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Children & LIBRARIES

the journal of the Association for Library Service to Children

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Who needs grown-ups? Little Grady of Wisconsin wanted a little quiet tummy time with a book on his own!
Photo by Rachel Gustafson.

Editor's Note
The Awakening

By Sharon Verbeten

Mothers may know best, as the saying goes, but grandmothers and librarians are a close second. Put them together and, *well,* it's a recipe for early literacy success.

Heidi Gustafson, a library associate of mine at Brown County (WI) Library in Green Bay, couldn't wait to be a first-time grandma this year; she began collecting book favorites old and new even before little Grady, pictured on our cover, was born.

On a weekend trip to the family cabin, young Grady woke—as infants do—very early, so Heidi offered to let his parents sleep in. She excitedly began reading to him, but later, the others in the lofted cabin told her she had woke them up by reading too loudly! I guess she took author Paula Fox's adage a little too literally: "When you put a book in a child's hands . . . you are an awakener."

Literacy won out over lack of sleep in the end, and later, Grady's mom, Rachel, snapped this shot (on our cover) of Grady enjoying some tummy time, content to "read" on his own.

As a longtime library employee, Heidi knows the value of reading—she raised three young readers of her own. But now, books seem just a little bit more important, as she welcomes young Grady into the fold.

"Reading to your children is full of joy and expectation for who they will become," she says. "But reading to your grandchild takes that just one step further—knowing you have fostered the joy of reading for several generations." &

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PEER-REVIEWED

No Finish Line

Creating Inclusiveness in Children's Programs

KATE GRAFELMAN AND SARAH BARRIAGE

As a professional group, public library staff working in children's services strive to provide high quality services and programming for all children and their caregivers; they are committed to respecting the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the people in their community, creating inclusive spaces, and continuously working to develop cultural competency.[1]

Honoring the different aspects that make up a child's identity is emphasized multiple times in the Association for Library Service to Children's (ALSC) Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Libraries, including a direct mention of creating "diverse programs for children" with specific consideration of the diversity in a community.[2] Naidoo explains that a discussion of diversity in library programming should be "as expansive as possible," stating that "race, ethnicity, ancestry, physical and mental ability, family composition, gender expression, sexual orientation, citizenship status, language fluency, domicile, socioeconomic status, religious preference, and age" are only a few examples of the diversity present in a library's community.[3]

This study aims to explore how library staff working in children's programming are taking these considerations into account and actively using them to create children's library programs. Through interviews with eight library staff based in the United States, we gathered information about the methods used by library staff members to create, plan, and carry out children's programming, as well as the degree to which they are intentional about honoring children's diverse backgrounds.

Literature Review

Storytime song and book choices, physical spaces, and types of programs offered are several ways library staff can incorporate diversity into programming. Some studies focus on these discrete ways that children's library programs can work towards the goal of incorporating diversity, as well as edited collections of articles that focus on all aspects of this goal. The most common early childhood library program offered are library storytimes, which is the main focus of the existing literature.

Storytimes are an essential way library staff can incorporate different lived experiences into children's programming. Children benefit from seeing themselves reflected in diverse and culturally authentic books read aloud in children's programs; equally important is children's exposure to cultures that differ from their own in this same setting.[4] Seeing characters that resemble themselves allows children to feel they have every opportunity open to them, regardless of their race, ability, or background.[5] Unfamiliar cultures and identities are introduced to children through accurate diverse books and

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this allows them to "build bridges of cultural understanding."[6] Despite this, Cahill et al. found a significant lack of diversity in books read aloud in their study of public library storytimes.[7]

Research has found that the physical space used for children's programming can affect a child's ability to engage in the program.[8] The physical space used and activities performed during children's programming have the potential to exclude children with physical or developmental differences.[9] Library staff are continually looking for ways to make their programming spaces as inclusive as possible, for example by arranging programming rooms to allow for minimal distractions and using "sensory-friendly" toys and props.[10] Prendergast found that while children's librarians are eager to offer inclusive programs, they do not have the training they would like for working with children with disabilities.[11]

Social interaction has been noted as an important reason for bringing children to public library storytimes.[12] In addition to storytimes, play programs are increasing in popularity in public libraries. These programs occur either as stand-alone programs or following a traditional storytime. While engaging in play, children develop in all areas including development of their social, emotional, and early literacy skills.[13] In addition to allowing all children to build vital skills, these programs are a means for children with physical and developmental differences to interact with typically developing children.[14] These interactions and friendships build empathy, acceptance, and "an appreciation for diversity."[15]

Many studies focus on individual best practices in early childhood programming. This study seeks to examine how practicing library staff are making use of these separate elements as a whole to create accessible, inclusive, and meaningful early childhood programming.

Methodology

Recruitment

In November 2020, children's library staff were invited to email Grafelman if they were interested in being interviewed regarding their practices in creating inclusive, accessible, and meaningful programming for children aged birth to five years. The invitation was posted to three Facebook groups whose membership is made up of library staff and to the now-closed ALSC Preschool Services Discussion List. The Facebook groups had individual membership sizes of approximately 5,500 members, 16,500 members, and 23,600 members.

Participants

Participants included eight library staff members located in the Western and Midwestern regions of the United States. Initially, nine library staff had expressed interest in participating, but only eight agreed to be interviewed. All participants are directly involved in planning and carrying out programming in a library setting for children who are birth to age five. Participants were not asked about job titles, qualifications, age, race, or gender. Two participants were located in small, rural towns, one participant was in an urban environment, one participant was in a college town, and four were in midsize towns. Two participants stated their community was made up of primarily low-income families, and three participants stated there was significant socioeconomic diversity in their community.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants were interviewed via phone or video conferencing software. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted, on average, thirty minutes. The interviews were recorded on an external voice recorder and transcribed by Grafelman, with all identifying information removed. The transcripts were then analyzed using thematic analysis, "a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data."[16]

First, Grafelman read and re-read the interview transcripts, making note of her initial impressions and thoughts about potential patterns across the data set. Next, she assigned initial inductive codes to data extracts that appeared salient to the phenomena of interest. She organized these codes into themes, which she then reviewed in order to ensure that the data within each theme "cohere[d] together meaningfully,"[17] that there was enough data to support each theme, and that each of the themes were distinct from the others; changes to themes were made as necessary. Next, the first author defined and named each of the themes, further refining each theme and noting particularly salient or illustrative data extracts to be incorporated into the final write-up. The second author participated in peer debriefing at various stages throughout this process.[18]

Findings

In this analysis, the researchers identified seven themes of common practices among the participants.

Know the Community

Participants were asked how they assess the diverse make-up of the community they serve. Knowing who is in the community is a vital first step in providing programming that appeals to that community. Analyzing data from the Census Bureau is a common first step among the participants interviewed in learning the makeup of their community. Lindsey explains that the Census Bureau provides a valuable picture of a community's demographics, even economic status and education levels.[19] Nicole points out that census data is "limiting in some ways, especially when you're assessing abilities of people—physical and mental abilities of people—it is a little bit hard to

figure that out, but in terms of economic and racial diversity, census data is really helpful."

In addition to the Census Bureau, Becky also uses data from the local school system to get a picture of the student body makeup, which she finds especially useful for guiding children's programming. Malorie's library system has access to surveys conducted by the community's Parks and Recreation Department that assess factors such as "how people identify and what people want from the community." Some libraries conduct their own needs assessment surveys, but Crystal points out that not only is it difficult to figure out how to ask patrons what their needs are, "but even once you do put things out there, it's hard to get people to respond."

While demographics data provide an important snapshot of a community, many participants rely on their own observations to understand who they are serving. Crystal, Joy, and Lindsey all find that paying attention to who is coming to the library and who is attending their programs is the most reliable way to know who is in their community.

Other participants get the best sense of their community outside of the library. Malorie and Nicole both find that being active in their community allows them to see who is living there. Because it can be difficult to gain feedback from library users through surveys, personal conversation is a preferred way to learn about a community. Malorie feels that even chats at the grocery store have been helpful and she uses conversation with community members to "know who is here and understand what people need." Stacey also benefits from relationships with the families of the children she serves, because when she gets to know a family, she is better able to know what that family's needs are, so that she can be inclusive.

Crystal makes an effort to keep in contact with families who attend library storytimes to understand their needs. She maintains these relationships through a professional Facebook account, separate from her personal account, that she uses to engage in local community groups. She also shares her professional email address extensively and lets the families she interacts with know that they can come to her with any questions. When she is interacting with people in her community, especially people from different diverse communities, Becky focuses on the question "What can the library do for you?" She also ensures that each individual she talks with knows that she does not expect them to speak for their entire cultural group, but only for themselves.

Be Intentional about Diversity

All participants stated that they are intentional about including diversity in all of their library programming, especially storytimes. This includes choosing books with characters from many different cultures and representing many races and ethnicities, choosing books that have LGBTQIA+ characters, and choosing books with diverse authors. Rachel states that when planning storytimes, "I do try to make sure that I'm using diverse books and being mindful of different family structure and different religious beliefs and customs." About her library, Nicole states that with "storytime we've really tried to make sure we are including books that are both written [by] and portray BIPOC humans as well as humans who are different sexualities and trans and [other identities], so we're trying to be more intentional about the inclusion of that in storytime."

Lindsey and Joy try to mirror their audience so children can see themselves represented in books. At the same time, Lindsey intentionally asks herself, "How do we make it so that we're still being diverse even though the patrons that we serve aren't?" in order to keep herself mindful of the books she is choosing. Malorie's community is predominantly white, so she chooses her storytime books to introduce different races and ethnicities to the children who attend.

Three participants reported providing programming that focuses specifically on one cultural group. For example, Stacey hires presenters who are from a specific cultural group to present if she is holding a program the focuses on a cultural group she is not a part of, and she gathers library materials to complement the program. Conversely, Nicole said her library avoids programming that focuses on one specific cultural group. Crystal also avoids this type of programming, stating that "just knowing how to be inclusive while not othering people I think is a really hard line to walk, and I try really hard to make it so that everyone feels welcome."

The participants felt that being inclusive of differing cultures and experiences is something that they are continuously working at and will continue to work at. Nicole's library is mindful of this and has "taken a really pretty progressive approach to make sure we are all considering our inherent biases and that we are being as open and communicative and empathetic as possible."

Malorie feels that "diversity and inclusion is always important, not just when it is in the news . . . it is something that we should always be working towards and doing so that people feel welcome in our libraries . . . keeping in mind that diversity is beyond race, and that is of course incredibly important, but there is also diversity in language, and . . . economic diversity, and abilities, and families, and family structure, and gender identities and all of these different things, and just to always keep that in mind: just the default of what can we do to be welcoming."

Similarly, Becky says, "I think one of the things about librarianship in general, but youth and children's librarianship in particular, is librarians are positioned in a way in our communities that they can be such amazing bridge builders and as long as they're doing it with cultural humility and continually working on their cultural competence, it often just benefits their whole community in ways they might not even be able to anticipate. It needs to be like a standard part of what we do as children's and youth librarians, is do that work of holding space for our whole community."

Joy emphasizes that it is important to remember that library staff will make mistakes as they work towards being inclusive and they should be willing to apologize and be open to learning from their mistakes. Becky, Nicole, and Crystal suggest seeking further professional development with regards to all forms of diversity in children's programming. Becky feels "there are aspects of our community, beyond racial and ethnic diversity that we could take a better look at and do a better job of supporting. So, the work's never done, right? There's always room to grow."

Create an Accessible Space

Participants were asked how they use their physical space to make programming accessible. Crystal, Malorie, Rachel, Joy, and Stacey all said the libraries where they work were built in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Becky's programming space is a large room in the children's area that has one wall that can slide completely open allowing for easy entry. In addition to holding programs in open spaces, Crystal and Stacey both have easily moveable furniture in their programming spaces. This allows for furniture to be moved easily when necessary to improve accessibility. Rather than relying on moveable furniture, Malorie ensures accessibility by "making sure that furniture is placed so that people are able to move around and having it always be that way so it's not like these are special accommodations that we make, no, this is what we do, this is how it always is."

Design for All Children

Only one participant reported providing separate library programs for children with disabilities or developmental delays. Crystal's library has held after-hours programs for families of children with special needs. Crystal provides a sensory storytime, marketed for all babies and toddlers, that consists of "fun quiet play time that is sensory focused." She found that this storytime "is a good one for bringing in kiddos with special needs to play with other kids." Rachel says her library had considered providing storytimes "specifically for children with disabilities or developmental delays but we have kind of moved away from that idea in the hopes that we can focus more on making it accessible and open and welcoming in the mainstream" storytime.

Becky sees her programming space as a way of making her programming inclusive. She explains that because her space is very open "we're not sort of confining them to the space and we try to make it clear for all parents that if they're bringing their young ones to a program, that they can come in and out of the program and we don't take that personally; we cater to various levels of neurodiversity," further explaining that "we want parents and caregivers to feel comfortable bringing them to the library—including to programming—so we try to make it clear that it's ok if the kids leave the programming space, and come back in, if they go back and forth." Lindsey says her programming space has a specific area where children can go to calm down if they are over-stimulated.

Rachel, Malorie, Crystal, and Becky agree they are mindful of providing multiple ways for children to engage in programming to account for ability and comfort level. Rachel keeps activities in her programs "very open ended, and that way they are manageable for kids who are right on track developmentally and they can also be challenging for those who have moved ahead a little bit, and good for those who are still not meeting developmental milestones."

In storytimes, Crystal adapts movement activities, noting, "I make sure to say 'and if you don't want to stand up to jump up and down with us, or whatever, you can bounce in your chair' and it's really cool to be able to do that in a way that doesn't call out kiddos with physical disabilities . . . just do what you can, we can modify this, we can make it good for everybody."

Participants also mentioned being flexible with ages allowed at programs to allow children of different development levels to attend the programs that best fit their needs. Malorie notes this flexibility is also convenient for families with differently aged children, allowing a family to come to one program that all their children are able to participate in.

One of the participants interviewed mentioned providing bilingual storytimes; Lindsey says other branches in her library system offer bilingual storytimes as well as single language storytimes held in languages other than English. Nicole's library system offers American Sign Language interpreters for any program, even virtual programs, as long as they are requested in advance. These were the only mentions of providing programming in a language other than English.

Remove Barriers

At most of the libraries, there was no cost for children's programming. Rachel's library also strives to make sure that activities presented in her programming are inexpensive or free so families can replicate the activity at home.

Becky's library does not require registration for any program because many families in her community lack access to the internet, making registration impossible. Becky feels that while not knowing how many library users may attend a program does make planning difficult, it is important to remove that barrier to participation. Another potential barrier was program timing. Malorie addresses this by offering programs on evenings and weekends as well as during the weekday to accommodate the varying caregiver work schedules.

As the pandemic paused in-person programming, many libraries offered virtual programs. This necessary move away from in-person programs has amplified the problem many families face—a lack of reliable internet access or internet capable devices. Becky's library created videos, and in addition to having those videos available to stream, the library also burned them to DVDs, allowing library users to watch the content offline. Those DVDs are one piece of a kit of activity materials distributed to caregivers.

Three participants reported distributing take-home kits with age-appropriate activities or crafts during pandemic library closures. Rachel's library saw kits as a way to get over the digital divide and allow all children to participate in programming. Nicole explains that her library felt there were two equity issues to overcome with programming during the pandemic—lack of computers or internet access and lack of materials to do crafts or science activities at home. They began distributing take-and-make kits with all the supplies needed for six different activities that did not require internet access. Becky's library began distributing kits to library users in June 2020 and had given out eight hundred kits within the first month, proving they were extremely popular.

Provide Programs beyond Storytime

All participants interviewed provide early childhood storytime programming. Other programming mentioned includes science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs, art programs, playtimes, and an educational series with hired presenters geared towards preschoolers.

Becky runs a program that is process art based.[20] She found that the relaxed structure and lack of focus on academic achievement that can exist in storytime programs made the program more accessible, resulting in higher attendance numbers and a more diverse attendance than her storytime programs. Lindsey also provides an art program, including a favorite watercolor program. Lindsey's library is in an urban environment, and the program was open to children and teens alike. Lindsey said, "In this community, it's a lot of violence, and sometimes the kids do need a space where they can destress and regulate their emotions . . . when we do programs like calming programs, watercoloring [*sic*] and crafting and having the kids be busy with their hands and minds, a lot of times they're really successful."

Two participants held library playtimes. Nicole brings out toys at the end of her educational program co-led with a hired presenter to let both children and caregivers socialize. Crystal has a playtime at the end of her family storytime and also sets up stations at the end of her kindergarten readiness storytime. At these stations children are "encouraged to choose which station they wanted to go to and then they were able to choose whether or not they wanted to play with the other children, if they wanted to stay with their family, do that parallel play, start trying their cooperative play, things like that. . . . It's really child led and I try to encourage things that get the kiddos to talk to each other because that emotional development is so important."

Acknowledge Challenges

Interview participants were asked what challenges they face in providing inclusive and diverse programming. Two participants reported feeling that families of children with developmental differences are uncomfortable coming to library programs. Rachel feels these families feel judged by other families present if their child does not behave like a typically developing child. Crystal, whose library holds after-hours programs for children with special needs, also thinks these "families tend to choose not to come to libraries because they're worried that their child will be too loud, or they won't be able to follow the rules, or they're worried about being a disturbance."

Crystal, Joy, and Becky felt that pushback against LGBTQIA+ programming, displays, or book choice in storytimes is one of their main challenges in providing diverse and inclusive programming. Joy stated that while there would be no problem at her library with featuring books containing LGBTQIA+ characters on a table display, they might face a problem if such a display were specifically labeled as a Pride Month Display.

Such a display would not be possible at Crystal's library since they have faced negative reactions from some conservative community members. Crystal and Joy's pushback on this topic is only from the community; however, Becky's library director is also unwilling to allow LGBTQIA+ programming or displays.

For Malorie, the biggest challenge is "an ongoing challenge of I don't think that inclusivity is ever . . . really a finish line, you know? It's just something that we're always striving for . . . the main challenge would be always keeping that in mind and always trying to come up with new ways to reach different people."

Discussion

All participants felt it was important to create early childhood library programming that is welcoming to all children and their families. Participants interpreted welcoming programming in many ways, but common to all interpretations was intentionality with book choice for storytime programs. Every participant said they make an effort to include books in their programming that feature characters from many different races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and family structures and try to both reflect their library users in their book choice, as well as introduce new cultures to them, practices which have been proven to be beneficial to children.[21] This finding is encouraging as Cahill et al. found in their recent study that very few diverse books were actually being read in storytimes in the United States.[22]

Some participants noted that including storytime books that include LGBTQIA+ characters was challenging, if not impossible, at their libraries. This troubling finding is in opposition to ALSC recommendations, which state that library staff serving children must counteract "systems of oppression, discrimination, and exclusion in the community" by providing "culturally aware services."[23]

As Barriage and colleagues note in their study of drag queen storytimes, "It is important to recognize that LGBTQ+

individuals reside in all types of communities, and they may be erased by those who perceive a lack of community support," real or imagined, for programs and displays that feature LGBTQIA+ experiences.[24] Such acts of internal and external censorship are detrimental to the overall mission of the library as an institution, including its commitment to intellectual freedom, in addition to the harm inflicted on LGBTQIA+ individuals and families within the library's community and beyond.[25]

Another facet of welcoming programming was ensuring programs were accessible to children of all abilities, both physical and developmental. Most participants stated that their spaces are ADA compliant, allowing for the programming spaces to be reached and navigated easily. Interview participants design their program activities to have multiple ways for children to engage so that children of any physical ability or developmental level have a way to participate and feel successful.

Most participants prefer this approach to programming, allowing all children to attend the same programs and interact with one another, rather than holding programs specifically for children with disabilities or developmental delays. A smaller number of participants felt that families preferred separate programming for children with developmental differences because they would feel more comfortable, but it is unclear if this was stated by a library user or if the interview participant inferred it.

In interviews with library staff and parents of children with disabilities, Prendergast found that parents of children with disabilities tended not to approach library staff to share how the library could best meet their needs or to learn how they could best be served by library programs.[26] It is possible, therefore, that there are families of children with developmental differences who would prefer to attend regularly scheduled programs, as well as similar families who prefer separate storytimes for their child. The challenge is finding a way for library staff to learn these preferences from families in their community.

Participants are offering open-ended art programs as well as play programs, both of which have less formal structure than a storytime. This is seen as more welcoming to families who are intimidated by the academic elements, whether real or imagined, of a storytime program. These programs make it easier for typically developing children and children with differences to interact because there is none of the sitting still and demonstration of abilities that can occur in a storytime. These programs also build children's skills, including social emotional and early literacy skills.[27]

While incorporating diverse experiences into library programming takes many forms, participants felt that they will always be working towards this goal; as Malorie stated, it does not have a finish line, but rather, is something to always strive for by learning and listening. Conversation with library users—whether in the library, the community, or online—is a vital way participants learn what their community wants from early childhood programming, allowing them to create programs that library users want to attend.

"I don't think that inclusivity is ever . . . really a finish line, you know? It's just something that we're always striving for . . . the main challenge would be always keeping that in mind and always trying to come up with new ways to reach different people."

Conversation and active listening also ensures that those creating library programs hear when they have made a mistake or offended someone and allows them a chance to learn and grow. Many participants wish they had access to more professional development and training that specifically addresses topics of incorporating diversity and accessibility into children's library programs.

Based on this study and the existing literature, library staff value incorporating all forms of diversity into their programs for early childhood, but they would like more professional support as well. Knowing who is in the community and what they would like from library programs is one way that library staff can achieve this goal.

Direct conversation with families in the community who have children in this age group is an important way to make sure that programs are welcoming and meet community needs. There are often barriers to having these conversations, as it is hard to find situations where these conversations can occur. Informal programs such as open-ended art programs and play-based programs are ways to bring more library users in general to library programs, and a more diverse group of library users specifically. These programs allow for natural conversation between library staff and caregivers, giving library staff the opportunity to learn about their community and for community members to learn what the library can offer their children.

EDI Recommendations

As library staff may face challenges in providing inclusive programming in their own libraries similar to those described by the participants in this study, the authors reached out to members of ALSC's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Task Force for their recommendations.

Consistent with prior literature related to diversity in children's literature used in library storytimes,[28] ALSC's EDI Task Force emphasized the need to incorporate books that feature diversity of all kinds. One member said, "During any given storytime, 80% of the stories selected for read aloud should feature visible diversity or explicitly named invisible diversity."[29] Importantly, this guideline applies to all storytimes, not just those that are focused on themes or events such as "holidays or awareness months."[30] As Naidoo notes, "by including diverse material in regular programming, all families are included in routine programs and their experiences are normalized."[31]

However, as the task force emphasized, the use of diverse books alone is not sufficient—how these books are incorporated and used in storytime is also key. As one member stated, "Yes, it's critical to highlight own voices, diverse characters and settings but what if the presenter is including their own bias while reading? What if the way they are talking about the characters or culture/lifestyle/religion is othering? It's not enough to read diverse books, storytellers need to be able to present these books with empathy, prompting opportunities for connection and stimulating curiosity about the lived experience of others in [an] open-minded way."[32]

Notably, books are not the only materials that can be used to create a more inclusive programming experience. For example, storytimes can incorporate diversity into other elements of the program, such as songs, crafts, props, and other activities.[33] This can also extend beyond storytimes; as one member of ALSC's EDI Task Force noted, "Library spaces can also include physical representations of ethnic diversity through the toys, games, puzzles, and dolls they incorporate into play times."[34]

Several participants in this study noted pushback they receive from the community and, in one case, their library director, in creating displays featuring books with LGBTQIA+ characters. One task force member offered the following recommendation to combat this pushback. "Instead of having a specific LGBTQ+ display that would not be approved by administration, create a display that says 'Celebrating Family' or another theme that will support highlighting books that feature diverse families and identities."[35]

Other strategies to combat negative reactions include ongoing education for library staff about the LGBTQIA+ community and their information needs, the development of policies and procedures related to challenges to the content of library programming and library collections, and the creation of toolkits or other resources for library staff to use in responding to such challenges.[36]

Community partnerships are another means of combatting some of the challenges library staff experience in providing inclusive children's programming. For example, a member of the ALSC EDI Task Force suggested that library staff could "reach out to local schools or special recreational associations for partnership opportunities" to provide programming that better meets the needs of children with developmental differences.[37] Partnerships with local youth and family-centered organizations such as community parenting groups, early childhood education organizations, and those who serve LGBTQIA+ children and families also offer an opportunity to create programming that serve various diverse groups.[38] Libraries could also create advisory boards consisting of "diverse members from the community to allow for community buy-in and to ensure cultural sensitivity of program materials and activities."[39]

Libraries could make major strides in creating inclusive environments by hiring and retaining an ethnically diverse staff that reflects the diversity of the communities they serve.

Importantly, the diversity of the field itself can pose challenges to providing truly inclusive library programming. As Vinopal notes, the professional library community as a whole is "starkly lacking in diversity based on race and ethnicity (we are overwhelmingly white), age (librarianship is an aging profession), disability, economic status, educational background, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other demographic and identity markers of difference."[40]

According to a member of the ALSC EDI Task Force, "Libraries could make major strides in creating inclusive environments by hiring and retaining an ethnically diverse staff that reflects the diversity of the communities they serve."[41]

Limitations

This is a small exploratory study, with only eight participants. Because the participants knew the interview would cover the topics of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, it is reasonable to assume that these issues are important to them and they may demonstrate more intentionality in these areas in their work practices than other library staff.

Because of these factors, these findings may not be transferable to children's library staff more generally. However, the participants were from a wide variety of communities and offered a wide variety of experiences, which suggests that their responses are a valuable cross section of library staff members' experiences.

Conclusion

Library staff who create early childhood programming have the goal of reaching and empowering as many children in their community as possible. Listening to and learning from their community, curating storytimes that reflect and honor the lived experiences of children in their community, seeking professional development that addresses diversity in all its forms, and branching out beyond storytimes in early childhood programming are ways that library staff are currently working towards this goal. By incorporating diversity into their programs in ways that affirm children and broaden their view of the world, library staff can create programs that fulfill the ALSC goal of creating "diverse programs for children."[42]

Being intentional about these practices will ensure that all aspects of a child's self are honored and valued in the library. Nothing is more welcoming than feeling valued in a space, and this feeling of welcome and inclusion is what library staff are always striving for in early childhood library programming. &

The authors thank Sophie Kenney, Ayn Reyes Frazee, and Kelly Smith from the ALSC Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Task Force for their helpful contributions to this paper.

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Just Ask about Diversity

A New Librarian Uses Books to Teach Empathy

STEPHANIE CONNER

As a beginning librarian and MLS student, the phrases "on-the-job-training" and "trial by fire" took on new meaning for me. There was so much I had to learn by doing.

Soon after starting my library science program at East Carolina University, I accepted a media coordinator position at Lillington-Shawtown (NC) Elementary School, a moderate-sized public school in a small rural county. The pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school had a population of about seven hundred students.

Learning by Doing

As a new librarian, I had to learn how to order and catalog books before I ever had a cataloging class or understood how to develop a collection. I am grateful for the help I received from peers and mentors in those early days.

As a new librarian, I also learned that diversity was a popular and important topic, especially when examining and building library collections. While it is important for students to be able to see themselves in the books they read, it is also essential to have books that negate negative stereotypes and promote positive aspects of various cultures, races, religions, and genders.

Diverse books also help students to identify uniqueness in individuals and to begin to understand how those differences shape each of us. The hope is that through reading diverse books, students will begin to celebrate individual uniqueness and develop compassion for others.

As I learned about evaluating library collections and diverse books, I wanted to ensure that our collection reflected our student population. I took a collection development class at ECU, in which I had to examine a variety of factors (like demographics, economics, student testing, and curriculum) in both the local community and the school community. I had to identify a few areas in my collection that were lacking or weak and make a plan to improve them.

In doing so, I planned to order more multicultural books based on our demographics, but I also found that our collection lacked books featuring characters with disabilities. Our

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school had a large Exceptional Children's (EC) population at that time, consisting of nine classes of students with varying disabilities. These nine classrooms of EC students made up almost twenty percent of our school population. When I searched our database for topics on disabilities or special needs, I found very few books that represented my students and what I did find was severely out of date.

When I started in the school library, most of the students I served were considered regular education students. I provided media classes and book checkout as part of the enhancement programs at our school.

Initially, I had very little contact with our EC students, as many of those teachers provided their own library instruction in their classrooms. Some of those EC students mainstreamed for enhancements, but generally there was limited interaction between them and their regular education peers.

Slowly, I began serving these EC classes in the library and getting to know the students and their teachers. Part of my mission became to help our students understand each other's differences and identify their similarities. But I wasn't quite sure how to begin.

There is an increasing number of picture books that illustrate inclusion.

A Lesson on Diversity

In one of my library science courses, I learned about various awards given to authors and illustrators of children's books, including the Schneider Family Book Award, which is given to authors and illustrators for excellence in depicting the disability experience for young readers.

One of the winners in this category was U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor's exceptional title *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*. In this book, a young Sonia discusses having juvenile diabetes and reminds readers that it's okay to ask questions if they don't understand something.

Throughout this story, Sonia's friends, who each have some sort of disability or challenge, explain what makes them different and unique. This book explains differences that the students may be familiar with like allergies, ADHD, and asthma. It also describes disabilities like blindness, deafness, and physical impairments, as well as other conditions such as Tourette's syndrome, autism, and Down syndrome. I decided to use this book to introduce my students to differences and disabilities.

This story became a launch pad for some very powerful conversations, providing a framework in which my students were able to identify differences, disabilities, and challenges in themselves and in others. They were able to see their own unique challenges as strengths, of which they were the experts. They shared from their own experiences instead of trying to hide them.

This lesson also helped some of my students to develop understanding and empathy for others who struggle with different challenges.

When I first shared the book with the kindergarten through second grade students, they liked the colorful and engaging pictures. After the story, as part of our discussion, many of them made connections with the boy in the story who was deaf because they knew about a first grade student at our school who was deaf. They were fascinated with how he communicates through sign language with his interpreter.

Students also connected with the concept of allergies (especially peanut allergies) and asthma. Multiple students shared that they dealt with one or both of these conditions and readily shared from their experiences. Some students also related to terms like ADHD and diabetes. Many commented that they had heard about diabetes because a parent or grandparent had it. There was still an abundance of questions about what it was and how people got it. One of the students shared with his classmates that he had juvenile diabetes like Sonia, and he was able to answer some questions about the machine that monitors his blood sugar. Some students had heard the term ADHD or were able to identify with it themselves. This group of students enjoyed the story and was able to make some personal associations with it.

The students in third through fifth grades had many more questions and made some very good correlations. Many of them openly shared about conditions that they had or knew about, while others freely asked questions about what they didn't understand. The most frequent comment made by students was about a family member who had diabetes, which prompted a discussion about the difference between adult diabetes and juvenile diabetes.

In different classes, multiple students identified themselves as having ADHD when it was brought up in the story. These students were not only able to identify with the characters from the story, but they were proud to share what they knew about it. This validated their experiences and provided an opportunity for their ADHD to be viewed in a positive light.

As the story was read, a third grade student shared all about his sister who has Down syndrome. He was so excited to see a character like her represented in the book and wanted to share how amazing his sister was. He raved about what made her unique and that he loved her so much. Other students also identified with characters in the book.

One student shared that she was shy and didn't like to share in class; she explained that her Tourette's syndrome was the reason she blinked a lot, repeated her words, and made noises. She received positive feedback from her classmates who previously didn't know about her condition. Overall, students felt comfortable enough to share their personal experiences. Some students were able to discuss their struggles with stuttering, autism, allergies, and dyslexia. For many of my students, this book validated them and helped them to understand that the things they struggle with are also the things that make them unique and an expert on their own experiences.

Most of the students were highly engaged and found something that they could share as part of our discussion. I was so proud of them for being so brave and willing to share their personal experiences. There were no negative comments or jokes made during this lesson. If there were students who were disinterested, they did not make it known. The students all found something to connect to in this story.

Reading this story not only helped many of the students to understand themselves a little better, but it also assisted them in identifying some of the things that make others different and unique. I have seen some of these students develop a more compassionate and kind attitude toward those that are different than themselves. There appears to be more understanding and patience for EC students who mainstream into regular education classes. The regular education students see that EC students are kids just like them, but with different challenges.

I have also used the book *Rescue and Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship* by Jessica Kensky and Patrick Downes to help develop empathy and understanding of others. Like the story *Just Ask*, *Rescue and Jessica* is a true story written from the perspective of a young girl. Jessica had an injury that required partial amputation of both of her legs. She had to learn to walk again using prosthetic legs. During this time, Rescue, a service dog, is being trained to help her. This book deals not only with the physical challenges that Jessica faced, but it also beautifully depicted the range of emotions that accompanied her loss, struggle, hope, and eventual joy after her accident.

Recommended Reading

Arnold, Elana. *A Boy Called Bat*. New York: Walden Pond Press, 2018.

Davis, Bela. *Every Day Sign Language Series*. Minneapolis, MN: Abdo Kids Junior, 2021.

Harrington, Claudia. *My Special Needs Family*. New York: Looking Glass Library, 2017.

Kensky, Jessica and Downes, Patrick. *Rescue and Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2018.

Palmer, Erin. *Katie Can: A Story about Special Needs*. Vero Beach, FL: Rourke Educational Media, 2018.

Reid, C.L. *Emma Every Day Series*. North Mankato, MN: Capstone, 2020.

Sotomayor, Sonia. *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You*. New York: Philomel, 2019.

This story demonstrates the struggles of change and explores the friendship that Jessica builds with Rescue. Through this story and our discussion, the students again were able to empathize with Jessica and her struggles, as well as gain a better understanding of the purpose and use of service dogs.

As a result of these lessons and the reaction of the students, I have purchased additional and varied titles that depict a range of disabilities and differences.

Overall, there have been positive interactions between our regular education students and EC students, especially with the students who are mainstreamed. There is still much more work to do in building relationships between students and helping them to understand individual differences are what make us unique, but the foundation has been set.

I look forward to building bridges between the students in our school, continuing to populate our school library with books that focus on disability as a vital component of diversity, and utilizing books to build empathy in our students. &

PEER-REVIEWED

Representation Matters

Board Books with Children with Disabilities

ALLISON G. KAPLAN, CAITLIN TOBIN, TINA DOLCETTI, AND JENNIFER MCGOWAN

Diversity is an important part of children's literature as demonstrated in numerous articles beginning with Nancy Larrick in 1965 and most recently codified in the We Need Diverse Books movement.[1] However, while diversity has the aim of inclusion, disability representation has not always been part of the equation.

The goal of this study is to explore the evidence of disability representation in children's literature with a focus on board books through the examination of one library collection. Our team selected board books because we had access to a finite collection we could explore in its totality, and we expected that, due to the nature of board books being explicit in representation, we would be able to easily identify disability representation.

Our aim in conducting this research is to add to the scholarly literature by analyzing and reporting upon the various types of disability representation in board books. Given that the total number of unique titles in that collection was 1,143, we were able to conduct an audit of the entire collection. Each book was examined for types of character representation (i.e., human, animal, inanimate), ethnicity representation, and disability representation. From this collection, we found evidence of disability representation, but mostly through the inclusion of children and adults wearing eyeglasses. Additionally, we identified a few publishers and specific titles that may be helpful in collection development with respect to inclusion of disabilities.

Why Moose Jaw Public Library?

Our sample was the board book collection located in the Moose Jaw Public Library (MJPL), Saskatchewan, Canada. MJPL serves a wide demographic of library customers and works in partnership with a variety of inclusion-oriented




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community-based organizations, including the Early Childhood Intervention Protocol, Inclusion Saskatchewan, Moose Jaw Family Services, and the Early Childhood Coalition of Moose Jaw. In striving to meet the needs of these organizations, MJPL aspires to ensure that all of its collections meet the broadest definition of diversity.

The MJPL makes a targeted effort to purchase diverse materials for its collection. In addition to reviewing library media journals and using standing orders, they purchase materials by recognized educators and advocates, and harness the power of two Canadian national institutions dedicated to equitable library access: the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) and the National Network for Equitable Library Services (NNELS).

In 2019, MJPL received the CELA Accessibility Award in recognition of the efforts of the children's department toward providing equitable access to reading materials and programs to children during summer vacation. This included marketing and including inclusive books in programs, adapting programs to benefit all children, and making books accessible to all children.

Also in 2019, MJPL partnered with Moose Jaw Soccer to create an accessible soccer environment for all children, including those with autism. Additionally, in 2022, MJPL will be a pilot site for the Saskatchewan Integrated Library System collection of dyslexia-friendly books.

Finally, there is the librarian in charge of the children's collection. Tina Dolcetti, children's librarian at MJPL, has several years of experience working in the overlapping fields of community inclusion and disability as a mentor for Inclusion Saskatchewan and peer supporter for the Canadian Mental Health Association. Dolcetti was an advisory board member for Project PALS, an online training hub regarding autism and libraries, created by the University of Florida.

As a result of that work, Dolcetti was invited to participate and contribute to the Targeting Autism forums offered through the Illinois State Library and to participate on the Taking on Autism panel at the American Library Association Annual Conference in 2017. Dolcetti also served as an advisor for Project Enable, a free course for librarians to improve disability awareness and service to their disability community, through the University of Syracuse.

Dolcetti's personal expertise, along with the emphasis on inclusion and accessibility across the library, resulted in the MJPL maintaining a widely diverse collection of inclusive and accessible books making this collection perfect for this study.

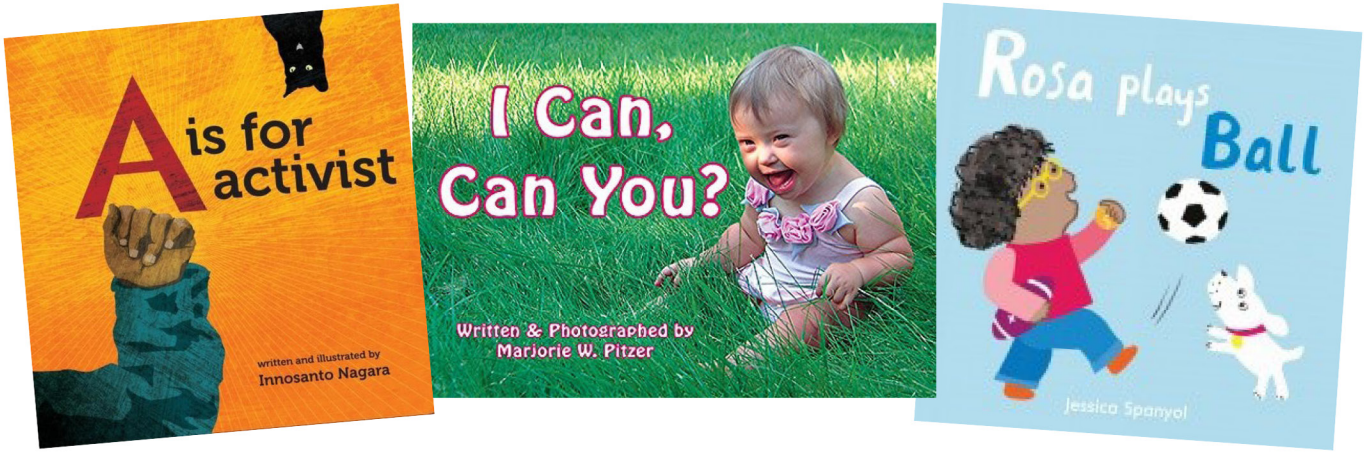
Literature Review

To begin our discussion of why diversity audits matter at all, we must start with Rudine Sims Bishop's essay "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors" as a landmark article on diversity in children's literature.[2] In her essay, Sims Bishop states that it is important for children to see themselves being represented in the literature they are reading. Additionally, it is also increasingly important for children to see people who are different from themselves in literature, as it attempts to break stereotypes and expand the child's world view.

Schwartz touches on this topic as well, recognizing the impact that literature can have on children. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education, is quoted in Schwartz's article as saying, "the white child gets all kinds of mirrors of the self in literature. . . . Whereas other children only get a very narrow slice of that history."[3]

In a study more directly related to the focus of our work, Hughes-Hassell and Cox examine this idea of seeing the self-mirrored in board books, as those are often a child's first exposure to aspects of society that are not immediately accessible to them in their current environment. Furthermore, board books may have an early effect on a child's self-esteem and self-image.[4]

Looking at disability representation is important because children with disabilities need to see themselves in the books they



read, and able-bodied children need to see those who do not look like themselves in positions of equality. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has been collecting diversity statistics since 1985 and today is considered a leader in collecting, analyzing, and reporting diversity trends in youth books publishing.[5] Statistics collected by the CCBC show evidence of a slow but steady increase in diversity representations in children's literature.

For example, books about Black children numbered just eighteen out of 2,500 titles (less than one percent) in 1985 but, in 2019, that number rose to 471 out of 4,035 titles (about 12%).[6] Still a small percentage of the total publications when considering the size of the population, but encouraging evidence of an increase.

The CCBC did not start tracking representation of children with disabilities until 2018. In their report for 2019 publications, they counted 126 titles (about 3.4%) that included some representation of disabilities.[7] Supporting this statement of disparity, in an examination of Newbery Award winners from 1975-2009, Leininger and colleagues examined how the winning titles portrayed disability in which the authors found that "the representation of Newbery characters with disabilities is not proportionate to the [2010] U.S. population of students with disabilities."[8] None of the these statistics is specific to disability representation in board books; however, from these numbers we can see that overall there is little disability representation.

Consider also that the statistics collected by the CCBC count only occurrence or no occurrence of disabilities, not the quality of representation. This corroborates earlier studies of representation of people with disabilities in picture books. Importantly, some studies do go beyond noting the occurrence of disabilities. Kleekamp and Zapata, for example, provide four questions to be asked when considering the quality of the portrayal of a character with disabilities because the mere existence of a character with disabilities is not enough to count as being inclusive, noting that these books "often benevolently perpetuate deficit narratives of characters worth pitying by positioning characters with disabled bodies as mascots or characters with disabled minds as class pets. It is not uncommon to encounter characters with disabilities who appear to lack agency or are victimized by other, "able" characters."[9]

Kleekamp and Zapata present the following issues to look for when evaluating a picture book for appropriate representation in an audit, including

- if a character is multi-dimensional,
- able to speak for themselves,
- given agency, and
- has mutually beneficial relationships with other characters.[10]

These four characteristics ensure that representation of children with disabilities is not only present, but has a positive impact on children both disabled and able-bodied.

Furthermore, educators and librarians alike recognize the need for more books that represent children with disabilities, but they do not know where to find them. Cockcroft states that "81 percent [of school and public librarians] consider it 'very important' to have diverse books in their collections, including titles about disability."[11] But, few of them have found good ways to add substantial amounts of representation to their collections, and when the books are included in review journals, they may be deemed to include poor portrayals of disability.

Reported in this article, one librarian asserted that even if a book has a character in a wheelchair, the surroundings may look inaccessible, which may not present an accurate depiction of the disability experience. Additionally, the books that do exist are often biographies and tend to be of historical or other public figures.[12]

Overall, representation is on the rise, but in comparison to the rest of the diversity seen in current picture books, it has a long way to go. Matthew and Clow, in particular, note that the few books published about disabilities are from smaller publishing houses often in conjunction with focused organizations and include this quote from a librarian, "It would just be so much easier if mainstream books came out with images that reflected the real world."[13]

Often discussions about inclusion of children with disabilities in a public library setting revolve around only the issue of physical inclusion. Universal design, accessible materials, and the physical environment are all important, as indicated in a study conducted by Kaeding, Velasquez, and Price.[14] However, beyond having an accessible library building, inclusion also means having representation of people with disabilities in the materials available to patrons.

Kaeding, Velasquez, and Price discuss the change a ramp or audiobook collection can make for a patron and also mention the need for more research on the development of collections to meet community needs.[15] These studies of picture books influenced our decision to focus on disability inclusion in the board book collection as a way of furthering the professional literature.

Research Methodology

Our audit focuses on the board book collection of 1,143 titles at the MJPL. The board book collection was chosen as its size was manageable for a full audit and the library had an intentional emphasis on disabilities and accessibility. After a full audit was completed (described below), we then chose a smaller subsection of books that dealt only with human characters, which resulted in a collection of 447 books.

Diversity audits are a relatively new trend in librarianship in which the aim is to assess selected diversity qualities within a collection to discover trends and gaps that need to be addressed. Additionally, audits may connect the library's internal collection to the wider context of society and trends within the publishing world, that is, is there an actual gap in the collection or does the publication simply not exist? In general, studies about conducting diversity audits focus mostly on the process of conducting the audit and what to do with the results of the audit.[16] One example of an audit that focuses on societal trends is provided in Stone's audit of a theatrical plays collection in the University of California, Irvine (UCI) Libraries. In this research, Stone discovered that the collection in the study did not adequately reflect the breadth of works that were being published. Although Stone found that diverse playwrights were being published, whether they were being bought by UCI Libraries and therefore available to be read by their patrons was another story entirely.[17]

The goal of our audit and study is similar to Stone's in that our interests were both to evaluate if the MJPL's collection accurately reflected the societal and community needs to have access to books with disability representation (that is, had the titles in its collection) and also to learn if there were appropriate publications to add to the collection.

Some diversity audits in the literature have indeed included disability as a category of consideration but not to the degree required to truly reflect the full spectrum of disabilities. Reporting on an audit of a public library in Illinois, Mortensen included disability as a factor in the examination of literature used in youth storytimes, adult screening, and adult book discussions. In examining the literature used in these programs, Mortensen's evaluation for inclusion was a binary decision: "disabilities" was or was not present. Mortensen's audit is representative of how disability is frequently recorded in audits, that is, one-dimensional, and not the primary concern of the audit.[18]

While other identity markers such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and religion are segregated into separate sub-categories to represent their rightful complexity, "disability" tends to remain unidimensional. The category of "disability" is as complex as other identity markers and should include cognitive, physical, sensory, and other forms of disability. Our audit seeks to address this gap in the literature that sees disability as a singular subject, and delves into the complex issues and categories that affect representation in board books.

Having investigated methods for conducting audits and opting to audit the full collection at hand, we turned to investigating methods of conducting diversity studies. As a book examination site that receives most children's books published in the U.S. in any given year, the CCBC keeps diversity statistics of all of the publications it receives.

Over the years, the criteria for evaluation have evolved. For example, Pacific Islander was added as a separate category in 2019, prior to that year, the category had been "Asian/Pacific." As stated previously, disability was not included as a central category in their statistics until 2018.[19] As the CCBC continues to collect diversity data and as other institutions are conducting diversity audits, data about percentages of diverse main characters are revealing increases in the diversity of characters in children's literature. When institutions share their audit data, it allows our profession to evaluate issues of diversity in a more quantitative manner.

Drawing on resources from audits done on race, gender, sexuality, and other identity-groups (as described above), and based on the expertise of the MJPL librarian, our team developed several different categories to represent the different aspects of disability, along with other categories that would assist in statistical data analysis after the audit was completed. Due to the nature of board books, that is, short, simple story lines that allow for minimal descriptions, we relied mostly on illustrations and photographs as evidence of presence or non-presence of a given disability. We are well aware that quantity does not equal quality. In disability representation, stereotypes can still be present and harmful even though those characters are being depicted. If we were examining more complex books such as picture books or early readers, we would have included quality of representation in addition to presence.

To address the complexity of disability, we used the following headings: *physical disability*, *neurodiversity*, *sensory disability*, and *mental illness*. We also included *mobility aid used*, to indicate a wheelchair, walker, ankle-foot orthoses (AFOs), or other mobility devices; *sensory aid used*, to indicate a cane, guide dog, or other device used to assist the senses; and *hearing aids used*. Furthermore, we added information to help contextualize the book in a larger context, such as author and character identity. Focusing on the author, we investigated if the author is an *#ownvoices* author, or if the author is a medical specialist.

At the time of the study, #ownvoices was an appropriate category of study to note that the author shared experiences with at least some of the characters portrayed in the book, e.g., race, disability, etc., which can be important but is not necessarily a check on the quality of the illustrations or text. We recognize the shift away from that phrase but as it was included in our study at the time, we maintained the heading.[20]

We noted if the author was a medical specialist as an indicator of an author with specialized knowledge; again, not as an indicator of the quality of text or illustrations. Due to the trend of a high percentage of animal and non-human characters in children's literature, we also noted if the main character was *human*, *animal*, or an *inanimate object*. In our collection, more than half of the board books were animal or inanimate objects. Finally, we created a category for *publisher* as we were curious to see whether certain publishing houses were more likely to publish books containing disability representation than others. In conducting this audit, whenever possible the

physical item was examined, however, due to the pandemic and restrictions on in-person research, books from the collection were also examined via YouTube read-aloud recordings and the Epic! reading application for tablets (https://getepic.com). The team met frequently to discuss findings and review any questions about representation to ensure we all agreed on the representation we were recording.

Results

From the collection of 1,143 titles, we found 447 books that dealt with human characters and of those, eighty-seven of the titles included disability representation. Of those titles, six titles included characters who used mobility devices (wheelchair, leg braces, walker), one used an auditory device, seven had Down syndrome, forty-eight used vision aids (mostly eyeglasses), and twenty-five displayed a mix of more than one type of disability (most often eyeglasses plus some other disability).

Mental illness, although included as a category in our study, was not evident in the collection. Physical disabilities were much more prevalent in our board books with disability representation. Our hypothesis for this is that, due to their visual nature, these disabilities are easier to convey through simple images than other types of developmental or cognitive disabilities. Drawings of wheelchairs, crutches, eyeglasses, and hearing aids can be easily conveyed in board books in which words are either minimal or nonexistent. Anxiety, depression, autism, and other similar conditions are not as easily portrayed in pictures and therefore are not easily included in the board book format.

The count of forty-eight titles that included an occurrence of eyeglasses as a physical disability required further investigation on our part. Anecdotally speaking, we are aware that many people have corrected vision, including all four of the researchers, and so the fact that more than half of the books we examined also included characters with corrected vision was so expected that we almost didn't include eyeglasses in our analysis.

However, upon further investigation, we found that most of the titles that included eyeglasses, used that as an indication of age. This was interesting to us because the use of other disability indicators (mobility devices and hearing devices) was applied mostly to child characters. But with eyeglasses, about 80% of the incidences of eyeglasses indicated an older person. Further, all of the titles that included multiple types of disabilities, with the exception of one title, included eyeglasses plus another disability.

Although we found that in this collection, eyeglasses were more often used to mark an older person, there were notable occurrences of young children with eyeglasses. Jessica Spanyol's "Rosa" series is especially notable in this case, as Rosa, a toddler, is depicted with eyeglasses in a playful, bright yellow frame. Providing eyeglasses representation on child characters in board books can help affirm and empower the youngest eyeglasses wearers that they are not alone and help non-eyeglasses wearers see these children in equitable situations.

Comparing the number of titles with disability representation to the total board book collection, we find that about 7% of the MJPL board book collection is inclusive of disabilities. That number, however, includes the instances of eyeglasses worn by adults only. If we subtract the thirty-two titles that only included adults wearing eyeglasses and no other disability, we end up with 55 titles, or not quite 5% of disability representation in the MJPL board book collection. Is that a number that is representative of the community MJPL wishes to reflect?

According to the CCBC, in 2019 3.4% of the total books received that year had primary characters with disabilities.[21] If we consider that we are looking only at board books in the MJPL collection, then we could say that our number of 5% representation does not look too bad. But the comparison is not quite equal in that we counted any representation, not just primary characters because in board books, the story often does not require a primary character.

Additionally, the CCBC number is derived from all of the books they received, not just board books and applies only to books published in 2019 whereas our collection covers many more publication years. Ultimately, only the librarian and the community members can say whether having 5% children with disabilities representation in their board book collection meets the community needs or not.

Since the focus of our study was on diversity and inclusion, it was important to also measure disability along with instances of other diversity issues to assess if the collection was generally inclusive or not. We found that within the MJPL board book collection of books with human characters (as opposed to animals or inanimate objects): 72.9% of characters were assumed white, followed by 49.8% having brown skin, 30.4% identified as Black or African, 19.6% identified as Asian, and 3.8% identified as Native American/First Nations. Happily, the numbers for the books with disability representation are not as lopsided. Importantly, very few of these titles were single representations, most of the books included mixed race and ethnicity representation. In fact, in the count of disability representation, only twelve titles contained assumed white only characters and seventy titles out of the eighty-seven titles with disability representation included multiracial representation. While this can be seen as an encouraging set of statistics, we were unable to identify with certainty any titles that included Black/African characters with disabilities and identified only two titles that were only "brown skin."[22] We are hoping this does not mean that illustrators are using "brown skin" tones merely for the sake of appearing to be multiracial or multiethnic, but rather that it is simply difficult to present sufficient detail in a board book to be explicit about racial or ethnic identity.

The Question of Publishers

We were also interested to see if there were publishers that either specialize in or include a number of disability representation titles in their catalogs. The collection we reviewed is, by the nature of most library collections, limited. Therefore, we cannot make any global statements about the publishing industry with respect to disability representation.

However, from investigating this collection that includes titles from over thirty different publishers, we have noted a few publishers that excel in quality representation of children with disabilities. For librarians, teachers, and other adults looking to expand their collections with disability representation, we suggest examining the catalogs of Child's Play and Woodbine House.

Without being an advertisement, we cannot help but highlight one publisher in particular that published books demonstrating an authentic presentation of inclusion—Child's Play (United Kingdom). As stated on their website, their publications focus on "whole child development, focused play, life skills, and values. . . . [Publishing] books that fully reflect our diverse society in terms of heritage, disability, gender, and family."[23]

True to their focus on inclusion and accessibility, the website itself can be viewed as text only or with high visibility. Out of the eighty-seven titles containing humans with disabilities examined in our study, twenty-two titles were published by Child's Play. Further, all but three of those titles were racially diverse.

One author in particular, Jessica Spanyol, has a series featuring a character called Rosa, who wears eyeglasses and whose skin color is clearly not white, although a specific race or ethnicity is never stated. As discussed earlier, having a young child, the main character in this case, wearing eyeglasses is empowering for young eyeglasses-wearers and raises awareness for all children. Additionally, one of the recurring supporting characters is Samira, who is in a wheelchair and who fully participates in activities with accurate illustrations of a child in a wheelchair.

Another one of Spanyol's series titles is the Clive series. Although Clive himself is assumed white and does not overtly exhibit any disability, one recurring character named Anisa wears a leg brace and another recurring character, Asif, wears eyeglasses and has brown skin color. As for Clive, he engages in many roles traditionally associated with female nurturing family roles, such as taking care of babies, and professions, such as being a librarian or a nurse, which provide positive portrayals of expanding traditional sex roles. A bonus factor is that the text for both the Rosa and Clive series is printed in dyslexia-friendly fonts. Additionally, many of these titles are also available in Spanish.

Another author to highlight is Annie Kubler whose book, *Zoom Zoom Zoom*!, is an excellent, albeit not perfect, example of inclusion and diversity. The child characters are identifiable as white, Asian, and Black/African and the disabilities are portrayed through the inclusion of a Black/African child in a wheelchair, another with an eye patch, an assumed white child with a hearing aid, and an Asian child and white child wearing eyeglasses. The last page of the book shows the Black/African child in a modified wheelchair that looks like a rocket ship, which is a very powerful and empowering image. While the font is not dyslexia-friendly, it is accessible in that there are no serifs on the letters. Our only issue with this book about children going to the moon is that they all present male and since this is a rocket-based book, it is unfortunate that no female-presenting characters are included.

Because these books are not only inclusive and diverse, but are also engaging and well-written, it is little wonder that there are so many Child's Play books in the MJPL collection. The Child's Play company is located in England and may not appear in United States-based catalogs but is worth investigating.

Woodbine House (Maryland) focuses on publications to specifically address disabilities, Down syndrome, and autism in particular, stating, "Our mission has grown to encompass publishing accessible, empowering books for families, teachers, and professionals who are seeking guidance and support in helping children and adults with any disability achieve their potential."[24] Their board books in particular illustrate children with Down syndrome and account for six of our eight books that include representation of children with Down syndrome (the other two are from Star Bright Books and Orca Book Publishers).

Two of the Woodbine authors highlighted in this collection are Marjorie W. Pitzer and Laura Ronay both of whom are documented specialists in child development. Sadly, this publisher went out of business, but books by Pitzer and Ronay are likely to be easily found in second-hand bookstores and book distributors. The closure of this specialized publishing house is a call for another publisher to step in to ensure this kind of representation.

One area of interest in our study was to discover if there were titles that were representative of disabilities but were not in the collection. This question was difficult to answer if for no other reason than there are a lot of board books published every year. We highlight here a very few publishers and titles but emphasize that this is not an exhaustive list and there are many publishers not presented here that are worthy of consideration.

In terms of a publisher that is already included in this collection, Child's Play, we recommend the addition of *What Can I Hear*? by Annie Kubler. Although the child characters in this book outwardly exhibiting disabilities are assumed white, there are three instances of disability representation including a child with an eye patch and eyeglasses, a child with a hearing aid, and a child with a cochlear implant. Another

Kubler title, *I'm a Little Teapot*, includes two assumed white children, one with a cochlear implant and one wearing eyeglasses. Kubler, like Spanyol, is adept at positively portraying children with disabilities in her books.

Triangle Square, a division of Seven Stories Press (New York), focuses on raising political awareness in young children.[25] Triangle Square creates board books including one title in the MJPL collection, *Counting on Community*, which includes representation of a non-white child in a wheelchair. This book is part of a series titled Little Activist Book Bundle, which includes two other books that are not currently in the collection: *A Is for Activist* and *Together*. *A Is for Activist* shows eyeglasses, limb differences, and a wheelchair, and *Together* also shows eyeglasses, as well as a wheelchair. As a series, these titles demonstrate good examples of inclusion and diversity.

The third publisher to highlight is Free Spirit Publishing (Minnesota), mentioned here less for disability representation and more for the dedication of the company to supporting social and emotional development in children and teens. As stated on their website, their mission is, "to provide children and teens—and the adults who care for and about them—with the tools they need to think for themselves, overcome challenges, and make a difference in the world . . . and to support them in developing their talents, building resiliency, and fostering a positive outlook on life, so they can reach their full potential . . . [and] to offer accessible, contemporary books that help young people develop socially, emotionally, and intellectually."[26]

The four Free Spirit books in the MJPL collection are racially and ethnically diverse but display only older people wearing eyeglasses. Nevertheless, the themes of the books both within the collection and available from the publisher can be empowering to young children as they grow and develop including a series of board books the publisher lists as their "mental health board book collection," which includes titles such as *Calm Down Time*, *Bye-bye Time*, and *Worries Are Not Forever*.

Our final example of a publisher worth further consideration is Charlesbridge (Massachusetts), specifically the series by Ruth Spiro, "Baby Loves the Five Senses."[27] The MJPL collection holds one of the titles, *Baby Loves Touch!*; however that title does not include disability representation. We recommend the librarian also add *Baby Loves Hearing!* and *Baby Loves Sight!* to their collection. These two titles showed not only images, but also text referencing disabilities. For example, in *Baby Loves Hearing!*, both a hearing aid and cochlear implant were clearly shown, and each adaptive device was explained.

Additionally, it showed that some people were deaf and unable to hear at all. In this case, the correct American Sign Language signs for "play" and "yes" were shown, with directional guidance. In *Sight*, eyeglasses were shown, and people without the ability to see were also mentioned. In addition, there was a depiction of a low vision child using braille to read a book.

One publisher not represented in the collection is MVP Kids (Arizona). MVP Kids is very intentional in incorporating disability representation in its books for young children covering topics from feelings to holidays to professions.[28] In their board books, a recurring cast of characters display an array of races and ethnicities as well as various disabilities including one non-white character depicted with a cochlear implant. There are numerous examples of eyeglasses and quite a few examples of mobility devices including use of a walker. What makes this instance almost unique is the fact that the child character (rather than an older adult) is using the walker. Seeing a child use this device can really resonate with children who use walkers. There was also a wheelchair used in this series, which is not in itself an unusual representation of disability, but in this case the wheelchair was used for a doll that a child was playing with, indicating that a wheelchair can be inclusive of a normal part of life, not something that is on the fringes of society.

As good as this company is in providing examples of complete inclusion and diversity, we have some concerns. We are uneasy with the *Celebrate! Thanksgiving* book, published in 2017, that still has the children celebrating the Pilgrims and traditional themes. As it is a recent publication, this depiction was disturbing to us. Additionally, it is difficult to find information about the company itself. It appears that all publications are created in-house and the books are created as curriculum, which sometimes results in didactic and heavy-handed text. Still, the inclusion represented in these books makes these titles, at least on an individual basis if not the full series, worth investigating.

After we finished our analysis of the board book collection, Dolcetti made us aware of a few additional board books in the library that are not cataloged and shelved as part of the board book collection. Those books were two titles in braille and five titles presenting sign language. In discussing if these books should be included in the study or not, we opted not to include them for two reasons. First, the braille books were not designed for inclusion but rather as special books, in a sense, translations of other published books and thus the reason they were shelved in a special braille section even though they were board books. While, again, we opted not to include these books, librarians and educators may want to include them in their collections to meet community needs or to introduce braille to neuro-typical community members. We would like to point out that the National Braille Press has children's books translated into braille.[29]

Second, the five sign language books were in the language section but Dolcetti remarked that the books were rather old and unappealing and she would look for more current publications. This did, however, bring up the issue of baby sign language books, one of which is in the board book collection, but we opted not to count the title as a disability representation because this book and indeed most of the baby sign language

books are created as a tool for hearing parents to teach their hearing babies how to communicate before those babies have speech skills.[30] Additionally, these books are not universally embraced in the Deaf community, making us uncomfortable in including them in our analysis.[31]

Conclusion

Results from our audit of the MJPL board book collection illustrate that there is representation of children with disabilities within the collection. While we may not be happy with the extent of the collection, at least we can say that the library is working toward inclusive representation. We were impressed with the books from the Child's Play family of publishers within the collection, although the library could add more titles from that publisher.

In terms of disability representation in board books in general, from our sample, we are encouraged that the diversity movement is more inclusive of disability representation although we have a sense that there is still a long way to go for complete representation. The next step would be to conduct a similarly thorough examination of a picture book collection. Picture books, by virtue of more detailed illustrations and complex text, have more space to depict disabilities that are not as easily represented in board books. Knowing which publishers support positive representation of people with disabilities may help individuals in libraries, early childhood centers, or at home to develop more inclusive collections. &

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PEER-REVIEWED

Shy, Not Anti-Social

How to Include and Represent Shy Children in the Library

EILEEN CHEN

Shyness in children is a phenomenon often overlooked as a trait that every child will "grow out of" or stigmatized as an emotional or behavioral anomaly, by caregivers as well as teachers. Yet, academic research on supporting shy children in the context of library youth services is scarce.

Unlike social anxiety or introversion, shyness is a lay term that is more difficult to pinpoint, yet inherently meaningful. Asendorpf defines the term broadly as, "various forms of modest, reserved, wary, inhibited, anxious, or withdrawn behaviors in social situations."[1] While this may serve as a functioning umbrella for a variety of behaviors, not all children who identify as being shy exemplify all of these behaviors.

Several scholars, such as Xu, Stacy, and Krieg, have proposed narrowing this definition into further subcategories: "shyness towards strangers" (reticent in novel social situations), "anxious shyness" (anxious about social perceptions), and "regulated shyness" (acting reserved as a conscious choice). In North America, shyness is often associated with the first two categories, and considered to be detrimental to personal growth.[2] Yet, in East Asian cultures such as Chinese and Japanese cultures, shyness is often associated with positive traits such as self-control, maturity, and social harmony.[3]

Unsurprisingly, Chinese children are also far less likely to see shyness as a permanent, immutable trait than American children.[4] In several Indigenous cultures across North America as well, such as the Cree, Inuit, and Yup'ik, social inhibition is considered to be both normative and desirable as a sign of adaptiveness.[5] On top of the already daunting task of integration with the dominant culture in a North American school, these shy children of different cultural backgrounds are often forced to participate in social contexts in which their shyness is neither understood nor supported by adults.

Apart from regulated shyness supported by certain cultures, shyness towards strangers and anxious shyness can also be explained by a variety of complex background factors. Plomin and Daniels presented a strong case for a genetic basis for shyness by reviewing several longitudinal twin studies, demonstrating that twins can each grow up to be shy even when raised in different households.[6] Evans et al. found that shyness, as well as antisocial/aggressive behaviors were possible results of authoritarian parenting with poor efficacy,[7] and Eapen et al. discovered further predictors for childhood shyness: low family sociability and maternal social anxiety.[8]

While these findings have a risk of leading to overly generalized assumptions about both shy children and their familial backgrounds, they shed light on the fact that shyness can be deeply embedded in the social and hereditary contexts that foster a child.

Shy Children in Collective Learning Environments

Many studies have found correlations between shyness and inhibited self-expression, lower academic performance, and reduced social acceptance at school.[9] While recent studies have argued that any academic disadvantages are largely overcome after preschool and early elementary school years,[10] the social

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consequences of shyness in a North American society that values confidence and achievement can still be significant. Furthermore, extreme cases of shyness towards strangers and anxious shyness are often tied to low self-esteem, and can be a risk factor for depression and social anxiety.[11]

Unfortunately, some studies have shown that many teachers and caregivers are poor at identifying signs of shyness, and hold prejudices against shyness in the classroom. A pertinent study by Spooner, Evans, and Santos found that one-third of middle-grade children who self-identified as "shy" were misidentified by their parents and teachers as "non-shy."[12] Moreover, those who are identified by their teachers as shy are often mentally flagged by teachers as being less intelligent and having poorer academic performance.[13]

Even well-intentioned teachers who lower their demands on shy children in an attempt to reduce anxiety can be doing more harm than good. Nyborg et al. found that instead of helping shy children feel included among their peers in oral activities, teachers often gave shy students obvious hints to answers to save them from embarrassing themselves publicly.[14] This approach, however benign, may lead to passive reliance on authority figures, as well as heightened self-consciousness in more sensitive children.

Implications and Recommendations for Youth Librarians

Even though public libraries are already perceived by many children and caregivers as a less formalized environment for learning and play, a shy child may not hold the same view, and may feel stressed by the mere idea of speaking to library staff, let alone participating in a youth program. The easiest and most fundamental step to helping shy children feel welcome is to be empathetic towards the challenges they may face, without singling them out of a group with overt special treatment.

Like all children of diverse needs, shy children would benefit from the practice of inclusive literacy, which focuses on harboring a sense of community and delivering dynamic programming that considers each individual's needs.[15] Instead of forcing stranger-shy and anxious-shy children to confront their fears, it is perhaps more conducive to help them see friends in place of strangers and alien social groups.

According to Crozier, teachers can show support to shy students by fostering an "environment that emphasizes acceptance, encouragement, and praise."[16] Nyborg et al. suggest that instead of simplifying oral activities for shy children, teachers can lower the stakes by making group activities playful.[17] Both of these suggestions can easily be transferred to a library youth programming context, in which children learn and play alongside their peers without the pressure of being graded.

As well, Rosheim proposes the use of alternative approaches to oral reflection and communication, such as writing, drawing, and using digital tools.[18] While it is healthy to give shy children chances to practice speaking up in a safe and low-stake setting, it can also be greatly helpful to incorporate other modes of expression into a youth program. This will not only help shy children build confidence, but improve multimedia literacy in all children involved.

In regards to examples from more specific programming, Lee found that participating in speaking activities with other players in the immersive online game Second Life helped improve self-expression in fifth grade Korean children.[19] This progress was especially prominent in children who had previously been identified as shy, which Lee attributed to online anonymity and the approach of "learning by doing."

Meanwhile, a more traditional program developed by Harris and Brown found that one-on-one cognitive behavioral modification sessions reduced shy children's fears of socializing and public speaking.[20] Although it would be difficult to emulate both of these programs in a public library, and somewhat contrary to the philosophy of inclusive literacy to implement the latter, both of these studies provide relevant insights on programming for shy children. Youth librarians may investigate ways to create an online community linked to their programming for children to explore at home, and may also find it useful to introduce practices of mindfulness into their programs.

For example, many youth librarians have been holding storytime sessions and book clubs through Zoom or similar online meeting platforms since the COVID-19 pandemic. Pointing out that the chat box is an option for communicating, as well as allowing participants to join with their cameras off, can send an encouraging message to shy children who are hesitant about participating in live programming. Whether online or in-person, establishing a check-in ritual at the start can also benefit all participants involved. A ritual can be as simple as a classic storytime song or dance, or a quieter one that guides participants to count their breaths together and observe (with the option to share) their emotions. Whichever approach, collective rituals establish a sense of familiarity, and can help children feel included and strengthen their relationship with the group.[21]

A helpful guide to helping shy children published on the *Virginia Infant and Toddler Specialist* blog suggests four tactics: start small, pair up, praise and reward, and read books.[22] A public library can be a good place to implement all of these. Aside from the first three tactics, which can be covered by youth programming, librarians can include books and other multimedia resources about shyness or shy children in readers' advisories. These resources need not always be about overcoming social fears, but can also be empowering stories about quiet protagonists and role models. There is no shortage of such booklists geared towards middle-years children and young teens online, and of course, still more relevant resources await discovery in the stacks.

Conclusion

Despite the prevalence of shyness among children, fostering the right atmosphere and creating relevant programs that support them are actions that are not as simple as they may sound. On one hand, librarians should not overlook the particular socio-emotional needs of shy children and expect them to participate at the same level as outgoing children; on the other, it can be more dangerous to the growth and self-perception of shy children to single them out for special treatment.

To better serve the often-invisible population of young children in the library, librarians can take the following approaches

- adopting the philosophy of inclusive literacy
- taking a playful approach to group activities
- encouraging a combination of both verbal and non-verbal modes of expression, and
- experimenting with virtual learning and practices of mindfulness.

In addition, librarians can encourage conversations about shyness between children and interested caregivers by suggesting relatable and inspiring book resources.

Labelling shy children as "anti-social" is outdated and far from fair, and the library is a great place to start fostering healthier perceptions for both shy children and the adults in their lives. &

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Bragging Rights and the Newbery

Carol Hanson Sibley

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In an article in the Spring 2022 issue of *Children and Libraries,* celebrating the centennial of the Newbery Medal, author Steven Herb provided an intriguing statistical examination of Newbery Medal and Honor Books and their creators. In addition, the author wished for a "country and state-by-state birth distribution."[1]

Of the ninety-five Newbery Medal authors to date, including this year's, eighty-three were born in the United States, which is expected since guidelines require authors to be US citizens or residents. Twelve medalists were born in other countries, including Canada, Hungary, India, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United Kingdom.

New York can claim bragging rights with eighteen Medalists by birth. California ranks second with eight Medalists and Illinois third with seven. Pennsylvania comes in fourth with six authors. Herb would be proud of his home state!

Medalists by State:

California: 8
Connecticut: 3
Hawaii: 2
Idaho: 1
Illinois: 7
Indiana: 1
Kansas: 2
Maryland: 3
Massachusetts: 5
Michigan: 4
Minnesota: 1
Mississippi: 1
New York: 18
North Carolina: 2
New Jersey: 2
Ohio: 4
Oklahoma (Territory): 1
Oregon: 1
Pennsylvania: 6
Utah: 1
Virginia: 3
West Virginia: 2
New Mexico: 1
Wisconsin: 2
Wyoming: 1

To what extent, if any, do the birth locations of authors influence the settings of their Newbery Medal books? Maybe a question for further research!

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Voices of Generational Poverty

My Story . . . and Why It Matters

CHRISTINA DORR

I grew up simultaneously rich and poor. Rich because my father's passion was farming, dairy farming, to be specific. Our old family farm, barn, house, and grounds were overrun with cows, pigs, chickens, dogs, cats, and other assorted creatures. While I, in no uncertain terms, didn't appreciate the four-legged animals that shared our living space, they did provide us with an abundance of eggs, milk, and meat.

I was also rich in another way. Though neither parent valued education, my mother loved to read. And obviously, her time was at a premium, with a large farm family, and few modern amenities to make domestic life easier. But she read whenever she could spare a bit of time.

Value of Reading

While we had nine children, Mom always said we had three families of three children each, because of the manner the nine of us were grouped throughout the twenty-one years she and Dad had children. Mom shared her love of reading with the three youngest of us by either reading to us, or telling us stories, every night.

She also took us to the tiny red brick public library in the center of the quaint village near our farm. A trip to the library allowed each of us to find books we enjoyed. I used to check out as many as allowed, and how I wished I could keep them.

Additionally, each of the three of us was given a fifty-cent allowance when the "milk check" arrived twice a month. When Mom shopped at the local grocery store, I went to the adjacent newsstand to peruse the comic books, the only books for children it sold, and the only books my fifty cents could buy. I'd search through the comics to find one Mom would approve of, usually settling on the latest Archie edition. I would devour it on the way home and treasured my growing pile. *These books were mine.*

Effects of Generational Poverty

I was a child of generational poverty on both sides of my extended family. The Great Depression permanently scarred both parents, but particularly my mother. Until the day she died at 100 years old, Mother wove tales to anyone who would listen about the dandelion soup her mother used to make to have something hot to serve her family.

On my father's side, the story was less severe. My grandfather was a railroad engineer who managed to stay employed throughout the Great Depression and was able to secure a job for my father as well, if only my father would accept it.

Neither parent valued education; in fact, it was openly devalued. Furthermore, my father didn't allow his six sons the option of following their passions, as my grandfather had done

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for my father. Instead, each was expected to quit school and be farmers, and were openly ridiculed if they didn't want to.

I had seven older siblings to do most of the hard physical labor. But also cursed because I was tormented by those seven older siblings. Blessed because I was a girl, and my father didn't expect me to devote myself to farming. Cursed because females were to take care of their husbands and children, the only definition by which women were measured for success. I remember my mother's mantra well—*family takes care of family*. And she used it on many occasions, to defend myriad situations.

Saving Graces

So how did I turn out to be an active wife, mother, PhD, teacher/librarian, author, writer, speaker, and consultant?

- An aunt who cared about me as an individual always affirmed and encouraged me to be my best and achieve.
- I was a natural born student academically, who thrived in the school environment.
- I had a strong desire to achieve, which unlike my parents and siblings, was combined with a sense of planning and preparation.

Years later, I realized that my "otherness," distancing myself from familial patterns, and my lack of close ties with family helped, rather than hindered, my independence.

Many researchers who write about generational poverty haven't lived that life. I liken this situation to an oncologist whom you consult upon being diagnosed with cancer. They may be the best educated, know anatomy and physiology and the disease backward and forward. They may be completely knowledgeable about the treatments, and which are best for you. But they have no idea how you feel.

For more children, digging themselves out of generational poverty is nearly impossible because of the often-insurmountable obstacles put in place by institutional racism, sexism, ageism, and the ties of family and community that suck them back in.

What often keeps children in generational poverty is not the lack of supports that researchers such as Ruby Payne reveal are needed (though they are needed), but it's the child's inability to turn their back on everyone and everything that they grew up with. It's emotionally too difficult. What professionals, who predominantly come from middle class backgrounds, who now work with these children, need to understand is that conditions are well beyond their control, and they are beyond one's control.

Serving Youth Living in Generational Poverty

Many classroom teachers, librarians, social workers, and other professionals in the United States were raised in middle class homes, fortunately for them. According to the Children's Defense Fund, nearly 20 percent of school age children in the United States are being raised in poverty.[1] If we as a collective group of professionals don't understand these children and their families, how can we operate with the needed attitudes, resources, and partners to meet their needs?

As librarians, we need to know that we can't truly understand how children and teens living in generational poverty feel, and we can't impose our judgements, beliefs, or expectations on them or their families. Instead, here—in a nutshell—are lessons I've learned both from being a child of poverty and having provided library services for children from preschool to grad school over the last thirty years.

- Be present and respectful
- Honor their stories, skills, and knowledge
- Keep their trials and challenges in mind
- Reach out to families and ask what they need
- Ask what they really want in life, not what do you think you deserve, or often what they think they deserve
- Encourage them in their desires and provide opportunities for their choices
- Help them realize that these opportunities may never come their way again
- Don't impose your values and wishes
- Show hope and help them understand there is no one more important than them, and their needs come first
- Provide excellent literature that reflects and inspires

This is just the beginning of this conversation, and this is just one story, mine. We must talk about the power structures that hold families in generational poverty and why the cycle continues. We need more stories, more voices, and more activism. Here's my invitation to connect with me and forge forward. &

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PEER-REVIEWED

Transformative Magic

Considering Zetta Elliott's *Dragons in a Bag*

ERIN HOOPES

I saw a social media post recently in which librarians were asked to share their favorite recommendations for read aloud books for early elementary students. Nearly all the responders suggested books by white authors, until a commenter noticed and pointed it out. A conversation ensued about how we, as librarians, need to change the way we recommend books. If we want to serve all children and all families, we must pay close attention to what stories we highlight, to whom, and why. American institutions have been dominated by white culture since their inception, and librarianship is no exception. As librarians, we must actively and continuously strive to change the way we select, purchase, consume, and recommend books. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas writes, "Since troubling discourses of colonialism and supremacy are transmitted via childhood stories, it is absolutely critical that these functions of children's literature are revealed, historicized, and interrogated."[1] We can use the theory of critical multiculturalism to critique the way we practice librarianship, in addition to the way we analyze texts. As Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman write, "critical multicultural analysis . . . is literary study as social change."[2]

In this essay, I will apply the lens of critical multiculturalism to Zetta Elliott's 2018 novel *Dragons in a Bag*, which I think is an excellent read aloud for early elementary students and was the first book I thought of when I read that social media post about the need for greater diversity in book recommendations. *Dragons in a Bag* is the story of Jax, a Black nine-year-old who makes a surprising discovery when his mother leaves him with a prickly old lady she introduces as Ma, and a mysterious package on Ma's kitchen table starts moving. The package turns out to contain three tiny, living dragons and Ma tells Jax he absolutely cannot let the dragons see him, lest they imprint on him. An exciting adventure ensues, in which Jax learns about the presence of magic in Brooklyn and the larger world and decides to accompany Ma in her quest to return the dragons to another realm. First, I will analyze the author's development of Jax as a character, then I will examine the systems and institutions of Jax's world, and finally I will consider the story within the larger context of the fantasy genre.

A Human and Humanized Main Character

In a 2020 column in *Journal of Children's Literature*, written by several children's literature authors and scholars, Maria Acevedo-Aquino discusses the importance of asking questions about visibility and power in children's literature. Specifically, "What messages and characters are included/excluded?" and "Who has power? Who solves the problems?"[3] Jax is a fully developed, relatable human boy. He feels and shows emotions such as sadness, frustration, and anger throughout the story. The author affirms his humanity immediately with the book's opening lines: "Mama strokes my cheek with her finger before pressing the doorbell. I feel

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tears pooling behind my eyes, but I will them not to fall."[4] As events unfold, Jax responds in ways that will be immediately recognizable to child readers or listeners. When Jax first realizes something unusual is happening in Ma's kitchen, and Ma tells him, "'You ain't here to get all up in my business, boy' and 'You're hardheaded, just like your mama,'" (29) he must hold back tears of anger and frustration. But he still finds the inner strength to defend both his mother and himself. "'Don't talk about my mama,'" he tells Ma, quietly, and when Ma laughs at him, he walks out of her apartment. This scene brings up familiar images of the child's impulse to run away from home, but Elliott reframes it in this story—Jax leaves the apartment, but immediately and calmly assesses his situation and considers his options. Ma comes outside shortly afterward, and the rift is repaired when Ma asks Jax if he wants to come with her. Both characters are aware of the social and emotional forces at play: "Ma isn't looking at me, but her voice isn't as harsh as it was before. Something tells me Ma's not the sort of person who's good at apologies. That's okay with me, because I'm not planning to apologize, either " (33). The story of *Dragons in a Bag* is centered on Jax, a child who both deserves and commands respect, a boy with both the inner resources and social supports that he needs to thrive.

Jax experiences emotions of uncertainty, fear, and determination that will also be relatable to child readers and listeners. Jax bravely agrees to help Ma return the dragons to the magical realm, which is accessed through a guardhouse in Prospect Park. After their first bumpy ride through space and time in the guardhouse, Ma asks Jax if he's okay. "I don't know if I am okay, but I'm here to help—not be helped. So I clear my throat and say, 'Ready, Ma,' with more confidence than I actually feel" (57). He finds courage in his role as a helper. Jax and Ma end up in the wrong time and place and Ma has trouble getting the guardhouse transporter to work, so Ma tells Jax he has to go back to the present without her. He says, "I'm just a scared nine-year-old boy, but I came along to help Ma, so I decide that's what I'm going to do" (66). Jax makes an important realization: "maybe Ma sent me back alone because she trusted me," he thinks (80). These dual experiences of being trusted and finding a purpose in being a helper reinforce the inner strength on which Jax has already learned to call. When he travels in the transporter a second time, with Trub (the grandfather he's just met), and Trub asks him the same question Ma had after his first transporter journey, Jax responds differently. "'I'm fine,' I tell him—and I mean it. I'm nervous, but I'm not afraid" (112).

Analyzing the Story's Power Dynamics

Jax's choices speak to Acevedo-Aquino's questions about who solves the problems in the story. Jax holds genuine power in the story, and also works cooperatively with other characters, of a variety of ages, to confront the challenges he faces. When Ma sends him back to the present, alone, Jax is terrified, but even in his fear, he is able to draw on the love and support of his family and community to figure out a solution. "My eyes fill with tears again, but I quickly blink them away. I'm Ma's helper, and I have to find a way to bring her home, too. But I can't do it on my own. Who will help me?" (74). He has strong female role models, especially in his mother, who is always emotionally present even though she is physically absent for much of the story because she's in court fighting a looming eviction. Ma also models strength and resourcefulness, and surprises Jax by getting help from a man named Ambrose, who Jax assumes is homeless when he first sees him, saying, "He's wearing so much clothing he looks like a walking pile of laundry!"(45). Jax learns an important lesson that appearances can be deceiving, and when he finds himself back in Prospect Park alone, he too turns to Ambrose for advice. Ambrose encourages Jax to call his friend Vik and offers to call on his own resources as well. "'You call your people and I'll call mine. That's how we're going to fix this, Jax—teamwork" (76). Vik and his sister Kavita come, as does Trub, called by Ambrose. Upon meeting the children, Trub says, "'Why don't we sit down. I can think on my feet, but we can make a better plan if we put our heads together'" (92). This pattern of friends and family members coming together to solve their problems repeats throughout the story, creating a strong sense that the people in Jax's life and community support and care for one another. Even Trub, who describes himself to Jax as a "rolling stone" to explain why Jax's Mama has chosen not to involve him in Jax's life thus far, becomes a source of strength for Jax (98).

Botelho and Rudman write that in critical multicultural analysis, "The social processes among the characters are explored to determine how power was exercised along the continuum from domination and collusion to resistance and agency."[5] Jax demonstrates a strong sense of self and agency throughout the story. Early in the story, when Ma repeatedly calls Jax "boy," he remembers what his mother has told him—"Mama always said I didn't have to respond to anyone who called me out of my name"—and finds the courage to tell Ma, "'My name's Jaxon'" (33). This scene repeats itself toward the end of the book, when Sis, a guardian of magic, calls him "boy" just as Ma had. "'My name's Jax,' I tell her in my most respectful voice. 'And I won't let you down, Sis. . . .' Sis looks down at me, and I think I can see something in her eyes that wasn't there before: respect" (137). Jax is supported in affirming his own self-worth and agency throughout the book. He is praised ("'You're no fool, Jax,'" Ma tells him), trusted ("'He's had a rough first day on the job, and Jax still has a lot to learn, but I trust him,'" Ma says), and loved ("I blink a few times, and Mama comes back into focus. Her face is full of love, and that gives me the courage I need" (38). And he acts with courage and confidence because of those experiences. When Mama tells him "'This world is the only one that matters, Jax. This is where you live. This is where you belong,'" he has agency to make a different choice than the one his mother made (135). "'Bad things happen, and sometimes there's nothing we can do. But this time, there is something I can do. I want to help Ma return the last dragon" (148–49). Jax's agency in this scene, and throughout the story, comes from his belief in himself, the love with which he is surrounded, and his strong senses of curiosity, hope, and joy.

Genre Considerations

The fact that *Dragons in a Bag* is a fantasy adventure story is significant. Critical multicultural analysis asks us to consider the messages a book sends in all its components. Botelho and Rudman write that in addition to examining "how identities are constructed in a story," we must also look at how "texts are constructed" and how "societies are constructed." In a *Jeunesse* essay written before *Dragons in a Bag* was published, Zetta Elliott reports, "there is still an appalling lack of fantasy fiction for children of color."[6] *Dragons in a Bag* is one solution to that problem, in addition to being a fun and appealing adventure story. According to Botelho and Rudman, "Fantasy often disguises itself as unrelated to fact, lowering the reader's guard and inserting 'information and values' that the reader internalizes."[7] This makes it even more critical that fantasy stories featuring positive representations of Black and Brown children and communities are published and shared. The values demonstrated by Jax and his family and friends—of love and care, courage, and responsibility—are essential for children of all backgrounds to witness and consume. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas writes, "if today's children grow up with literature that is multicultural, diverse, *and* decolonized, we can begin the work of healing our nation and world through humanizing stories."[8]

Although *Dragons in a Bag* is a fantasy story, it is set in present-day Brooklyn. The setting is integral to the story's power. In her *Jeunesse* essay, Zetta Elliott writes: "Within the field of children's literature, my novels may be categorized as urban fantasy, but I prefer Ramon Saldivar's concept of '*historical fantasy*,' which 'links desire and imagination, utopia and history, but with a more pronounced edge intended to redeem, or perhaps even create, a new moral and social order.'"[9] How can this new "moral and social order" be created? First, as was explored previously, through the characters' actions and development and the systems of power and agency developed by the author. In the world of *Dragons in a Bag*, which notably is the world in which we live, Jax has personal power. He experiences love, magic, and wonder. He is the hero of his own story. Second, the painful structural inequities of this world are not ignored; rather, they are subverted. Daniel Hade writes that "critical multiculturalism is a reform movement based upon equity and justice. . . . Critical multiculturalism is about naming this injustice and struggling toward social change and social justice."[10] Third, Jax's heritage is celebrated. When Trub helps Jax learn more about magic, he says, "'Africa's called the cradle of civilization. Know why?' 'Sure,' I reply. 'That's where the human race started out'"[11] Trub goes on to explain that the source of the magic is also in Africa, and that connects Jax even more closely to his ancestors. Through her acknowledgment of injustice, her honoring of Jax's racial and ethnic heritage, and the fact that Jax owns his story, Zetta Elliott has written a transformative and critical story.

Jax knows why his mother brings him to Ma at the beginning of the book. "Mama thinks I don't know our landlord's trying to get rid of us. She takes down the eviction notices he pins to our front door, but I still know what's going on" (2). The entire reason we learn Jax's story is because of this part of his lived experience—of being a poor child in a poor family in a modern American city. This fact is the reason, as Ma explains to Jax, why they must take the dragons to another time and place. Ma tells Jax: "'Brooklyn's lost its magic. All kinds of creatures used to call this place home. But not anymore.' I think about the notices our landlord keeps putting on our front door. 'Everybody should have a home,' I say, 'and get to stay there as long as they want.' 'In an ideal world, that would be true,' Ma says. 'But that's not the world we live in, Jax'" (40). Later in the book, Trub explains to Jax more fully why the dragons must be taken to another realm. "'This realm is a sanctuary for many beings and creatures that just wouldn't be safe in our world. But the longer they stay hidden here, the more foreign and frightening they become to humans. People fear what they don't know, and when you're separated from folks just 'cause you're different . . . well, our people know what that feels like'" (116–17). Jax understands that Trub is talking about both historical and present-day segregation. In *Dragons in a Bag*, Jax isn't whisked away to a utopian paradise where everyone loves and respects everyone else and all people are treated equally. But in the story, such a place is possible. Trub tells Jax: "'Some folks fear magic, Jax—black magic especially. But in the other realm, there is no black and white. There's less fear and more . . . wonder'" (105). Jax's discovery of this magic allows him to see the world more clearly and allows him to change the way in which he interacts with the structural oppressions present in his life.

Although Zetta Elliott writes that she prefers the term "historical fantasy" instead of "urban fantasy," considering *Dragons in a Bag* as an urban fantasy can still lend useful insights when applying a critical multicultural lens to the book. Urban fantasies are notably set in cities, and the book's Brooklyn setting is essential to the story. Stefan Ekman writes that "urban fantasy is a genre of the Unseen, and it offers a way for us to discover—and discuss—it."[12] Jax would be unseen by many in modern American culture—just one of so many little Black boys living in the crowded city of New York. In the beginning of the story, Jax expresses awareness of how American society sees him. "People never expect a kid like me to know anything about anything. I'm used to it, but it still bothers me sometimes."[13] By the end of the story, American society hasn't changed, but Jax has. He is more confident, more determined, more resourceful, and more powerful. He learns that he deserves to be seen, to be visible. Botelho and Rudman write that a critical multicultural analysis asks the question, "Who is silenced/heard here?"[14] Because Jax's story and voice are centered, *Dragons in a Bag* sends the message to child readers and listeners that Jax's life matters. His voice matters. His fears and worries, his triumphs and mistakes, his humanity is affirmed through the telling of his story. There is a long tradition in fantasy literature of white male children being the heroes. That is why this book is transformative, and why it is, as a fantasy story, an example of how, as Botelho and Rudman point out, "genres can be sites of resistance and struggle."[15]

In the previously cited *Journal of Children's Literature* column, Zetta Elliott writes, "I worry that the industry's appetite for narratives about Black pain may prevent me from finding homes for the books I've written about Black joy." Thankfully, at least in this story and in the lives of all the young people who experience it, that worry has not come true. *Dragons in a Bag* is ultimately a joyful story. Jax struggles and experiences pain, but his overall story is one of wonder and magic, power and determination. The story ends with Jax's firm decision: "'I've decided to become Ma's apprentice,' I say with a mixture of fear and pride."[16] Readers are left to anticipate what adventure Jax will embark upon next, knowing he has the inner fortitude and love and support to be a force of love and good in all the realms of his life—magical and real. &

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The Importance of Wishes

An Interview with Author Sandra Magsamen

ELIZABETH MCCHESNEY

Children's author and illustrator Sandra Magsamen holds a beloved place in the hearts of library professionals who know the impact and power of her loving board and picture books. As the author and illustrator of more than sixty children's and adult books, Magsamen, trained as an art therapist, hopes to create books that offer people a way to reach out and connect in a meaningful and expressive way with someone in their life, and indeed she accomplishes this with her endearing new release, *I Wish Wish Wish for You*.

In fall 2021, Magsamen and the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) partnered on the World of Wishes Campaign. NSLA is the nation's pre-eminent non-profit organization focused on the powerful impact of investing in summer learning to help close the achievement gap. At NSLA's 2021 national conference, Magsamen revealed her new book, *I Wish Wish Wish for You* (Sourcebooks, 2022) and the accompanying World of Wishes campaign. The campaign aims to empower our next generation of change makers—our children—through collecting and sharing the brilliant and beautiful wishes of children around the world for other children and for the world during the turbulent time in which we live. Magsamen and NSLA encourage libraries and other organizations serving children to participate in the campaign and lift-up the voices of all children. Magsamen and her team will gather and compile the wishes into a book to be shared with the world. Here, she talks about the power of wishes, the need to hear our children's voices, and the critical role of NSLA, summer learning, and out-of-school learning year-round.

Tell us about the book.

At its heart, this book is a love letter. I believe, in many ways, that my new book is not unlike many of the other books I've written in that my inspiration has always come from the feelings, ideas, and love that I have in my heart as a mother, as a sister, as a daughter. This book really represents the wishes that I personally hold for the people in my life, the children in my life, as well as a universal wish for children all over the world.

This book speaks not only from my heart, but from the heart of mothers, grandmothers, librarians, and teachers all over the world. We wish for everything and more for our children. I believe we are living in a time where we see that our children are really struggling.

Coming through and coming out of a pandemic, our children are distressed and their anxiety level is higher than

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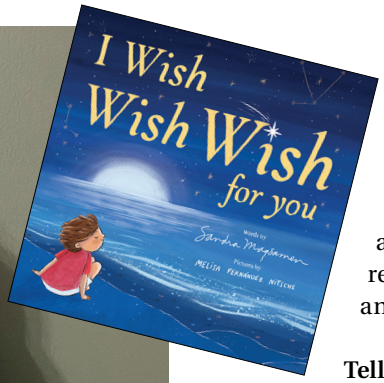
we have seen before—certainly in my lifetime. I hope this book is comforting, healing, and a gentle reminder of all those things that we wish for our children. It's a gentle hug and a love letter to children in our lives and to children all over the world.

Why do you think wishes matter right now for our children? And what kind of wishes has the campaign elicited from youth so far?

We are living in a very vulnerable time. COVID has swept through our neighborhoods, communities, and the whole world. It has been a time of uncertainty, fear, and anxiety. As parents, caregivers, teachers, therapists, librarians, and human beings, we want our children to feel safe, to feel like they belong, to feel loved, and we want them to feel inspired and empowered to be all that they are meant to be. This book shares those heartfelt wishes for each and every child on this planet. When you sit down and read this book with children, my wish is that the message is comforting, reaffirming, inspiring, and goal setting.

The World of Wishes Campaign was born through conversations with librarians, teachers, and parents. We all have universal wishes for the children in our lives, but we wanted to know what were the wishes and the themes that *children* are thinking about. If children can begin to tell us what they desire and what they want, we can really begin to look at the themes that emerge that we might not have been so aware of.



I think we need to listen to children and we need to really understand where they're coming from. Children are the future, and we need to support them and help them to have the brightest future possible.

I've asked children to write and to draw their wishes because drawing, as we know, is really a pre-verbal activity. Sometimes, what happens in the drawings are things that are not yet able to be spoken with words. So, drawing offers children a way to really express what's in their hearts.

We are seeing some of the themes that we expected like, "No more COVID," "No more sickness," "No more masks," "No more virtual school." But we are also seeing wishes like, "No more anxiety," which, for a young child to say really touches my heart.

Another theme that has emerged is wishes for the greater good, one's community and one's family. These are primarily wishes for others and not for the child themselves. So, as we gather these wishes, we are really looking to understand these silos and learn more about the state of children in our country as a result of looking at what children most desire, and we call those "wishes."

Tell us about the campaign.

I do take children's wishes seriously because it really is the heart of the matter. The acronym for the World of Wishes Campaign is WOW, and as I see these wishes coming in from children all over the country, I am wowed at what these kids feel and think and what they wish for.

If a child can share with us, through their drawing or their writing, what they desire most and what matters to them, we can understand what concerns them and then work together in communities, schools, and in libraries to help solve those problems and grant those wishes. I think we need to listen to children and we need to really understand where they're coming from. Children are the future, and we need to support them and help them to have the brightest future possible.

Through the campaign, we are reaching children through schools, libraries, camps, after-school programs, and city-wide initiatives like the San Francisco Human Rights

Commission. We are using the children's wishes as data points to really understand and meet children where they are.

One of the most important things that I have learned in this process is that, just in the act of identifying and expressing a wish, we each begin to make that wish come true. The minute we share that wish it has meaning, and we begin to manifest.

You've partnered with the NSLA, and a part of the campaign will be a book to highlight children's wishes and also the significance of summer and out-of-school time learning. Why does summer matter to children and families?

Summer learning and after-school learning matter in a huge way. I was lucky enough to hear Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona . . . propose that education doesn't end when school pauses in June and summer begins. We need to begin to think about learning in every single place that a child goes! Our children should be learning all the time and not as a mandate, but as a human right. It is a gift to expand their sense of curiosity and adventure.

After-school and summer learning experiences are key to this—they are not an "extra," they are fundamental and are part of the heart of learning. Offering as many places and spaces for children to learn and grow is so, so important to the health and wellbeing of our children and to their futures.

The idea of what we will be doing with these wishes continues to expand and to grow. The more schools, libraries, educational programs, and communities that are helping us to gather these wishes, the bigger the vision becomes. We are looking at creating a digital platform to share wishes. We are also looking at creating video content. I love the idea of individual groups like schools, camps, libraries, and places of worship publishing their own wishes as well, using a print on demand platform. The final product or products is ongoing and evolving as the campaign continues to grow.

You are asking children to not only write their wish but also to draw it. What do you see as the role of art in a child's life? How do you see libraries as partners for providing art?

Art is one of the most beautiful ways children can express themselves. Art is pre-verbal, so, often, a child will be able to create an image that expresses their feelings long before they can formulate the words to say what is most important to them. I think a visual representation of what a child is wishing for is powerful and if they can bring the words to it, that adds to the power. We are looking for children to find the most organic and authentic way to express themselves and share what is most deeply in their hearts, what they desire and what they long for.

Libraries are an integral part of every single community throughout our country and the world! I think that they have become even more so throughout this pandemic. I couldn't ask for better partners than the staff and libraries that the campaign has worked with. Librarians touch the lives of children in the most positive way—helping in literacy, helping families find the resources they need, providing a space for creation and exploration…the work librarians do is extraordinary and they really are wish granters.

The WOW Campaign will reach children internationally. What types of themes do you think we are likely to see?

Wishes really are an expression of what we desire, what we want and what, perhaps, may be missing. What need that needs to be filled. I can only comment on what we have seen and heard thus far and the themes that we have begun to unpack. We have seen themes of fear, anxiety, sickness and death, but also friendship, kindness, love, family, belonging, and peace.

Children are remarkable; they have a way of identifying the heart of the matter that often eludes us grown-ups. I have no doubt gathering their wishes in 2022 will help us all heal and grow.

How Libraries Are Involved

Libraries across the country included the World of Wishes campaign into their summer learning programs in the summer of 2022. From displays of art, to programs featuring wish making, public libraires have centered the campaign to respond to the social-emotional needs of our children. And the campaign continues in the fall of 2022. Details for a free, virtual visit from Magsamen and to receive an activity kit are below.

Magsamen will speak at the 2022 NSLA National Conference in Washington, DC, October 24–26. A public library track is scheduled on Monday, October 24. For more information, visit https://summerlearning.org/national-conference. &

For more information on the World of Wishes Campaign and to schedule a virtual visit with Magsamen, email info@sandramagsamen.com. Visit https://www.sourcebooks.com/i-wish-wish-wish.html to download the free I Wish Wish Wish for You *activity kit, which also includes an entry sheet where children send in their wishes to the World of Wishes Campaign.*

Placemaking

Expanding Our Reach and Empowering Communities

Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian, Betsy Diamant-Cohen, and Tess Prendergast

***Lisa M. Sensale Yazdian**, PhD, is an educational psychologist who has been working in public libraries since 2007. She currently oversees youth outreach services at Boone County Public Library in northern Kentucky. **Betsy Diamant-Cohen** is a children's librarian with a doctorate, an early literacy trainer, consultant, and author. She is known for translating research into practical activities with developmental tips and presenting these via webinars, engaging workshops, and online courses. **Tess Prendergast**, PhD, is a lecturer at the School of Information, University of British Columbia where she teaches courses in librarianship and children's literature. She currently serves on ALSC's Excellence in Early Learning Digital Media Award committee and Geisel Award Selection committee.*

Due to COVID, communities across the globe have had to rethink ways to safely connect and engage with one another. One option that has emerged is placemaking, "a collaborative process of people coming together to create the great public spaces at the heart of their communities."[1]

Rooted in urban design, placemaking has enabled some communities to successfully negotiate COVID challenges while participating in a process that also has the potential to transform our post-pandemic world. Because 80 percent of children's time is spent outside of school, it is exceptionally important for communities to leverage opportunities for them to learn beyond classroom walls. Libraries and other community partners can share placemaking resources while exploring new ways to harness placemaking principles to create better social, cultural, and economic outcomes. This is important since many of today's youth and families are living in inequitable spaces.[2]

Project for Public Spaces

https://www.pps.org/

Project for Public Spaces has a long history of using placemaking to help communities transform public spaces to meet local needs. In addition to defining placemaking, their website describes their consulting and training services and a vast number of placemaking projects. Their site hosts a large number of freely accessible reports, guides, webinars, and blog entries on the subject.

Bass Center for Transformative Placemaking

https://www.brookings.edu/center/anne-t-and-robert-m-bass-center-for-transformative-placemaking/

A collaboration between the Project for Public Spaces and the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Center that conducts and disseminates research, papers, blog posts, and multimedia on placemaking to help practitioners transform public spaces.

Outside the Box—Placemaking, Partnerships, and Community Event Design

https://www.webjunction.org/events/webjunction/Libraries_Go_Outside_the_Box_with_Redbox.html

This webinar addresses how libraries can leverage placemaking and Redbox's Outside the Box program to create attractive and engaging

community spaces. After defining placemaking and explaining how the process unfolds, it describes the qualities that make libraries great community spaces including offering a "front porch" to users that is inviting and easy to access, a flexible use of the space that supports different purposes, seasonal usage, and having the ability to manage and organize events.

The webinar also explores additional elements that make places great and explains how to undertake a placemaking project with key stakeholders and partners.

Outside the Box: A Guide for Placemakers

https://www.webjunction.org/content/dam/WebJunction/Documents/webJunction/2015-04/guide-outside-the-box-placemaking.pdf

Authored by the Project for Public Spaces, this guide was designed to accompany the previously mentioned webinar. It explains the impact and benefits of placemaking, and also explains fourteen qualities that allow libraries to become community anchors. This document also offers readers a step by step guide to placemaking.

Playful Learning Landscapes

https://kathyhirshpasek.com/learning-landscapes/

Playful Learning Landscapes (PLL) transform everyday spaces to support learning and family engagement while employing urban planning, the learning sciences, and placemaking. Research-based activities connect play and learning, and studies show that there are long-term benefits. This website unpacks the movement and shares information on various projects, including the following:

- Supermarket Speak,[3] which interspersed signs throughout supermarkets to increase the quantity and quality of conversations between caregivers and their children, and
- Too Small to Fail, which uses similar conversation producing signage along with play spaces in laundromats and playgrounds.[4]

City of Philadelphia Playstreets of Wonder

https://www.phila.gov/programs/playstreets/

Philadelphia Parks and Recreation started this initiative more than fifty years ago. Designated streets are closed to traffic for a set time so children have a safe space to play during the summer months. Snacks and meals are also provided. The website details the program requirements and expectations and shares photos.

Street Lab

https://www.streetlab.org

A nonprofit organization that works to transform city neighborhoods into safe and comfortable spaces for people to gather. They partner with city agencies and community groups to provide pop-up programs and services. StreetLab is best known for its portable library structures, but has organized a range of projects over the years. In response to COVID, for example, they set up no-touch obstacle courses, pop-up meeting spaces for New York City students, and implemented a program to encourage community art installations.

The Pop-Up Placemaking Tool Kit

https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/livable-documents/documents-2019/Pop-Up-Tool-Kit-112119-w-singles.pdf

Co-authored by Team Better Block and AARP Livable Communities, this tool kit explains what pop-up demonstrations are, offers reasons for doing them, and provides step-by-step directions for implementation. It includes a catalog of projects with photos and shares success stories of pop-up projects that transformed into permanent community fixtures. &

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Don't Leave the Homeschoolers at Home

Lola Edwards Gomez

Lola Edwards Gomez *is a Master of Library Science student at Texas Woman's University. She teaches Bilingual Music and Movement to preschool aged children at Melissa Public Library, and is a member of the Public Awareness and Advocacy Committee with ALSC. She also homeschooled her two children when they were young.*

Homeschooling, an adult-led home-based education, is typically seen as an alternative method of schooling children from preschool to secondary school. There are also "temporary homeschoolers," a term which includes kids who traditionally attend school but have been learning remotely.[1]

Homeschooled students fall under a wide variety of demographics, including multiple religions, ethnicities, educational backgrounds, and income levels. At its current rate, homeschooling will be the most rapidly growing education sector.[2] It is expected that families will choose to continue homeschooling in years to come, and librarians must be prepared to attract and serve this steadily increasing group to their libraries.

Homeschooling Is on the Rise

In March 2020, 99% of all public libraries in the United States were closed due to the pandemic.[3] These closures did not stop many libraries from providing important materials and services to the public. They continued to distribute free materials such as craft supplies and STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) kits. They supported online learning by extending library Wi-Fi to reach their parking lots and checked out hotspots to patrons.

In many cases, these services offered educational options while children couldn't attend school. Fast forward to the present, most schools and libraries have reopened. As students and parents are welcomed back into school buildings by teachers and staff, many of America's families have chosen an alternative to traditional schooling.

The popularity of homeschooling has been on the rise over the years and has drastically increased since the onset of the pandemic. In spring 2019, there were 2.5 million homeschool students, and by the 2020-2021 school year, 3.7 million families homeschooled their children.[4] With this rapid increase, libraries need to focus attention and budgets on offering educational programs and resources to this demographic.

Reaching Out

First, do your research. Find homeschool families and co-ops in the community and discover their needs. Consider holding an open house, connecting with homeschool advisory teams and coordinators, and interviewing homeschooling parents. These connections can assist you in discovering the community you serve and the gaps that must be filled.

Next, seek resources for your library to offer. Providing pertinent resources is essential to serving homeschooled students. The Mid-Continent Public Library (MCPL) system in Kansas City, MO, provides numerous daytime programs and materials for homeschoolers at its thirty-three branches and online.[5] Their library's home page has a section dedicated to

homeschooling resources, which includes a newsletter and live homework help. They have invested in curriculum resources and platforms that provide lesson plans and worksheets, such as Scholastic Teachables, Tumblebooks, Britannica Kids, and National Geographic Kids. Online courses are provided for free through companies such as Gale, Mango Languages, and Universal Class.

MCPL has also created YouTube videos to help families create an effective and comfortable learning environment. As you build your programs and collections, consider the needs of bilingual students. The Texas State Library and Archives Commission website offers links to excellent Spanish-English bilingual resources including books, webinars, and blogs.

Advocating

Once you've done the preparations, it is time to advocate. Reach out to local public, private, and charter school administration to encourage relationships between the library and schools. Librarians can glean information from school administration regarding tools and resources being used for the school year. School administrators and teachers will know they and their students have support and resources from their local library.

Also reach out to local businesses and organizations to find ones that provide educational services to children and families. The ALSC Championing Children's Services Toolkit encourages a partnership between libraries and community stakeholders.

"Their engagement and investment in the library give the library relevance. In a time of diminishing funds and increased demands, partnerships are essential to meeting community needs, and to sustaining active and engaging environments for library users."[6] These partnerships can provide resources and benefits to organizations with common goals. Locales such as community centers, tutoring centers, local artists, and other educational organizations can offer courses and demonstrations that will supplement homeschoolers' learning.

While starting or expanding a homeschool initiative might seem daunting to some, the benefits should prove worth the effort. The library can become a second home to these patrons by fostering a love of life-long learning. &

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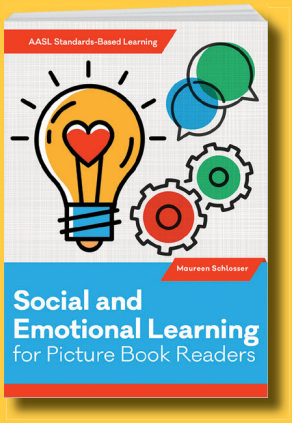

MAUREEN SCHLOSSER

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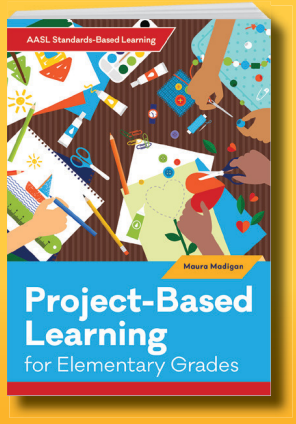

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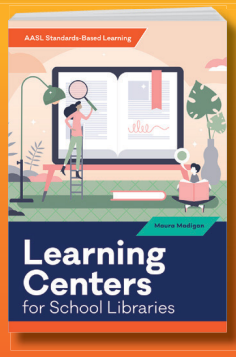

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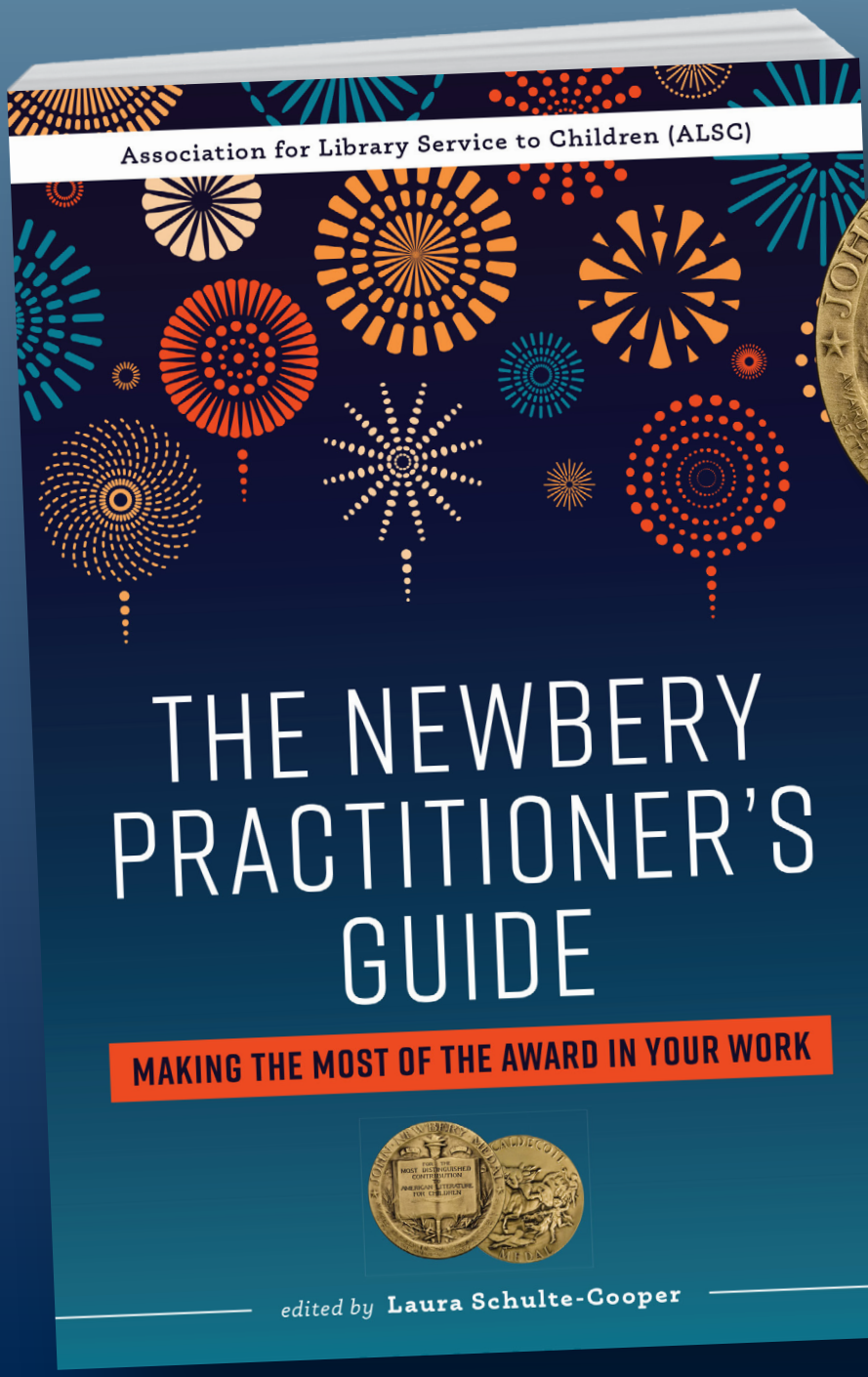

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