but also books for our students to keep. Being able to provide books to all our students allowed Matt’s visit to be more student-centered and student-sensitive. It is a reality that author visits are often tied to selling books, a circumstance that, unfortunately, serves as a sorting mechanism that determines which students get to spend time with the author. Those students able to purchase a book get face time in the signing line. Creative librarians counteract this effect by devising workarounds to limit sorting, such as allowing students to bring books purchased by the library to the signing line. Purchasing books for all students in advance removed this sorting based on who could afford to buy a book.

The novels and short stories I ultimately chose for the students to keep and for whole-class instruction are shown in table 1. Factors including themes and student–professed genre interests guided my decisions. All the texts chosen could be classified as enabling texts, identified by Alfred W. Tatum as texts that move beyond a sole cognitive focus—such as skill and strategy development—to include an academic, cultural, emo-
Hibbing, and social focus that moves students closer to examining issues they find relevant to their lives (2009). Enabling texts also provide positive reinforcements of the characteristics of strong writing by being engaging, thematically rich, provocative, and able to awaken the intellectual curiosity of the reader (Tatum 2009), thus inspiring teens to write their own stories.

Whole-School Instruction

I chose class sets of Matt’s powerful picture books—Newbery winner *Last Stop on Market Street* and *A Nation’s Hope: The Story of Boxing Legend Joe Louis*—to facilitate whole-class instructional sessions. The classroom teachers and I integrated Matt’s work across the core curriculum, studying figurative language in *Last Stop on Market Street* during English language arts (ELA) classes and exploring WWII history in *A Nation’s Hope* in social studies classes. Additionally, the students in all the core ELA classes participated in literature circles around the short story “Believing in Brooklyn” (sixth and seventh grades) and the novel *The Living* (eighth grade).

While the whole-school instructional thread allowed every student to connect to Matt in advance of his visit, it also allowed me to integrate into the core curriculum texts that were representative of our students’ lived experiences. I have found that having an author visit makes it easy to incorporate inclusive texts into classroom instruction. Once diverse books are used in the course of instruction and teachers see their impact, the titles find a permanent home. This is another way school librarians can chip away at the traditional literary canon and challenge the normative position of whiteness in the curriculum. Our students’ right to inclusive resources shouldn’t end in our school libraries—we have to make use of inclusive resources a reality throughout our schools.

A final facet of our whole-school preparation for Matt’s visit was incorporating art projects related to Matt’s novels into ELA classes at every level. Not only did these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>For Students to Keep</th>
<th>For Whole Class Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
*A Nation’s Hope: The Story of Boxing Legend Joe Louis* (Dial 2011)  
“Believing in Brooklyn” |
| 7th         | *The Living* (Delacorte 2013) | *Last Stop on Market Street*  
*A Nation’s Hope: The Story of Boxing Legend Joe Louis*  
“Believing in Brooklyn” |
| 8th         | *The Living* | *Last Stop on Market Street*  
*The Living* |
| 8th-Graders | *Mexican WhiteBoy* (Delacorte 2010) | *Last Stop on Market Street* |

Table 1. Matt de la Peña titles purchased.
projects offer another entry point for students to learn about and respond to Matt’s novels, the art also provided visual excitement when displayed throughout the school.

**Writers’ Workshop Students**

For the second thread, I needed to prepare the fourteen students who would be working with Matt for a week of intense writing. As school librarians, our programming priorities are, of course, situated in the culture and practices of our schools. As my school functions as an academic recovery program, some teachers were resistant to the idea of the fourteen workshop students being pulled out of core classes during Matt’s visit. Additionally, I needed to procure dedicated time in the students’ schedules to work with them in the months leading up to the Writer-in-Residence week. Luckily, I had full administrative support and was able to use data to justify the time these fourteen students would be spending in novel discussions; the data supported both the transformative power of literacy and the ways that positive racial and ethnic identities lead to academic success (Hanley and Noblit 2009).

Frequently, the dialogue about youth of color and literacy is solely focused on raising test scores. While this outcome may be important, we can never neglect the true reason we want young people’s lives to be enriched with literacy: to improve life outcomes. Ernest Morrell’s words provide a powerful framework for our work with students. “Literacy is not just about decoding text. It is about becoming a superior human being that can act powerfully upon the world” (quoted in Hughes-Hassell et al. 2012, 6).

I was adamant that interest, not school performance, be the main factor in choosing the students who would participate in Matt’s writing workshops. I did not even want reading levels to be factored into the selection process, as reading levels are not associated—should not be associated—with a capacity to think or discuss big ideas. Therefore, I created an inventory to gauge interest; we gave it to all seventh- and eighth-grade students in December 2015. I administered the survey in ELA classes after we watched an interview in which Matt talked about *The Living*.

Using the results from the interest inventory and working in collaboration with the ELA teachers, I created two groups. Due to scheduling difficulties, I eventually created two reading electives—one each for seventh- and eighth-graders—thus balancing the needs of the teachers with the enrichment opportunities that being part of the Writer-in-Residence program offered. In the two months leading up to Matt’s visit, I met daily with alternating elective groups and was lucky to also have the support of our eighth-grade ELA teacher who joined in that group’s discussion. In both electives we read and discussed ideas from the novels—from issues of power, class, and microaggressions in *The Living* to unpacking ideas on identity and race in *Mexican WhiteBoy*. As Carole King has pointed out, teens benefit from discussing literature—with an educator and with each other—as it helps them develop meaningful interactions with the text (2001). We also discussed how swearing—in the “context of literature”—could add relatability and gravitas to writing. The students enjoyed hearing me swear in the course of reading a passage—and loved that I trusted them enough to do the same. Sometimes, at the end of a long day, I trusted them to do so very loudly.

To foster a sense of community and identity, I created a hashtag for our groups—#MdlPwriters. I wanted the students to feel connected to Matt before he arrived and also to start seeing themselves as writers, a powerful label to wear. Conversely, I wanted Matt to feel allied with his future writers—and all of our student readers—and I reached out via Twitter with pictures and stories in advance of his visit (see figure 1). Talking about logistics is not nearly as exciting as hearing about the

Frequently, the dialogue about youth of color and literacy is solely focused on raising test scores. While this outcome may be important, we can never neglect the true reason we want young people’s lives to be enriched with literacy: to improve life outcomes.
Figure 2. Cohort of eighth-grade writers with Matt.

Figure 3. Matt and the seventh-grade writers.
Figure 4. Matt coaching one of our eighth-graders.

Figure 5. Eighth-graders immersed in their writing.
#MdlPwriters, but attention to logistics and preparation helped make Matt’s visit go smoothly. As librarians hosting a Writer-in-Residence, our job boils down to:

- making sure visiting authors reflect our students and the wonderful reality that is our diverse world,
- preparing students so they are familiar with the author’s work and flooding the curriculum with the author’s diverse literature,
- using culturally relevant practices in classes and groups to examine the author’s writing,
- assembling writing groups—and any other opportunities for face time with the author—within an equity framework, and
- ensuring that the entire experience is student-centered.

When we do our job effectively, we are then able to get out of the way and watch the entire amazing experience unfold.

Writing with Matt: “Writing Is an Act of Bravery.”

The fourteen writers who chose—and were chosen—to participate in Matt’s Writer-in-Residence workshops are the stars of this story. Our eighth-graders were F., M., A., H., K., L., and K. (see figure 2). Our seventh-grade group was comprised of N., K., S. (the only sixth-grader in the group), T., T., H., and B. (see figure 3). They were readers. Dreamers. Thinkers. Writers. It’s not possible to overstate the power of the creative and brave voices the #MdlPwriters displayed during the course of Matt’s Writer-in-Residence week.

Each group met with Matt for two sessions a day on a rotating schedule so that the same students were not pulled from the same core classes each day. Each writing session included whole-group discussion but also time for individual coaching from Matt. Matt talked with our teens about high-level issues and did writing exercises that he had previously done with college-level students. Part of a culturally responsive library practice is having high expectations for our students and believing in their ability. It was wonderful to watch Matt connect with our students in this way (see figure 4). Our students (see figure 5) rose to every task he gave them—including some that he had never before done with middle-school students. The students’ writing was incredibly powerful and overwhelmingly personal as shown in figure 6. Many school staff wanted to observe—and understandably so—but to respect our writers and their voices, we kept the groups private. This policy did not make me the most popular person in our school, but adhering to a student-centered framework was my top priority. Keeping the groups private was always worth any pushback I faced.

The first writing exercise Matt did with both groups was centered on a piece of micro-fiction and then a two-word writing exercise. The two words that our students used to describe their lives were incredibly powerful. For everyone in the room they were unforgettable: Picket Fence—from a student who misses her mother and viscerally remembered a moment sitting beside a fence with her eating ice cream. Flashing Lights—from a student who described living in a home where it felt like everything could change in an instant, as quick as a light turning off. Never Fixed—from a student who felt that as soon as one part of him was fixed—a physical injury or a family problem—something else would get broken.

One of our seventh-grade writers would not participate in the two-word exercise, and I was afraid he was going to stop coming to the workshop sessions. At the end of that first day, Matt had the students work through an exercise in which a woman needed to be “talked
off a ledge.” Literally. Each student’s story was impressive. When the student who had previously been resistant shared his piece, it was so good, so well written, it blew me away. More impressively, it blew Matt away! Matt told me later that it was amazing writing—truly incredible for a first draft. He shared with the student that it was some “bad-ass writing.” That student shared that compliment with everyone he could—and rightfully so! What a powerful affirmation to carry.

The success of the entire program, however, could be illustrated in just one student—in just one moment. One of our eighth-graders has experienced more hardship in her thirteen years than most of us will in our entire lives. She is tough. Sweet. Stoic. And full of talent. After reading one of her pieces, Matt told her that if she finished it, he would publish it on his blog. She sobbed. Sobbed. And then picked up her pencil and started writing. She wrote for the rest of the year. She’s in high school now. She is still writing.

The Benefits Continue

Because it had such an impact on our school, even after the Writer-in-Residence week ended on Matt’s last day, we were still feeling its effects. The picture in figure 7 was taken immediately after Matt had left us on Friday of that amazing week. On Monday, K. brought in eight pages he

Figure 7. A seventh-grader writing after Matt had left.
had written over the weekend. We were in such a post-Matt creative swoon for the rest of the entire school year that we were literally drawing on the library walls, and I decided to simply call my fourth-quarter elective “Create.”

In August 2015 when school started last year, one of our eighth-graders told me that “he does not read. Ever.” In spring 2016 right before Matt’s visit, the same student handed me his copy of Matt’s novel *The Living*—all 308 pages of it—and told me he had “read it all.” At fifteen, it was the first book he had ever finished. His rationale: “Well, you kept reading it in class, and I knew Matt was coming, and I wanted to find out what happened. And now I need to read the sequel!” An educator’s role is never about forcing a student to read but rather inviting the learner into a community of readers (Morrell 2002). Having an author visit is a powerful way to construct and inspire that culture of reading throughout a school!

To attempt to measure any changes in our writers’ confidence and comfort levels related to a variety of literacy factors, I had created a writing and reading self-efficacy assessment instrument to administer to our writers both before and after their reading elective and Writer-in-Residence experiences. All of our writers chose a higher value to describe their writing ability after Matt’s visit.

Our principal was so impressed with hearing about our experience and seeing the effect it had on our students that he pledged enough precious budget funds for this school year to support another Writer-in-Residence experience for the 2016–2017 school year.

Concluding Thoughts
How many students get opportunities like these? Certainly not enough. For students in alternative or academic recovery programs, perhaps even fewer than in more traditional schools. José Vilson speaks truth when he describes teaching students: “We can only show them love at the moments we have them, and help them create safeguards that deter their worst detractors” (2016).

Giving our students the space to empower themselves through creative writing and expression can be a powerful contributor to creating those safeguards. Providing these growth opportunities is not an extra part of our library practice—it is our library practice! Thank you to SILS and Matt de la Peña for helping to create these safeguards with our amazing #MdlPwriters.

---

**Julie Stivers** (MSLS, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) has worked with teens in a variety of settings and is currently the school librarian at Mount Vernon School, an alternative public school in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she loves finding engaging, reflective literature to put in her students’ hands. Her research interests include culturally relevant librarianship, inclusive library spaces, and finding creative ways to dismantle the traditional literary canon.

---

*Works Cited:*


King, Carole. 2001. “‘I Like Group Reading Because We Can Share Ideas’: The Role of Talk within the Literature Circle.” *Literacy* 35 (1): 32–36.


Using Student Voices to Design Culturally Responsive and Just Schools

Teresa Bunner
tbunner@wcpss.net
“Culture is central to learning... Culturally Responsive Teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students’ cultural references in all aspects of learning.” (Ladson-Billings 1994, 29)

As a beginning teacher, I entered a classroom where most of my students did not look like me in a district where over eighty languages were spoken. Those first few years I struggled to connect with many students in my classroom, especially with African American and Latino males. I found myself at a crossroads. I could buy into “it’s them, not me,” or I could admit that obviously there was a pattern to this disconnect and that I was the common denominator. I struggled until I stumbled upon the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Gloria Ladson-Billings introduced the concept of culturally responsive teaching in her book The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children (1994, 2009). In her research Ladson-Billings examined the disconnect between the home experiences of students of color and their experiences at school. She concluded that the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices of communities of color are resources to honor, explore, extend, and build on in formal educational settings. In practice, culturally responsive teaching, thus, uses the “cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles” of students of color to make learning more relevant, meaningful, and validating (Gay 2000, 29).

With this research in mind, my colleagues Graig Meyer and Bonnie Davis introduced high school students in our Blue Ribbon Mentor-Advocate program (a program serving 120+ youth of color in grades 4 through 12) to a set of research-based culturally responsive teaching strategies. After reviewing the strategies, the students identified six key concepts they felt would be transformative for both teachers and students if the concepts were applied in learning spaces (see sidebar, opposite). The six concepts build on one another. All of them require attention to create the kinds of learning environments for which our students advocated. As the students explained, if every teacher and school wove these concepts into their learning and teaching efforts, they, as students of color, and their peers, would achieve more and feel more comfortable in their classrooms.

After identifying the concepts, the students and I then worked to use the concepts as a framework to create professional development for the teachers in our school district. The professional development sessions were facilitated by fifteen to twenty high school students (known as Student Six facilitators); I was a co-facilitator. My co-facilitators, students who were immersed in busy high school lives, committed to attend one two-hour workshop a month, to read the same research the teacher participants read, to speak their truth, and to share their stories in front of an audience of adults who were also their teachers. In our four years of implementation, participants consistently reported that the student-voice piece was one of the aspects that made the professional development so powerful.

Visibility and Proximity

The Student Six facilitators described visibility as creating a learning space in which every student feels acknowledged, valued, and included as an equal member of the learning community. Proximity is defined as using physical space, personal space, and design to engage students and reduce perceived threat. These two concepts work closely together in how we approach students and design our learning spaces.

When sharing the concept of visibility with teachers and staff, the students identified some key strategies school librarians can use to welcome and engage all students:

- greet students when they enter the space,
- know students’ names and how to pronounce them, and
- make a place for student voices.

Maria, one of our Student Six facilitators, shared how important it is to her that her teachers greet her and make a connection. “It makes me feel like they care that I am there. But some of my teachers don’t do that. So I decided I would do it. I walk in each day, and I greet them. I say ‘Hi!’ or ask how their weekend was. I hope that if they see it is important to me, they might start doing it themselves.”

Jotham shared about one of his favorite teachers. “He always greeted us when we came in and told us goodbye when we left. He made us feel like he knew each of us as people and cared that we were there each
day.” In contrast, Jotham explained, “We had a teacher who came late in the year to replace a teacher who left. This [new] teacher never bothered to learn our names. One day he wanted me to do something, so he snapped his fingers and said ‘You, do this.’ By not taking the time to learn our names, he communicated to us that we were out of place, disregarded, and not welcome in his classroom.”

Richard, a virtual non-reader when he entered ninth grade, told us that the school library became one of his favorite places to go because “Our librarian is awesome. She knows our names and always asks you questions about what’s going on. She helps us find books and anything else that we need. I never thought I would say that going to the library is one of my favorite things to do.”

When it comes to proximity, as Erika pointed out, “When you stay behind your desk (or other furniture) it makes me feel less welcome.”

Maria reminded us, “Being able to work with other people is important. I like it when we can move chairs and desks and work together.” But Jose shared “Sometimes I like group work, and sometimes I like to just work by myself.”

Corrinia reminded us that even the best strategy can be overused. “As a Black student there are times when teachers use proximity a little too much. When you keep standing by me or walking past me, it can make me feel like you don’t trust me.”

Connecting to Students’ Lives
The Student Six facilitators defined this concept as creating learning spaces where content and students’ experiences and perspectives are linked together to help students understand themselves and their

THE STUDENT SIX CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS.

VISIBILITY: Creating learning spaces in which every student feels acknowledged, valued, and included as equal members of the community.

PROXIMITY: Using physical space, personal space, and design to engage students and reduce perceived threat.

CONNECTING TO STUDENTS’ LIVES: Creating learning spaces where content is linked to student experiences and perspectives for the purpose of helping students understand themselves and their history.

ENGAGING STUDENTS’ CULTURES: Incorporating positive elements of students’ cultures into learning and community building in appropriate ways.

ADDRESSING RACE: Using content and discussion to talk openly about race, racial dynamics, and how they impact the student experience.

CONNECTING TO THE LARGER WORLD AND STUDENTS’ FUTURE SELVES: Creating learning opportunities that help students identify their future paths and using learning experiences to guide students toward attaining their personal goals.
history. They encouraged educators to get to know their students so they can make these connections.

“My teacher knows the kinds of things we are interested in. She includes those things in our class discussions or examples. It keeps us interested,” said Jaylan.

Antonio reminded us that it is important to remember that connecting to our students’ lives sometimes means being willing to learn from them. “There’s so many ways to speak Spanish. My Spanish teacher asks me sometimes, ‘What’s the Mexican word for that? What about the Honduran word?’ because he knows my parents speak Spanish from those countries. That’s awesome that he wants to know every type of Spanish, not just what he learned in college.”

Maritza talked about her U.S. history class. “I learn so much better when what we are studying connects with our day-to-day life. In my U.S. history class, we studied the Civil War. My teacher connected it to the Civil Rights movement and with the immigration movement of today.

And we were able to talk about the DREAM Act, which is an important topic for me.”

When we talked in our professional development sessions about connecting to students’ lives, Gabriela passionately reminded educators that they must get to know students, not just assume. She shared, “One time my math teacher made word problems with our names in them. My name was in a problem where it talked about how many tacos were eaten. I’m from Columbia! We don’t eat tacos! I was so mad that the teacher assumed because of my accent and my Latina heritage that all of us must eat the same foods.”

Engaging Students’ Cultures
We defined this concept as incorporating positive elements of students’ cultures into learning and community building in appropriate ways. After one of our sessions on this concept, one of the students said, “Ms. B, I don’t think they really understand culture. When we talk about it, people always focus just on race.” The other students agreed that they saw this narrow focus as well. So we did some research and reading and came up with a working definition for culture. We defined culture as all of the influences that shape our values and beliefs and how we operate in the larger world. Our culture consists of our ethnicity, race, religion, neighborhood, part of the country we live in, sexual orientation, family—all of those factors that influence who we are.

Often in schools and classrooms incorporating students’ cultures takes a “holidays and heroes” approach. Multicultural festivals or potlucks are held, or festivities and activities center around something like Black History Month. While these are not bad ideas, they do not truly incorporate and honor student culture as a part of the learning process.

Manuel shared the story of his Spanish teacher who taught about the Day of the Dead. “He had us research what our own family or culture does to celebrate this day or our family who have died. Then we shared that with the class.” Manuel’s teacher took a topic pertinent to the content he was teaching and allowed students to explore the topic through their own personal cultural lenses.

Jose’s story is a reminder of how important it is to understand all the ways that our culture influences how we operate in the world. "My teacher asked a question in class, and I answered it. She got mad and sent me to the principal’s office. When
I explained to the principal what happened, he asked me, ’Jose, do you know what a rhetorical question is?’ He explained it to me. I told him those don’t exist in my culture. In my culture when an adult asks you a question, you are supposed to answer. I went back to class and apologized to my teacher and explained what happened.”

Addressing Race

We defined “addressing race” as using content and discussion to talk openly about race, racial dynamics, and how they impact the student experience. When we approach this topic, it often creates some disequilibrium for our participants. The previous concepts usually closely align with some current practices of educators. In contrast, for many educators, this is the first time they have been involved in an open, honest conversation about race. Jotham told us, “It’s necessary to talk about race because most of the time race takes the backseat to everything.”

Jotham referred back to his favorite teacher and shared about a discussion in class where the issue of race was central. “It was our social studies class. Our teacher asked us ‘Do race and social class have an effect on the rising incarceration rate?’.” Jotham shared that a white student responded to the question by saying, “They (the Black community) choose to live in low-income communities, choose to go to prison, and are in the situations they are in because they didn’t take advantage of opportunities given to them.” Jotham said, “No one in the classroom responded, including my teacher. I was upset because I felt disrespected by the comment.” Jotham eventually spoke up, sharing the realities of race and the oppression still experienced in the Black community. “I wanted my teacher to understand that conversations about race are important and sometimes they get messy, but that’s okay.”

As we prepared for our session on this topic one year, Alexa got frustrated and called out, “Why aren’t any of my teachers talking about Ferguson? That’s my dad, my cousins, my boyfriend, my friends. Why aren’t we talking about it?” We talked about what we had learned about the hesitance of teachers to address race and brainstormed how we could incorporate Alexa’s thoughts and concerns into our training. The consensus amongst all the student facilitators is that, they don’t expect educators to be perfect or to get it perfectly right. But ignoring the conversations cuts much deeper than stumbling a little when we try.

Connecting to the Larger World and Students’ Future Selves

One of the student facilitators described this as the “Why do we need to know this?” answer. We define this concept as creating learning opportunities that help students identify their future paths and using learning experiences to guide students in attaining their personal goals.

Erika talked about her early struggles as a student who entered school speaking no English. “I am where I am today because of teachers who helped me learn the language. And teachers who helped me create a picture of who I could become.”

Michela attended a summer writing camp sponsored by one of her teachers. There she was introduced to several authors of color through mentor texts and in-person visits. “I never thought about being a writer. But now I think maybe that’s what I want to do for a career.”

Kiana’s teacher had students tackle a real-world problem they wanted to solve. The students researched and developed and presented their solution to the issue. Kiana shared, “You know, I’m not always the best at school. Some of my grades make people think I am not a good student. But I know I have something to say. And, yeah, I think the world is gonna hear from me.”

Why These Six Concepts Are Important

I’ve already shared with you that when I walked into my first classroom as a new teacher twenty-six years ago over half of the students in my classroom did not look like me. Today this is the reality for many educators. In 2014, an article
REFLECT ON YOUR OWN PRACTICE

VISIBILITY AND PROXIMITY
How welcoming is your school library? What attitudes, policies, and practices create this environment?
Do you know whether students feel visible in your space? How do you know? If not, how might you find out?
How is your learning space arranged? Does it create opportunities for group learning as well as quiet places for individuals?
Is your signage clear? In various languages to allow students to easily find what they need?

CONNECTING TO STUDENTS’ LIVES
Does your library collection reflect your students’ interests and lives?
Are the available resources varied, diverse, and in multiple languages?
Do you check to ensure that materials and resources appropriately represent various groups?
Do displays in the library reflect a wide range of interests and people?

CONNECTING TO STUDENTS’ CULTURES
In what ways can you use your library programming to honor and embrace the various cultures represented in your school?
What connections can you create with the local community to help facilitate this diversity of programming?

ADDRESSING RACE
What opportunities for explicitly addressing race might arise in your library setting?
How might you handle these discussions?
What opportunities do you have to create space for these important conversations?

CONNECTING TO THE LARGER WORLD AND STUDENTS’ FUTURE SELVES
How does your library programming help students connect to the larger world?
Do students see themselves now and in the future in the materials and programming available?
in Education Week stated that in the 2014–2015 school year “the overall number of Latino, African-American, and Asian students in public K–12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-Hispanic whites” (Maxwell 2014).

Twenty-six years ago, when asked about race, my response was, “I don’t see color. I just see my students.” I was not alone then, or even now, in thinking this way. Researchers Hazel Rose Markus, Claude M. Steele, and Dorothy M. Steele identified colorblindness—the belief that it is best to simply not see race or racial group differences, but to view students only as people—as a common ideology among educators (2000).

Terry L. Cross and his colleagues referred to this tendency as “cultural blindness.” They argue that systems that embrace cultural blindness “function with the belief that color or culture make no difference and that all people are the same” (1989, 15). However, as Cross and colleagues pointed out, “The consequences of such a belief are to make services so ethnocentric as to render them virtually useless to all but the most assimilated people of color. Such services ignore cultural strengths, encourage assimilation, and blame the victim for their problems” (1989, 30).

In direct contrast to the cultural blindness or colorblindness philosophies is research that shows that students of color are more academically successful when their culture is valued, their race is acknowledged, and specific attention is paid to their evolving racial identity (Hanley and Noblit 2009). Mary S. Hanley and George W. Noblit noted, “There is sufficient evidence to argue that both culturally responsive pedagogy and positive racial identity promote academic achievement and resilience. In-school and out-of-school programs can be designed to develop these linkages and to more generally promote the wider project of racial uplift” (2009, 11).

Achieving “cultural proficiency” as Cross, Ladson-Billings, and others have stated is not contingent upon one or two practices. There is no single “right” way to create culturally responsive learning communities. The Student Six facilitators have shared that it is the effort of the adults around them that the students value more than the adults’ getting it all right. That valuing, along with the compelling research, creates for us an imperative that as educators we must strive for cultural proficiency to help our students be successful. The rewards when we embrace the Student Six ideas are high. If we ignore these ways to make all of our students feel valued, engaged, and empowered, the consequences are too grave.

**Moving Forward**

While you can use the ideas shared by the Student Six facilitators, it is even more important for you to consider how you might invite the voices of your students into your planning and programming. As I’ve discussed, the six concepts our students identified are supported by research and connect to what we know is good practice. However, in the four years the students and I presented together, I learned much more from them about how to support students of color. We adapted our professional development each time based on students’ ideas and input. Don’t be afraid to listen to your students and take the journey toward creating culturally responsive and just schools together.

---

**Works Cited:**


---

**Teresa Bunner** works as the high school literacy coordinating teacher for the Wake County (NC) Public School System in Raleigh. She served previously with the Blue Ribbon Mentor–Advocate Program <blueribbonmentors.org> as the academic specialist, a role in which she helped develop the Student Six program. You can find her on Twitter @rdnteach and on her blog at <readingteach.wordpress.com>.
Libraries as Facilitators of Coding for All

Crystle Martin

cmartin@hri.uci.edu
Introduction

Learning to code has been an increasingly frequent topic of conversation both in academic circles and popular media. Learning to code recently received renewed attention with the announcement of the White House’s Computer Science for All initiative (Smith 2016). This initiative intends “to empower all American students from kindergarten through high school to learn computer science and be equipped with the computational thinking skills they need to be creators in the digital economy, not just consumers, and to be active citizens in our technology-driven world” (Smith 2016). For youth from certain demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds exposure to computer science is already a reality. However, many youth are still left out because of lack of access to school or after-school computer science–focused programs. Libraries are in a position to tackle this gap and create meaningful opportunities for youth to be exposed to and excel at computer science.

This article explores Scratch workshops that expose youth to coding and computational thinking in libraries. (Scratch is an online visual coding language developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and intended for use by young learners.) Although computer science encompasses more than coding, it is an important part of computer science. The data presented here examines nine implementations of Scratch coding workshops at eight public library branches in urban under-resourced areas. The librarians who facilitated the workshops were all novice coders when they began holding the workshops. Most youth who participated in the workshops would be considered underrepresented in computer science. This article starts with a discussion of why it is important to create more diversity in computer science. It highlights perspectives of librarians and youth facilitators, describing their process for delivering coding workshops though novice coders themselves, and the perceived impact by facilitators of the workshops and exposure to computational thinking and coding on the participants.

Disparities with Technology-Related Topics for Non-Dominant Populations

Gaps persist in employment diversity for many computing and science jobs. Only 3 percent of African American women and 1 percent of Latinas hold computing jobs (Ashcraft, McLain, and Eger 2016). This lack of representation in the workforce could be set up by early interactions, such as those that take place in school and in informal learning. Current research highlights that, despite attempts to address this employment inequality through formal education, the situation still exists.

A consensus is growing that youth start in early adolescence to think concretely about their futures and these early thoughts impact how young people prepare for their chosen careers (Auger, Black-hurst, and Wahl 2005; Bandura et al. 2001; Riegle-Crumb, Moore, and Ramos-Wada 2011). Existing research already describes the importance of exposure to disciplines that could potentially lead to future opportunities and career pathways (National Research Council 2011; Modi, Schoenburg, and Salmond 2012). Women and girls from low-income families face more obstacles in terms of access and exposure to out-of-school STEM activities and career options, which, in turn, reduces their career aspirations and expectations (Domenico and Jones 2006; Toglia 2013; Watson, Quatman, and Edler 2002). Although there is no simple solution to eliminating employment obstacles, digital media have the potential to create opportunity for upward mobility, particularly for disadvantaged youth (DiMag-gio 1982). Creating pathways to opportunities in computer science needs to be supported, and libraries are excellent places to do this.

Libraries Trying to Bridge the Gap

With 9,082 administrative public library units and 98,460 school libraries (ALA 2015), libraries offer great potential for bridging the computer science gap. The question is: How do libraries bridge this gap? John Y. Baek has offered six science-specific capabilities supported by informal learning environments like libraries (2013, 5), capabilities that I have modified for computer science and computational thinking:

1. Experience excitement, interest, and motivation to learn about phenomena in the digital world.
2. Use computational thinking to generate, understand, remember, and use concepts, explanations, arguments, models, and facts related to computer science.
3. Manipulate, test, explore, predict, question, observe, and make sense of the digital world through computational thinking.
4. Reflect on computational thinking as a way of knowing; on processes, concepts, and institutions of science; and on students’ own process of learning about computer science.
5. Participate in computer science activities and learning practices with others, using scientific language and tools.
6. Think about themselves as computer science learners and develop an identity as someone who knows about, uses, and sometimes contributes to computer science.

When modified like this, Baek’s science-specific capabilities reflect many of the aspects of computational thinking laid out in definitions, such as Brennan and Resnick’s, which focuses on computational thinking as a creative process that includes understanding concepts, processes, and perspectives of a designer (2012).

Libraries support informal learning by functioning as connected learning environments (Ito et al. 2013), connecting the learning youth do in classrooms with their learning in interest spaces, so that students can receive value for this learning and connect it to opportunities. Computer science in libraries is not necessarily about the creation of an end-product but about the underlying concepts, such as design thinking (Bowler 2014) and computational thinking (Brennan and Resnick 2012). Coding programs can be a great opportunity for the participants to learn skills that are vital in the twenty-first century, but also provide opportunities for young people who help with the programs to develop career-readiness skills, such as responsibility, agency, and leadership (Salusky et al. 2014).

The Study

Methods

The results presented are from a large ethnographic study of Scratch and its implementation in library programming. The Scratch community was chosen because it has low barriers for entry by participants. This section will start with a description of the research context of Scratch to help orient the reader. Scratch is an online visual coding language designed for people ages eight through sixteen, although the online community supports participants of a much greater age range.

Participants

The workshop participants held one of three roles: librarian facilitator, youth facilitator, or youth participant. All youth participants were attending school, and a majority of the total of 178 participants were in high school. The workshops were at eight public library branches. All participants in the workshops were offered the opportunity to participate in interviews. Through this study, I sought to understand what supports are needed for non-expert coding librarians to offer coding workshops in under-resourced public libraries. Each library offered Scratch workshops once a week over a four- to six-week period, at the discretion of the librarian. Workshops usually lasted from one to two hours, also at the discretion of the librarian. The library sites selected for the study serve under-resourced communities, with librarians who support mostly Black and Latino patrons.

(“This availability of supporting resources must be emphasized. It is not easy for librarians with no subject expertise to feel comfortable facilitating a workshop in front of five to twenty young people.”)
Observation and Interviews

Data collection for this paper included ethnographic field notes (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011) and interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) as a basis for the study. I conducted interviews over a two-year period with youth and public librarians who participated in the library workshops. I interviewed five librarians and twenty-eight young people who participated in or facilitated the workshops. This paper focuses on the experiences of librarians and youth facilitators of the workshops to demonstrate the challenges and benefits for novice coders implementing coding workshops. The interview recordings were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist.

Once the interviews were transcribed, I assigned all participants a pseudonym. The interviews were conducted using a protocol that I developed based on computational thinking (Brennan and Resnick 2012) and the connected learning framework (Ito et al. 2013), which focuses on equity in learning to code. Since this was a semi-structured interview protocol, questions and order were dynamically changed based on context and the unique experiences of the respondent.

Impact of Implementation

Librarians Leading the Way

Each library and librarian faced unique challenges for facilitating these workshops, but there were consistent themes across responses from the librarians. The librarians oftentimes dealt with serious technological limitations. They cited time as their biggest obstacle to trying new programs for which they were not subject experts. Stephanie said that learning to code before the workshops was “too large of a learning curve, while scrambling to learn new materials.” A lack of time to prepare made the idea of learning a new skill set like coding so arduous that it seemed undoable for the librarians.

The librarians who participated in facilitating Scratch workshops had no or almost no previous coding knowledge. Several of the librarians commented on the importance of the level of detail in the facilitator guides provided to the public libraries as part of the research reported here (and available at <https://scratch.mit.edu/info/codingforall>). This availability of supporting resources must be emphasized. It is not easy for librarians with no subject expertise to feel comfortable facilitating a workshop in front of five to twenty young people. Successful librarians were willing to do the following:

1. Try something new
2. Be willing to fail
3. Make changes on the fly
4. Be OK with the idea of not being the expert

For some people, demonstrating this level of flexibility can be a challenge, especially while looking at a room full of workshop participants.

Librarians identified peer-based and creative, interest-driven learning as part of the success of the workshops. Stephanie said that Scratch workshops created great opportunities for “peer-based learning between participants.” Claudia agreed, “Peer and mentor learning happened easily in Scratch through the problems [the participants needed to solve].” Lorenzo described the balance between teaching skills and supporting creativity. He said, “So to teach [content creation and skills] at once, it’s kind of difficult for a first class. But my idea was...you teach...those very basic things [at the beginning of the workshop] and then you know you can create your own sprites, your own animations.”
The supports most cited as leading to successful completion of the workshops were easy-to-use preparation materials, embracing peer-to-peer learning as part of the facilitation strategy, and enlisting youth facilitators to facilitate the Scratch workshops. The next section reports on the youth facilitators’ experiences.

Youth as Facilitators
To find the best youth facilitators, public librarians posted the positions at local schools and had students apply for the position. This requirement gave applicants experience in the process of applying for a job and, thus, provided a career-readiness experience for the youth—added value for participating as facilitators. Some of the interns were paid; others received credit for service hours. Each librarian leading a program made the decision about whether to use youth facilitators and whether to pay them. Of the eight libraries half used youth facilitators.

Two of the facilitators at one library explained how they became involved with the project and how the experience impacted them. Roderigo, a seventeen-year-old Latino high school senior who attended a science and engineering high school, described his existing interest in computer science. “I actually want to do this, well not Scratch, but I want to get into the computer science field as a career, because I really like computers and I like working on them. And I’ve actually been trying to build my own and stuff like that. I’ve self-taught myself in many different things. So yes, that’s why I thought this kind of fit.” He had developed an identity as a “tech guy,” helping his teachers and receiving preferential treatment because of his tech abilities. His advisor at school also knew about Roderigo’s interest in tech. She informed him about the opportunity to facilitate the Scratch workshops. “So I applied and I got in.” This introduction created a sustained and impactful opportunity for him.

Laretha, a sixteen-year-old African American junior attending a magnet school, found out about the opportunity to be a mentor and facilitator for the workshop through her tech teacher who talked about it in class. “I saw the flyer online, and then it said there was only space for two people. So at first I was a little discouraged, but then I realized that nobody else in the class was really taking interest in it. So I took advantage of that. I went to the library as soon as possible, and I got my resume and cover letter, sent it in, and that’s how I ended up here.” Laretha, for whom computer science was not part of her identity, did not feel confident in applying at first. Realizing that the competition was low because not many students from her class were applying encouraged her. Her confidence grew as she moved through the interview process and through her time as a facilitator.

The youth facilitators were responsible for preparing and delivering the workshop under the supervision of the librarian, and each facilitator had an individual approach to it. Roderigo described his process, “I like how we have time beforehand in order to make sure everything is going well. And we basically debug it ourselves in a way the day before. And it’s enough time. We’re not rushing or anything like that.” He also described his theory on teaching. “The number of kids makes it easier for us to not be, you know, flooded with kids, but at the same time we have enough to have time with each one individually and get to know them, the people that I’ve known from here. I know some of them like games, and some of them like decorating and stuff like that. So that’s actually been kind of nice
to get to know them instead of just talking to everyone at once and get a little bit of time with each one.” He understood, just from his interaction with the youth, how important it was to make a connection with learners and the power that connection could create for both the learner and for the facilitator.

Teaching also had a profound effect on Laretha. “It’s really interesting and kind of ironic because I always told my mom, ‘I’m never going to be a teacher, or this or that,’ or ‘I don’t work well with kids.’ But after I came here I realized that I do actually have a little interest in that because I find a way to guide them through, and they acknowledge that. And at first I thought I was really going to not like it, but then I ended up teaching. I’m, like, ‘Oh, this isn’t that bad.’ ”

The youth facilitators analyzed their practice of leading the workshops and described the challenges they have faced. Laretha described working with groups of young people. She lays out the challenges of what the first day can be like, "Well, at first one of the most challenging aspects was to get them to talk. I noticed that at the very beginning everybody was quiet. And it was really awkward because it sounded like only the interns were the enthusiastic ones. And, you know, like, there’s cliché situations where, like, there’s a class teaching and then all the kids are just, like, staring at each other, like, ’What?’ And so it took time. Like, we had to slowly get them to speak up, and we had to find out their interests. Like, it takes time and patience. And you have to also give them... space, too. But it ended up being a blessing because now everyone’s all happy.”

Roderigo agreed "Even if they had a problem they’d rather just stay quiet and sit there than actually ask us for help. And when we went to them they’d just be, like, ‘No, I’m okay.’ And now they’ve opened up, so whenever they have a problem they ask us. Or when we walk around they’ll be, like, ‘How do I do this?’ or ‘How do I do that?’ So that was the hardest part in the beginning.”

Roderigo also talked about the open explorative structure of the workshops. “They just sort of expected you to teach them stuff,” instead of exploring, problem solving, and working together. Although Laretha and Roderigo were inexperienced educators, they saw the importance of peer-to-peer learning, exploration, and agency for the attendees, and included space for these practices in the workshops that they helped facilitate. The librarians gave the youth facilitators agency to lead the workshops the way they saw fit and to make adjustments. This freedom created opportunity for growth and development in the facilitators’ leadership and facilitating skills as well as positive experiences for the youth participants.

Conclusion

In light of persistent under-representation of women and people of color in coding and computer science jobs, it is important for school and public libraries to consider ways to change this reality. Exposure to STEM-related fields like coding and computer science has been shown to have an impact on the types of careers young people envision for themselves (Modi, Schoenburg, and Salmond 2012). Offering workshops in coding is an obvious way for libraries to provide this exposure. In this paper, I have demonstrated how librarians with no prior coding experience

("It is important to remember who the workshops are for and why it is important to offer all youth opportunities for exposure to coding and computer science. Small exposures can lead to large impacts over the long run.")
can facilitate coding workshops. The librarians need well-written facilitators’ guides providing support for novice coders, to be comfortable not being the expert, and to be flexible in facilitating. Relying on peer-to-peer learning and problem solving as issues arise are also important strategies.

One librarian said that if you were unprepared for something to not go as planned you were not prepared to facilitate a coding or technology workshop. Librarians should also consider hiring young interns to help facilitate, which is a benefit to the interns, the librarian, and the workshop participants. It is important to remember who the workshops are for and why it is important to offer all youth opportunities for exposure to coding and computer science. Small exposures can lead to large impacts over the long run. Creating opportunities for programming—opportunities that librarians can implement easily—helps them support youth in the twenty-first century.

**Crystle Martin** is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Digital Media and Learning Hub at the University of California, Irvine. Her research focuses on equity for youth learning through information practices and computational thinking in interest-driven environments, with particular focus on supporting underserved youth as they connect informal learning to academic and future opportunities. Her current research explores the paths of youth—especially those from non-dominant communities—into, through, and out of Scratch, a free online visual coding language. She is also secretary of the YALSA Board of Directors.

**Works Cited:**


CONSIDER IN CULTURAL C
Cultural Competence

An Annotated Resource List

Nicole A. Cooke
nacooke@illinois.edu

Renee F. Hill
rfhill@umd.edu

GOMPETENCE

An Annotated Resource List

Nicole A. Cooke
nacooke@illinois.edu

Renee F. Hill
rfhill@umd.edu
Librarians who serve children and youth have the honor and privilege of providing information services to a population in the early stages of strengthening their skills of inquiry and knowledge acquisition. It is widely understood that effective children’s and youth librarians must be innovative, aware of current/popular trends, and able to build rapport with young patrons. However, more emphasis must be placed on the fact that it is essential for these librarians to be prepared to identify and meet the needs of a patron population that is becoming increasingly diverse.

The annotated resource list that follows shares resources that support children/youth services librarians in developing and strengthening skills of cultural competence defined as “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross et al. 1989, 7). Further, the annotated listing of materials serves to increase practitioners’ acquisition of equity literacy defined as “the knowledge and skills that enable us to recognize, respond to, and redress conditions that deny some students access to educational and other opportunities enjoyed by their peers” (Gorski 2014). Not every item that appears in the list below was created specifically by or for library practitioners. We believe, nonetheless, that the materials presented and described in this article are significant for raising librarians’ overall awareness about providing inclusive services for diverse children/youth.

Selection Criteria
Numerous resources exist that focus on cultural competence and equity literacy, and on related topics (e.g., diversity and inclusion) in children’s/youth services; searches for materials on these topics returned over two thousand results. Thus, selecting “just right” items proved a daunting task. We sought to include a total of twenty items that:

1. provided comprehensive coverage of some aspect of the general topic,
2. were relevant regardless of their publication date, and
3. were thought-provoking and instructive without being admonishing.

Unlike traditional annotated bibliographies, the list that follows does not exclusively describe written documents. Rather, we considered it important to include resources in a variety of formats to address multiple learning styles, interest levels, and information-sharing approaches. Ultimately, we used one specific question to determine an item’s inclusion in the list: Will this resource help a librarian who serves children and youth become better informed about how to effectively serve a diverse body of patrons?

Listing of Resources
The items below are listed in alphabetical order by author’s last name in the category within which they appear; they have not been organized to indicate the authors’ determination of relevance. Additionally, several listed resources include references to materials that are directly related to that item and of potential interest and use to the reader and to children/youth library practitioners.

This chapter, in the latest edition of a classic reference textbook, introduces readers to the broadness of the concept “diverse populations,” a concept encompassing much more than race and ethnicity. The text provides examples of diverse communities, including veterans; seniors; the disabled; New Americans; the homeless, hungry, and impoverished; LGBTQ people; and the incarcerated, all of whom require and deserve quality library services and materials. As part of serving these nuanced and diverse populations, it is essential that library professionals strive to develop and maintain empathy and cultural competence as part of their critical and reflexive professional practice.

The issues and discussions raised in this chapter are covered in more depth in the textbook Information Services to Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals (Cooke 2016). [Editor’s note: The citation for this and other “related works” follow the list of works cited.]


Elturk’s piece is a practical companion piece to Overall’s discussion of cultural competence theory (see #6). Elturk is a library professional with decades of experience who succinctly and effectively discusses the imperative for cultural competence development, and describes how she has successfully applied it in her practice as a public librarian. Elturk’s piece is very accessible and can serve as a solid starting point for those new to cultural competence in the context of librarianship.


The authors begin by describing a tense and (unfortunately) actual discussion that occurred during a focus group composed of African American students enrolled in a predominantly white high school wherein the students shared their dismay about a failed multicultural initiative. Gorski and Swalwell go on to describe five principles that educators might employ to move a step beyond focusing solely on culture to infusing concepts of equity and social justice into all areas of the curriculum.


In addition to providing clear definitions for the terms “cultural competence” and “diversity awareness,” this article presents the results of a study that explored the extent to which library practitioners felt prepared to address diverse populations. Current youth services librarians should use this writing as a call to actively consider the methods they use to interact with patrons from varied backgrounds as well as the ways that these librarians can model appropriate and effective behaviors for their colleagues.


This white paper positions libraries as spaces that serve to help children develop the skills necessary for thriving in an increasingly diverse society. Naidoo explains with clarity the role...
that libraries and librarians play in introducing children to stories that promote cultural diversity and aid in strengthening cultural understanding.


Overall has been credited with expanding the LIS field’s discussion of cultural competence. In this piece, she proposes a theory for developing cultural competence. She also suggests that cultural awareness is not enough, and that LIS professionals should be more knowledgeable and proactive about incorporating cultural differences into our services and collections.


Because cultural competence emerged from the applied health sciences, it is not surprising that medical library professionals were among the first to embrace the concept and that they have been discussing cultural competence in the literature for almost two decades. Like the Elturk article (see #2), Press and Diggs-Hobson’s piece is particularly valuable because of its practicality. The authors provide concrete steps for acquiring cultural competence. These steps include 1) acknowledging that we have room to grow and learn, 2) recognizing our own biases, 3) being willing to learn from others, and 4) developing trusting relationships with those we serve. The steps require effort, but they are accessible and appropriate for library professionals in any setting.


This article concludes with a question that every youth services librarian would do well to ponder at the beginning of his or her career: How can we provide quality library services to multicultural communities and establish diverse library organizations if we are unable to value cultural differences? The author challenges librarians to rid themselves of the notion that they should automatically and inherently believe that every patron and every human is the same and instead consider the value of the various lenses through which we all view the world. The author includes a set of suggestions that have the potential to guide librarians—especially those working with youth—through the necessary work of analyzing what the librarians believe about cultures that are not their own and learning more about other cultures.


Part of being culturally competent is being mindful of the everyday slights that others may encounter because of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or other visible and invisible cultural markers, slights otherwise known as microaggressions. Sue is among the foremost experts about the topic, and this article is a classic primer on microaggressions and its partners, microinsults and microinvalidations. Sue and his coauthors provide valuable suggestions for recognizing and dealing with microaggressions, information that is valuable inside and outside of our library settings.


A frank opening statement that “students need culturally responsive teacher-librarians” sets the stage for this article, which describes and defines four levels of evaluation that school librarians can employ to assess their level of cultural responsiveness with the goal of reforming the K–12 curriculum so that all students are exposed to material that leads to success in a diverse society. Additionally, the author lists four actions that school librarians committed to cultural responsiveness can take to encourage student achievement: build trust, value cultural awareness, foster motivation, and establish an inclusive learning environment.

**Books**


Perhaps this book is not an obvious choice for a discussion of cultural competence, but at its heart, cultural competence is about relationship building and getting to know the communities we serve. Grover, Greer, and Agada are experts on community analysis (getting to know our communities through a variety of quantitative and qualitative means), and they provide an accessible, step-by-step guide for engaging in this iterative and necessary process.

Years before LIS professionals began talking about cultural competence, people in the field of education were discussing the need for culturally responsive pedagogy and teaching. Ladson-Billings (along with Beverly Daniel Tatum, Geneva Gay, and, more recently, Django Paris) advocates for actively incorporating learners’ cultures into the teaching and learning process. This approach is something that teaching librarians should also be considering and embracing in their professional practices, inside and outside library classrooms.

RELATED WORKS: For more information and perspectives about culturally responsive teaching, please also consult the work of Geneva Gay (2010) and Beverly Daniel Tatum (Tatum and Brown 1998). Django Paris (2012) has extended this conversation by positing culturally sustaining pedagogy, which encourages us to not only incorporate, but celebrate, the cultures of our students.


Because school librarians have a role in teaching literacy, this book is useful for helping them consider—and articulate to other stakeholders—the importance of providing youth with culturally relevant literature. The authors of this book have written a clear, nonjudgmental document that is easy to digest. Its seven chapters attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice to help professionals who work with youth (classroom teachers and librarians alike) to better understand linkages between race, class, social equity, and literacy—with the ultimate goal of making a positive impact on the youth with whom they interact.

Media/Websites/Exercises


In this mini-documentary, the medical doctors who coined the term “cultural humility” are featured as they and others explain how cultural humility extends the work of cultural competence. This expansion occurs when practitioners move beyond the idea that one’s knowledge of various cultures should and will necessarily reach a point of finite understanding (competence) and become committed to perpetual openness in learning about cultures that are different from their own (humility). The material contained in the video is rooted in the medical field but is fully relatable to the library profession.


This is a simple but revelatory exercise that asks participants to engage in critical self-reflection. The exercise is most effective when people go beyond cursory, obvious, and visible markers (e.g., I am female; I am a parent), and explore invisible, possibly stigmatized, or conflicting aspects of their identity (e.g., I am an atheist; I am gender non-conforming). Coupled with a discussion about privilege (see #19 on the list) and/or implicit biases (see #17), this exercise goes a long way toward development of empathy and cultural competence.

The culturally responsive library walk tool was developed for use in a school library but is ultimately useful for all library settings. All librarians who work with youth can modify this tool as necessary (e.g., replace the term “school library” with “library”) to work within a team to objectively view how effective their library is with respect to culturally responsive programs, services, materials, and practices. The series of worksheets provides rationale, instructions for easy completion, focus areas for librarians to consider thoughtfully, space to include observations, and action steps. An additional useful feature is the inclusion of brief and thoughtfully worded questions for practitioners and patrons to answer, yielding additional insight into the process of improving the library program for diverse user groups.


Another simple but profound exercise designed to identify implicit biases: hidden and/or unconscious thoughts and feelings that we all have and that may inhibit our interactions with people who are different from us. These implicit biases are what allow stereotypes and other knee-jerk judgments and reactions to be perpetuated in society. These tests are useful for inspiring personal reflection and for inspiring larger conversations and calls to action.

RELATED WORK: The Implicit Association Test, on which this website is based, is fully explained in the book Blindsport: Hidden Biases of Good People (Banaji and Greenwald 2013).


In this video, best-selling author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie transfers her ability to weave stories in written form to a verbal narrative that reminds listeners that it is important to not fall victim to believing the one story that, while predominate, is likely not complete. Adichie’s spoken words will motivate school librarians to remain open to learning about the varied experiences of their young patrons as they create and deliver materials, programs, and services.


A brief but powerful video of students engaging in a physical exercise based on Peggy McIntosh’s (1989) “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” article. The exercise is seemingly simple but yields profound reactions from the participants. The video nicely encapsulates privilege and emphasizes why we should be having such conversations with our peers and our students.


Youth librarians who are interested in considering the big picture as it relates to creating or enhancing a culturally competent library program will benefit from using this toolkit. The online tool provides four broad categories (such as “Define Your Vision and Goals for Cultural Competence” and “Conduct a Cultural Audit”) and then shares detailed steps for moving toward goal achievement within each category. Two examples accompany the toolkit, which further help librarians understand its usefulness in their specific library environment.

Conclusion

The conversation surrounding diversity (in its many and varied
forms) is not particularly easy to engage in nor is it new to or exclusive to LIS. The field of education’s emphasis on culturally responsive teaching was followed by the first concrete definitions of cultural competence in both social work and medicine. Both of these models have paved the way for the emergence of cultural humility, which encourages practitioners to engage in a constant process of evaluation of self and program. It is our hope that the twenty items described in this writing serve to empower librarians to initiate and participate in difficult conversations as they strive toward the ever-important goal of effectively and compassionately reaching our youth.

Nicole A. Cooke is an assistant professor at the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She holds an MEd degree in Adult Education from Penn State and an MLS and a PhD from Rutgers University, where she was an ALA Spectrum Doctoral Fellow. She was named a “Mover & Shaker” by Library Journal in 2007 and was the 2016 recipient of the ALA’s Equality Award. Her research and teaching interests include human information behavior, critical cultural information studies, and diversity and social justice in librarianship (with an emphasis on LIS education and pedagogy).

Renee F. Hill is a senior lecturer and director of the School Library specialization at the University of Maryland’s College of Information Studies. In this capacity, she teaches courses and provides guidance that prepare graduate students to become information specialists who serve children and youth. Renee earned a Bachelor’s degree in Exceptional Student Education at Florida Atlantic University. Both her Master’s and PhD were earned in Library and Information Studies at Florida State University. She is passionate about and committed to research and teaching that focus on examining methods for increasing understanding of diversity issues in Library and Information Studies.

Works Cited:


Related Works:


Making Friends and Buying Robots

How to Leverage Collaborations and Collections to Support STEM Learning
In a climate of increased interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), school libraries have unique opportunities to grow collections and cultivate partnerships in the sciences. At the federal level and in many states, STEM initiatives encourage hands-on exposure to technologies and open the door for student-led discovery of tools related to robotics, coding, programming, and electronics. Influenced by local STEM initiatives, the Learning Resource Center (LRC) at the University of Wyoming Lab School decided to create a circulating collection of STEM kits. (The UW Lab School is a tuition-free charter school with a diverse population selected by lottery.) This school library also partnered with Lab School teachers to explore these STEM collections and to develop programming and a curriculum to teach digital literacies and STEM skills to students in kindergarten through ninth grade.

Because the Learning Resource Center did not have enough square footage for a dedicated makerspace and because the collection budget was more robust than the equipment budget, the school librarians decided to purchase STEM kits and materials with collection funds and circulate them. This decision generated excitement around the collections but also created new challenges related to collection development, acquisition, and circulation. Once those challenges had been addressed, the collection became available for exciting experiments, programs, and other instructional opportunities.

**Practicalities**

*Buying and Prepping the Resources*

The STEM kits and materials of high interest were not available from any of the library’s contracted vendors. To select these materials, librarians participated in the online makerspace conversation through websites, Twitter, blogs, and more. Teachers and professors recommended several items for purchase, and students also made suggestions. Selection criteria included designated age range, positive reviews, size, cost, number of parts, and the presence of consumable parts. The librarians favored purchase of items small enough (in their original packaging) to fit on standard library shelves and those that did not have consumable parts that required regular replacement (with the exception of batteries, which patrons are expected to provide). Kits with a higher cost or a large number of parts were considered on a case-by-case basis and sometimes added to the collection.

Once items had been identified for acquisition, they were ordered a la carte from websites and paid for using a credit card. (See the sidebar for URLs of suggested vendors.) Once the purchased materials arrived at the library, the processing required was significantly different from that of most acquisitions. The library already owned a small and growing collection of kits and games, and staff adapted the specialized workflow for those items when processing the new STEM collections. This workflow involves inventorying all parts and pieces of the kit for the benefit of circulation staff and patrons, photographing the items, and including the photographs and inventory in the online catalog (Butler and Kvenild 2014).

*Circulating*

Staff training and active policy refinement were required to circulate these materials. Many STEM kits include consumable or easily lost components, such as conductive thread, batteries, SD cards, specialized tools, or small LED lights. The school librarians had to decide whether to circulate consumable parts. When those parts circulated, we had to decide whether to charge...
patrons for missing components, or to accept a certain level of loss and pay the replacement costs from the library budget. Clear communication with patrons about expectations for what must be returned and what can be used up proved to be important when circulating this collection. Parts and pieces of a kit are counted at the points of check-out and check-in to ensure all parts are present and the kit will still function, a process that can slow the pace of work at the circulation desk.

Circulating the STEM materials can impact instruction and planning. Because of the popularity of the collection, librarians who want to use the resources are careful to check out kits in advance of programs. After an initial decision to circulate the STEM kits for a full loan period, the school librarians decided to shorten loan periods on all kits and games. This change increased availability of the collection for a larger number of patrons and helped make sure that kits were returned to the library in time to be used in the Lab School library’s own programming and instruction.

Learning How to Use the Resources
The acquisition of STEM materials also led to a different type of challenge: how best to use these new resources in support of student learning. Librarians are accustomed to learning the ins and outs of a new database or reading and recommending books. In many cases, librarians have been trained to provide critical insights and guidance about how to use purchased materials. In the case of these cutting-edge STEM collections, Lab School librarians had less experience on which to draw when testing the kits, but the results of their investigations and hands-on explorations proved rewarding.

One of the first significant purchases for the STEM collection included Raspberry Pi computer kits. The school librarians knew when they selected these kits that they could not be circulated in the condition in which they had been received because the hardware would be unassembled and untested. The choice was made to offer a nine-week program open to sixth-through ninth-grade students at the Lab School to build and secure these kits for circulation (see figure 1). When these kits arrived, librarians initially felt somewhat out of their depth. Lack of instructions, lack of experience working with small computer components, and lack of teaching background in STEM fields increased their uncertainty. Most collections do not require subject expertise to use or circulate, and most kits arrive with clear instructions or lesson plans. The STEM collections did not match the librarians’ prior experience with other circulating kits.

To remedy this situation, librarians approached science teachers from the Lab School and asked for help. One teacher was fascinated by the kits and offered to cohost the program. Not only did this teacher bring years of STEM experience to the project, she also had access to soldering irons, safety eyewear, and a science lab with heat-protected workstations. Thus, students were able to practice soldering skills prior to building the mini-computers. The burden of safety and subject expertise became shared when the school librarians partnered with a science teacher.

With this support, the program helped students conceptualize and discuss what constitutes a computer, and culminated in students building five Raspberry Pi computers, uploading a Linux-based operating system, and programming the machines using both Scratch and Minecraft (see figure 2).

Through this experience, the Lab School librarians realized that identifying and developing units of instruction while simultaneously gaining familiarity with technology-rich tools (many of which require assembly and software training) can be a daunting task. However, they also realized they were not alone in these endeavors and were reenergized about the work they had begun. Working with a classroom teacher increased the richness of resources for previously existing STEM opportunities in the school; the new resources provided a unique opportunity for teaching and learning.

Working with a classroom teacher increased the richness of resources for previously existing STEM opportunities in the school; the new resources provided a unique opportunity for teaching and learning.
way for librarians to reach out to science and math teachers. From that point forward, partnerships were actively sought to reduce anxiety, brainstorm ideas, distribute learning goals, share resources, and divide classroom applications. Partnerships have included the groups described in the following sections.

**Current Teachers**

Teachers have a wealth of knowledge to support STEM activities, are easily accessible, and often share interests in purchased (and desired) resources. As the school librarians have encouraged engagement with these materials, they have discovered interested teachers in a variety of disciplines, including science, mathematics, and art. Additionally, teacher partnerships have allowed librarians to access resources not traditionally held in their collections that facilitate and enhance program offerings (e.g., art supplies, safety goggles, sinks, lab tables). The division of classroom-management responsibilities also allows for the focus to be on leveraging STEM-based activities and engagement with students.

**Students**

Students gravitate toward these circulating STEM materials. Soon after receiving kits, student interest is piqued as they examine the new resources in programs offered by librarians. Students can gain considerable experience with technologies that match their interests and become useful mentors to others, including librarians and other partners. Fortunately, most students are flattered when given an opportunity to share their skills with others, particularly adults. Leveraging students’ expertise can generate ideas, facilitate instruction, engage other students, and foster student-directed learning.

At the UW Lab School, librarians have found that students are also essential partners in programs relating to STEM initiatives. Their enthusiasm is contagious and propels those around them to think about technology in new and innovative ways. Often, students research new collection materials and make suggestions for add-ons or additional kits that will allow them to deepen their STEM exploration. The school librarians find that students generally have strong opinions about purchases of STEM materials and are happy to share why they believe additional purchases are important. This process generates both a strong collection and program ideas that are student-driven. Librarians are now working to develop a formal student-led purchasing program with a dedicated portion of the collections budget.

**Part-Time Support Staff**

Additionally, school librarians lean on the interests and motivations of their support staff to encourage hands-on and web-based exploration and to report best practices. Because STEM resources are in library circulation, staff members are encouraged to check out materials, test them at home, share them with friends and family, and note their observations. This approach not only helps the school librarians identify websites and videos devoted to supporting STEM technologies, but also to identify potential lessons, activities, and assessments for learning.

**Local Enthusiasts**

Several faculty members at the university near the school are interested in Pre-K–12 technology integration and have historically partnered with local schools to help pre-service teachers gain technology skills (Shepherd et al.)
As the STEM programs and curricula developed by the school library continue to grow, the librarians consult and partner with still more local experts and enthusiasts. The librarians reached out to the local robotics club to share information and software. One librarian now volunteers with the robotics club to gain knowledge for the Lab School library’s programs while providing valuable mentoring to children in the club, as well as a female presence in the volunteer cohort. Programming software developed by leaders of the robotics club is now installed on all library workstations for use by students learning to code. The librarians developed relationships with other local makerspaces and with the 3-D visualization cave on the university campus for additional support and for field trip experiences. And, of course, other school librarians and public librarians are incredibly valuable resources and partners for sharing and learning about STEM resources and developing new approaches to implementation of STEM programs.

Sphero Robotics: An Example

Here’s a detailed example of a recent program to demonstrate how partnerships, along with circulating materials, have engaged students in STEM. When building the robotics collection of STEM kits, the library purchased and circulated several robots (e.g., Dash and Dot, Sphero, Ollie, Bee-Bots). During the 2015–2016 school year the library staff decided to purchase twelve additional Sphero devices (see figure 4) because they are compact, durable, waterproof, inexpensive, support free and portable programming options, lack small parts to lose, and were found to be more approachable than Lego Robotics. Fortunately, a university professor, a middle school science teacher, and a part-time library employee volunteered to help librarians develop and teach a nine-week course at the Lab School. In the course students explored robotics, programming, and art with this technology, even though none of the adult facilitators had much (if any) experience using Sphero robots.

Prior to instruction, all of these instructional partners met to discuss what goals and objectives they wanted to accomplish. They determined that students would learn how the robot moved and how they could interact with its various sensors using the SPRK Lightning Lab app for Android and iOS devices. The instructional partners wanted to teach basic programming that included key concepts such as loops, variables, sensors, and events. Achieving this goal required additional study for all instructors. While each had explored rudimentary Sphero programming for course-preparation purposes, they were not deeply familiar with many of these concepts and spent time learning off-hours. Teachers and librarians nurtured a culture of open communication to share their discoveries with each other and support one another’s successes.

To accomplish the daunting project of planning a new course with technology that was brand-new to us, tasks were divided among the team members. The part-time employee located web-based resources regarding the internal components of Sphero and how they worked. Librarians found ideas on Pinterest and other blogs about using Sphero robots with finger paints. The Learning Labs site associated with the robot included resources about using slow-shutter-speed cameras to draw light-based pictures (SPRK Lightning Lab n.d.). All partners learned how to program the robot using various examples provided in the app used to control the Sphero devices. Through these explorations, the team developed a solid curriculum. (See the sidebar for links to our website.)

Initially, fifteen seventh- through ninth-graders enrolled in this program, meeting for forty-five minutes a week in the heart of the library. During these sessions, students learned how to drive their robots using app-enabled navigation controls and how to program a Sphero to change colors, move in basic shapes (e.g., squares, triangles), play Sphero hot-potato games, and auto drive (automatically altering directions when the Sphero...
bumps into objects). The program culminated in an activity in which students programmed their robots to paint shapes with fingerpaints on giant strips of craft paper.

Although this program ran smoothly, instructors realized they had not leveraged student interest and expertise sufficiently. They revised their approach to better introduce difficult concepts like variables and sensors, and offered the course to a new group of students. During this implementation, students were encouraged to check out the robots, experiment with them at home, and report their findings during class. They were also asked more frequently to teach others, including the instructors and other adults. These changes resulted in more complex programs (e.g., heart shapes, stars, spiraling squares, circles), personalized hot-potato games, and more. Giving student partners a leadership role in this STEM program fostered greater depth and breadth in their robotics programming than would have otherwise been taught.

**Getting Started at Your Library**

If you want to reinforce STEM skills at your library, materials that will be the most popular and useful are those that can be used in numerous ways. Selecting versatile kits will allow for more program creation and offer a low-cost approach to getting started with STEM in your school library. Talking to other librarians and teachers to learn what kits they know about and what they’d be interested in using can provide valuable inspiration for purchases. Many of these kits are not reviewed in traditional sources, so partners will become your best reviewers and recommenders.
The next step after selecting materials for purchase and circulation is understanding how to use the technology. This step does not need to be intimidating, especially if you keep the following points in mind as you begin your STEM journey.

Remember, no one has to be an expert to learn. Developing expertise just takes some time and a willingness to play with the technology yourself. Blogs of librarians like Andy Plemmons, reports from maker fairs, as well as websites of STEM resource vendors and manufacturers are great ways to learn more about how the materials work and how to start teaching about and with them.

Provide a framework of support for you and your students. Consider adding books to your collection that directly correspond to the kits you selected for purchase. Being able to check out these books to read at home will allow students to delve deeper into understanding technologies and reinforce concepts.

Stimulate your students’ interests by aligning tasks or challenges in your programs with pop culture references that are popular in that moment.

Seek out partners in your community by identifying groups and individuals with specialized STEM interests. These enthusiasts and experts can help you find new ways to create and present programs for your library.

Encourage student input by asking them what they want in the collection. Polls, questionnaires, and advisory groups are all ways to give students a voice in purchasing decisions. Consulting students also ensures popularity of purchased materials.

Document your successes by tracking what resources have proven useful and what approaches ignite the students’ creativity. Incorporate formative assessments into programs to improve the experience as you go. Try to take photographs of every program and activity to capture and share what was successful.

Conclusions
Powerful learning moments occur when school librarians remember to step out of the role of teacher and into the role of fellow participant. Students working through problems on their own have been overheard making unprompted pronouncements about their learning experience, such as “I’m more comfortable programming this [robot] than driving it,” and “Guys, we’re doing a lot of geometry right now!” Learning connections to science and math were made without instructor input.

For lesson plans, inspiration, and ideas:
Barrow Media Center Blog: [https://expectmiraculous.com](https://expectmiraculous.com)
Geek Gurl Diaries: [www.youtube.com/user/GeekGurlDiaries](www.youtube.com/user/GeekGurlDiaries)
Learning Resource Center Blog: [http://uwlibblogs.uwyo.edu/learning](http://uwlibblogs.uwyo.edu/learning)
Learning Resource Center STEM Curriculum Materials Site: [http://libguides.uwyo.edu/lrcstem](http://libguides.uwyo.edu/lrcstem)
Scratch: [https://scratch.mit.edu](https://scratch.mit.edu)
Sphero: [www.sphero.com/education](www.sphero.com/education)

For purchasing STEM materials:
Bee-Bot: [www.bee-bot.us](www.bee-bot.us)
Dash and Dot: [www.makewonder.com](www.makewonder.com)
Little Bits: [http://littlebits.cc](http://littlebits.cc)
Maker Shed: [www.makershed.com](www.makershed.com)
Makey Shop: [http://shop.makeymakey.com](http://shop.makeymakey.com)
Sparkfun Electronics: [www.sparkfun.com](www.sparkfun.com)
Sphero: [www.sphero.com](www.sphero.com)
and resulted in students’ continued engagement with the library programming. The confidence with which students have tested and developed new technology skills, and then taught them to adults, has offered an authentic assessment of students’ burgeoning STEM interest and skills. Working with the hands-on resources also fostered a participatory culture in the library. School librarian Andy Plemmons has suggested that librarians ”just need to be willing to offer the space for students to develop their expertise and pass that learning onto others” (2012). In the case of the Sphero program, his advice proved more true than librarians had imagined.

At the UW Lab School librarians have cultivated an interest in emerging technologies, a commitment to diverse community partnerships, and a willingness to let students be the classroom experts. They’ve learned that students sometimes go farther in thirty minutes of engagement with these kits than the librarians did in several hours of work! Now, the participating librarians come to their programs with a belief in offering guidance (via videos, books, websites, and other materials) and support to the students, and an open approach to exploring STEM alongside the students. The librarians are now part of the journey; together all of the library’s partners model for students how to ask questions of each other and how to share their discoveries. Together they have overcome initial anxieties around creating compelling STEM programs and have opened the door to STEM success.

**Works Cited:**


When I was in fourth grade, I found myself with a big red F on my report card. It stood out against the line of As that surrounded it, and I can still remember the sinking feeling of dread it gave me, knowing the trouble I’d be in at home when my mother saw it.

It wasn’t the first or the last F in that little slot on my grade card. Every six weeks it made an appearance, wedged between the A in math and the A in science. But no number of As could erase the existence of that F, always in the subject of reading.

You might be surprised to learn all of this. I’m a writer, after all. Not only that, but I sold my first novel at the age of seventeen. Often, when people learn that I got a book deal at such a young age, they assume that I must have always loved books, that reading has been a passion of mine since I can remember. But this is far from the truth. I’ve always loved stories and writing, but for a long stretch in elementary school I absolutely hated reading.

If that doesn’t make much sense to you, you aren’t alone. My mother really didn’t understand it, either. Part of her was angry with me—she knew I could do better—but more than that, she was confused. She’d been reading aloud to me since I was an infant. She read me everything from picture books to the newspaper. Sometimes she found herself reading magazine articles aloud to me in public without even intending to do so. She loved to read, and she had worked so hard to instill that love in me as well. And for a while, she thought she’d been successful.

I was the sort of child who demanded more and more books be read to me before bedtime, the sort of child who sat at a typewriter long before I actually understood how to spell and pretended to write books of my own. And in years after, I actually did try to write my own books, both on paper and at the computer. Poems, too. How could I be failing a reading class?

The answer is both extraordinarily simple and incredibly complicated.

I was born legally blind, which made reading on my own difficult. That in and of itself wasn’t the issue, though. My teachers and librarians tried to provide books in large print for me. But no matter how hard they tried, I just couldn’t make myself read more than a couple of them without getting bored. I blamed it on reading as a whole. Reading was boring. Writing was fun. End of story, in my nine-year-old mind.

I want to be clear that my teachers and librarians did try to help, but even they became frustrated with me. They worked to find me the
easiest, shortest large-print books they could, but I just wasn’t taking to them. I was frustrated, too. I didn’t like making Fs. I was a good student otherwise, and I hated feeling like I was disappointing my mother and teachers. The whole situation caused my anxiety disorder to emerge. Soon, I was falling ill, horribly sick to my stomach, unable to keep down food every six weeks when those report cards were due.

One of those nights, while I was lying on the couch with my stomach aching, an ad for the first Harry Potter movie came on television. My mother, knowing this was based on a book that many kids my age seemed to like, instructed me to check it out from the library once I got back to school. I sighed, because ugh, books, but my mom knew how to play this game.

“You don’t have to read it,” she said. “I want to. Check it out for me.”

But of course I read it. Or, more accurately, she read it to me. And when she couldn’t read it to me, I would pull out my magnifier and read on my own. This was tiring and slow going—even now, in my twenties, the idea of reading that much with a magnifier makes my eyes glaze over—but I was obsessed. I had to keep going.

I devoured the first four books in the series, and then I went looking for more. My teachers and librarians were thrilled…but confused. The books I began reading were far more challenging—on a much higher reading level—than what they thought I could handle. I’d gone from reading nearly nothing to gobbling up books that were well over three hundred pages.

Eventually, one of these educators put it together. The books they’d been providing me, the ones that
Many years have passed since I rediscovered my love of reading, but it’s a story I reflect on often. And it’s an experience that, in many ways, informs how I write characters like Bo and Agnes in Run, characters whose strengths and weaknesses aren’t what those around them might expect. Mine is also a story I try to share, particularly with teachers, librarians, and parents because sometimes, when working with children who have disabilities, the solution to helping them may not be what you initially expect. Sometimes you have to take another look.

Kody Keplinger was born and raised in a small Kentucky town. During her senior year of high school she wrote her debut novel, The DUFF (Little, Brown 2010), which was a New York Times bestseller, a USA Today bestseller, a YALSA Top Ten Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers, and a Romantic Times Top Pick. It has since been adapted into a major motion picture. Kody is also the author of Lying Out Loud (Scholastic 2015), a companion to The DUFF; Shut Out (Little, Brown 2011); A Midsummer’s Nightmare (Little, Brown 2012); and Run (Scholastic 2016), as well as the middle-grade novel The Swift Boys & Me (Scholastic 2014). Kody is the cofounder of Disability in Kidlit <DisabilityinKidlit.com> and lives in New York City, where she teaches writing workshops and continues to write books for kids and teens. You can find more about her and her books at <www.kodykeplinger.com>.