

THE Teaching Librarian

The Magazine of the Ontario School Library Association
ISSN 1188679X

Creating positive spaces

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diversity @ your library

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THE Teaching Librarian

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diversity @ your library

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TingL Mission

The Teaching Librarian

The Teaching Librarian (TingL) is the official magazine of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA). It is published three times a year to support OSLA members in providing significant and effective library programs and services. *The Teaching Librarian* promotes library programs and curriculum development that furthers exemplary educational objectives. The magazine fosters effective collaboration within the school library community and provides a forum to share experience and expertise.

TingL References

The Teaching Librarian is a general magazine for OSLA members and not a scholarly journal. If your article does require citation of sources, please provide them within the text of your article or column with as much or as little bibliographic information as necessary for identification (e.g. book title, year). If you feel that the works you are citing require full identification, please provide a bibliography at the end of your piece, formatted according to the latest Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition) or APA Style.

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TingL Submission Guidelines

Please Note: Themes are subject to change.

May 2021 V. 28, Issue 3	"STEAM @ your library" Deadline: January 31, 2021
September 2021 V. 29, Issue 1	"Virtual @ your library" Deadline: May 31, 2021
January 2022 V. 29, Issue 2	"Innovation @ your library" Deadline: September 30, 2021

Articles of 150-250 words, 500 words, or 800-1,300 words are welcome. Articles, when approved, should be accompanied by high quality images and/or graphics whenever possible. Text must be sent electronically, preferably in a Microsoft Word (or compatible) file. Images or graphics must be sent separately in a digital format, such as .jpeg, .png, .tiff, or .ai. The minimum resolution must be 1000 px at 150 dpi. With photos that contain a recognized individual, please secure the individual's permission in writing for the use of the photo. Photos taken at public events or crowd shots taken in a public place do not require permission from the subjects. All submissions are subject to editing for consistency, length, content, and style. Journalistic style is preferred. *The Teaching Librarian* adheres to Canadian Press Style. Articles must include the working title, name of author, and email address in the body of the text. OSLA reserves the right to use pictures in other OSLA publications unless permission is limited or denied at the time of publishing.

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The Editor's Notebook



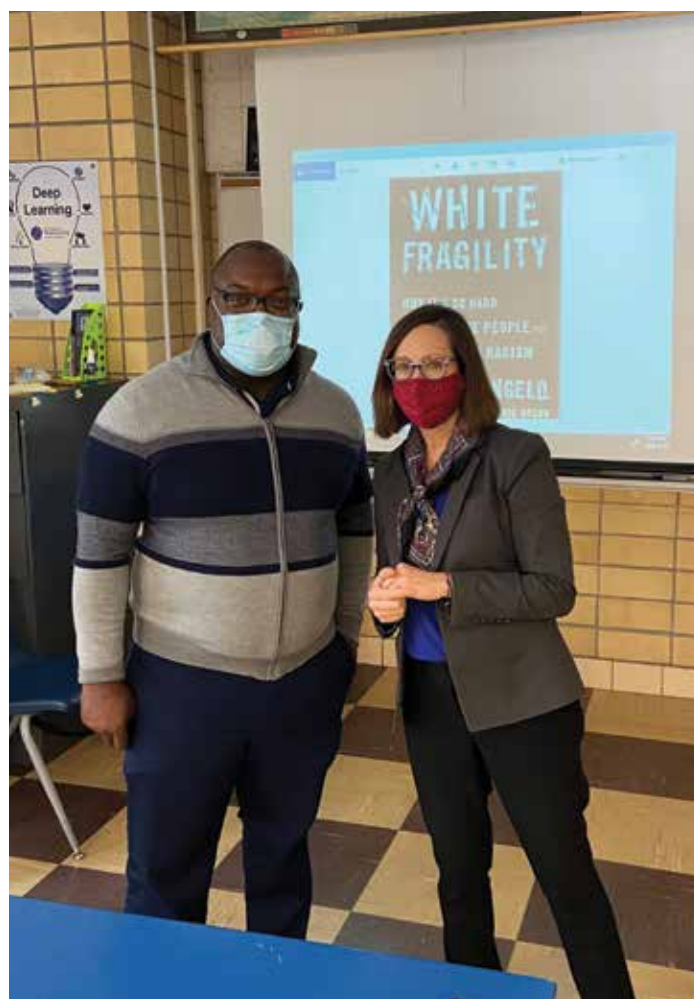
Caroline Freibauer

A diversity-themed edition of *The Teaching Librarian* was planned long before COVID-19, long before school closures and quarantines, and long before a police officer placed his knee on Floyd George's neck for eight minutes until he was dead. Back in that naïve time — before the dark days of the initial lockdown — we knew that Black lives mattered. We knew that Indigenous, LGBTQ, Asian lives mattered. But when we witnessed the horror of George's death, with a razor-sharp focus honed by isolation from friends and family, many of us were jolted out of our complacency. For those in the school library learning commons world, it was an event that poured accelerant onto the fires that teacher-librarians, library technicians and librarians were building with their professional book clubs, diversity audits and podcasts.

In 2017, the fifth Treasure Mountain Canada Research Symposium and Think Tank, held in Winnipeg, focused on a Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Library Learning Commons. Inspired by the then recently released Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, the symposium culminated with a challenge to establish strategies to achieve the goal set out in its theme. You can read the papers presented at the symposium here: canadianschoollibraries.ca/relevant-responsive-resources.

Now, three years later, school library learning commons staff across the province are galvanized to continue the work of promoting diversity, equity and inclusion. You can read about some of that work in this magazine, including a piece on how I was able to collaborate with Daniel Lumsden, a teacher at my new school, to launch a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion book club for staff.

During the lockdown, I had an opportunity to become the head librarian at St. Michael's College School, an independent high school in Toronto. It was a big change for me, coming from a small Catholic board centred in Brantford. One of the perks of the new position is being able to join Cohort21, a year-long professional development experience designed to support and build a community of passionate educators. Independently, Daniel and I both chose to join a smaller group interested in diversity. Combining forces to facilitate the book club seemed to be the next natural step.



When you read the other articles featured in this publication, including Toni Duval's experience conducting a diversity audit of her collection, Jonelle Aubyn's advice to consider diverse voices when bringing authors into the school and Melanie White and Amanda Potts' account of how they turned a desire to achieve equity in the classroom into a podcast featuring conversations about systemic racism, book choices and teacher efficacy, I hope you are inspired to try your own initiative. But be warned that, once you begin, you will realize two things: First, that this important work is bigger than you ever imagined; And, second, you can never stop. ■

OSLA School Library Advocacy Update

Ontario School Libraries in the 2020-21 School Year: A Survey of Ontario School Boards

OSLA is aware of the significant impact of COVID-19 on Ontario's students and educators, including school library staff. As school boards across the province released plans for the 2020-21 school year, we were deeply concerned with the decision made by many boards to drastically reduce or eliminate their school library staffing, and limit or restrict all access to school library materials.

Our Fall 2020 survey found that:

- 37% of school boards (15) reported that their elementary school library staffing had been reduced or eliminated.
- 64% of school boards (23) reported that their secondary school library staffing had been reduced or eliminated.

OSLA continues to advocate to the Ministry of Education and to Ontario School Boards

The elimination of school library staff and access to school library materials will have a significant negative impact on student learning and success. OSLA, along with our partners, are continuing to advocate for school libraries.

The Minister of Education responded on November 20, 2020 to our concerns. While the letter does not outline any changes to current funding or ministry support, Minister Lecce notes:

"... I wanted to state how important school libraries and library staff are to the education sector in Ontario. As Minister, I will always stand up to protect these important services. Because of this important role that school libraries and librarians provide, I have consistently advocated as Minister of Education to ensure that funding for library staffing continues to be provided through the Grants for Student Needs funding model."

Our [2020 Fall Budget Submission](#) reiterated our recommendation that the Ministry require provincial funds currently allocated to school boards for school libraries, teacher-librarians and school library professionals through Grants for School Needs be used for its intended purpose.

OLA will continue to actively engage with the Ministry, including directly and through the upcoming Grants for Students Needs consultation process, to ensure that we protect school libraries and the proven impact they deliver for student achievement and success.

You can see the latest on these ongoing advocacy efforts on [the OLA's School Library Issues](#) page.

President's Report

In a short YouTube video from the AASL called “Jason Reynolds on School Libraries”, Reynolds states simply, yet profoundly, that the role of the school library professional “is to serve as a buttress, as an affirmation and a confirmation of every single student that walks through those doors.” This edition of *The Teaching Librarian* responds to this definition as it tackles the complex theme of diversity. I write this to you all from my position of privilege knowing there is still so much work to do.

At the June 2020 board meeting and in line with [OLA's statement](#), it was determined that OLA would create an anti-racism, diversity and inclusion plan, and form a task group. The OLA Statement outlined what the long-term commitments and priorities are:

- Prioritize anti-racism work in the upcoming strategic plan.
- Formalize an inclusive and equitable hiring policy for staff.
- Seek increased participation from members who are underrepresented in the library community for the board, division councils, and committees.
- Continue the review of the selection process and submission criteria for the Forest of Reading® Awards with the volunteer committees to ensure inclusivity and diversity on future lists.

The overall OLA plan is to include: an audit of structures, systems, and programs; volunteer and staff training; and a plan that defines goals, timelines and success indicators. We are currently in negotiations with a consultant who has provided a framework and estimate for an Anti-Black Racism (ABR) plan.

As well, the OLA Advocacy and Research Officer has been working with a sub-committee of the OLA Diversity and Inclusion Task Force and the Indigenous Task Force on a policy and procedure for diversity data tracking and management. The goal is to better understand the demographics of the association so that we can build a more inclusive, welcoming and diverse association in line with our statement, and to monitor this over time to track progress.

The OSLA is continuing to develop an anti-Black racism action plan. At our last meeting we discussed some options to support our members such as: a webinar series, a book club, providing tiered support materials, and continued learning opportunities. Our conversation kept returning to the necessity for action, for a realistic move toward improving how we walk through this world with others, and how we advocate and create change for our students. If you are wondering where to start, here are a few things you can do:

- Use your skills as a media specialist to teach the essential tools of understanding so kids can challenge bias and support equity.
- Do a diversity audit. Ensure your collection is made up of culturally responsive literature. Run catalogue searches to evaluate the number of books on a topic or theme.
- Seek out and promote materials that represent diverse identities and experiences and then make sure everyone knows they are there!
- Offer to support your staff in their journey by working closely with teachers to incorporate culturally responsive materials into the curriculum. They may not know where to start.
- Investigate your school's demographic and share this with your colleagues. Question together whether or not the school's programming meets changing needs.
- Although we are not using our space in the same way right now, use this opportunity to take an honest look around your space: how inclusive is it? Microaggressions are small but mighty.
- Weed out denigrating and stereotypical titles from classroom and school libraries.
- Shake up your programming. Consider expanding celebrations beyond Black history month – extend the celebration of these voices beyond the month!



Maureen McGrath

- Invite a selection of guests who bring diverse voices and perspectives to read, share skills or speak.
- Participate in reading challenges such as Forest of Reading or The FOLD.
- Evaluate your teaching strategies: use a variety of approaches, technologies, assistive technologies and provide ways to bridge communication gaps and validate cultural differences.

Nowhere are we more perfectly situated than the School Library Learning Commons to challenge bias and support equity. Reynolds, in his 2019 speech to the American Library Association, heralds SLLC as safe spaces, then follows with the challenge to “train our young people to grow up to actually be safe spaces.” We must be the models, the leaders and the changemakers. ■



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Meet the Author

Farah Heron

After a childhood raised on Bollywood, Monty Python, and Jane Austen, Farah Heron wove complicated story arcs and uplifting happily ever afters in her daydreams while pursuing careers in human resources and psychology. She started writing those stories down a few years ago, and never looked back. She writes romantic comedies and women's fiction full of huge South Asian families, delectable food, and most importantly, brown people falling stupidly in love. She lives in Toronto with her husband, two children, and a rabbit named Strawberry. She is considering getting a cat.

Farah Heron's debut novel, *The Chai Factor* (2019), adds a South-Asian twist to the rom-com genre. Her feisty female characters and sense of humour have delighted readers, and many are eagerly awaiting the next creation from this talented author. *The Chai Factor* has been named a best book by *The Globe and Mail*, and has been praised in Book Riot, Smart Bitches Trashy Books, Bustle and more. Farah's next release, *Accidentally Engaged*, will be released March 9, 2021 by Forever/Grand Central Books.



TingL: What appeals to you about writing rom-com fiction?

I love writing rom-com and romance because no other genre is as optimistic. Romantic comedies must end with a happily-ever-after, and yet the twists and turns that the author can take you through to get there can be packed with as much tension as any other genre. But in the end, you know that the main characters will be happy, and that is so comforting to read, and to write.

What are your aspirations as an author / writing mentor?

I hope to continue writing romantic comedies, because I am having a ton of fun right now, and I love that I can give under-represented characters the love stories they deserve. I also am committed to help marginalized authors in this industry through mentorship programs such as PitchWars, BIPOC Writers Connect, and through Toronto Romance Writers. It's a hard road for authors of colour, which can be seen when looking at the statistics that show we are published at a rate well below our proportion of the population. I am committed to do my little part to change that.

What influences the stories that you decide to tell?

So far, the stories I have written feature South Asian Muslim Canadians like me, both because that is the community I know best, but also because I want others like me to see themselves in my books. And writing entertaining, joyful, optimistic, women-centric love stories with Muslims can help normalize our existence at a time when anti-Muslim sentiment is high.

Angela Thompson

I truly see it as revolutionary to give happily-ever-afters to people who many view as unworthy.

What does your writing routine look like?

I have no set writing routine! I'm a night owl, so I am often working into late hours, but right now I am not doing a lot of actual writing. I've started the promotion cycle for my next major release, *Accidentally Engaged*, out in March 2021. Plus, I am working in a few mentoring programs, and am teaching a class on writing rom-coms.

What issues are on your mind at the moment and how does that factor into your writing?

It's such a challenging time to write right now. A global pandemic and civil unrest isn't the most conducive time to write lighthearted escape reads, but I think these stories are so essential right now. We need joy and optimism more than we ever have.

What can you share about upcoming projects or publications?

My next major release is called *Accidentally Engaged*, and I love the story so much! It's a romantic comedy with a South Asian Muslim couple and it features an arranged marriage, a fake engagement, meddling families, a national cooking contest, a heroine who is a bread baker, and it has the most joyful ending I have ever written. I am excited it will be out in the world soon! I will also have another rom-com out in 2022. ■



Book Buzz

Little Free Diverse Libraries - GTA

When this issue's theme of diversity was announced, my first thought was to introduce *Teaching Librarian* readers to a grassroots initiative called Little Free Diverse Libraries - GTA.

At the beginning of July, one of the tutors on our team at Teachers on Call, Erica Yu, shared her plan to make BIPOC books more accessible to students by providing them for free. A graduate from the Master of Arts in Child Study and Education Program at OISE, and an elementary teacher in the Halton District School Board, Erica is deeply passionate about students seeing themselves represented in the books they read.

She was inspired by a campaign that started in the United States utilizing free little libraries as a platform to share BIPOC books and wanted to bring this to her local community. In June during the pandemic, Erica created a GoFundMe page, an Instagram account, and started to spread the word amongst her friends, family members and colleagues. Erica's fundraiser and mission has been embraced by many around her who share her values and goals of inclusivity.

To learn more about this unique project and how teacher-librarians can further incorporate diversity into their libraries, I interviewed Erica Yu.



For those new to Little Free Diverse Libraries - GTA, please describe your mission and goal?

Erica: Little Free Diverse Libraries - GTA was inspired by Sarah Kanya, the founder of Little Free Diverse Libraries (based in Arlington, MA and NYC). The mission is to highlight, and amplify BIPOC voices/characters, providing opportunities for continued learning and conversations through books. Especially here in Canada, conscious effort has been made to do this with Indigenous voices.

What inspired you to start this initiative?

Erica: As an educator, I see the growing diversity in today's classrooms, and want all children to see themselves represented in the books around them. I didn't have this as a child and want to see the narrative changed for today's students. These Little Free Libraries are a wonderful resource that families can tap into, to diversify the books that their children are exposed to.

How many books have you acquired and how many Little Free Libraries have been stocked to date?

Erica: To date, about 395 books have been acquired, and 97 Little Free Libraries have been stocked!

Who are some BIPOC authors and publishers to look out for?

Erica: There are so many amazing BIPOC authors/publishers to look out for, many of whom I have discovered through this initiative. Just a few include: Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer, Ibtihaj Muhammad, Grace Byers, Kiley Reid, as well as Canadians Desmond Cole and Sherry J. Lee. I also found an awesome First Nations distributor, GoodMinds, which is a thriving family owned and operated business based on the Six Nations of the Grand River at Brantford, ON.

What are some of the most popular books you have distributed that teacher-librarians may want to add to their collections?

Erica: *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi is one of my personal favourites and is a popular one among many of my friends and colleagues. *All Are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold, *Fatty Legs* by Margaret Pokiak-Fenton and Christy Jordan-Fenton, *Jambari Jumps* by Gaia Cornwall, and *Hair Love* by Matthew A. Cherry are also must-haves in my opinion!

For anyone reading this interview who wants to help, how can others get involved to support your mission?

Erica: There is a GoFundMe page for this initiative ([gf.me/u/ybhm4b](https://www.gofundme.com/u/ybhm4b)) with the funds being used to source BIPOC books to distribute to Little Free Libraries. I also have set up a registry with Indigo that supporters can use to purchase specific books that will be sent to me to distribute. Search “Erica Yu” in registries - it will be labelled Little Free Diverse Libraries - GTA.

What are you planning next for Little Free Diverse Libraries - GTA?

Erica: Ooh that’s tough to say. At the moment, I am quite focused on teaching my class of Grade 3s, with the extra challenge of adjusting to this “different” year! I plan to continue this initiative for as long as possible. I very much hope to continue to raise funds to acquire BIPOC books and keep distributing them to Little Free Libraries around the GTA, and maybe even beyond! I also would like to reach out to bigger companies/publishers in the hopes that they are able to donate books to this worthwhile cause!



What advice do you have for teacher-librarians incorporating diversity into student learning and school libraries?

Erica: I don’t feel as though I am in any position to give advice, but I would just say to make it a conscious and deliberate effort to include diverse books in your libraries and classrooms. In one of my courses in my teacher’s education program, I heard something that has stuck with me. As educators, our spaces should have both mirrors and windows – mirrors, so students see themselves reflected in the materials and visuals they are exposed to, and windows so they have the opportunity to look out and explore other cultures that are different than their own. Students are our best resources - tap into their wealth of experiences and knowledge for guidance. ■

“

As an educator, I see the growing diversity in today’s classrooms, and want all children to see themselves represented in the books around them. I didn’t have this as a child and want to see the narrative changed for today’s students.

”



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Forest Of Reading



Daniel Lumsden

Sparking Tough Conversations About Diversity

One morning while sitting in the staff room, our school teacher-librarian approached me about starting a book club for staff and administration with regards to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This club would focus on books with regards to the social and race issues that are happening south of the border and in many respects here in our country as well. Keep in mind this is not a new issue when it comes to race, but it has seemed to be heightened since the George Floyd incident when he was killed by a police officer, after the officer had his knee on his throat for eight minutes and 46 seconds. This has sparked outrage in Black communities across the world, and finally people are starting to pay attention, after Black voices have gone unheard for far too long.

It did not take me long to say yes to Caroline Freibauer. Actually, it took me less than five seconds to agree with joining her to co-moderate the club. As a Black male, these conversations are long overdue, and it is disappointing to know that it took a Black man to get murdered at the hands of a police officer in the month of May for people to start thinking that perhaps we do have a problem. At the same time, I have to be grateful that these conversations are now happening. But we also have to make sure that these issues are not checkbox items and that we stop having these discourses. Rather these discussions should be ongoing.

When Caroline and I met for our planning session, we wondered if we would get anyone to join. We believed that having one person join would be a success in itself. Therefore, when the initial email was sent out on our school's learning management system, the response was positive. We currently have 16 staff members including ourselves that are part of the book club.

Our next issue was deciding what books to choose from to begin these important discourses within our group. We both agreed that we wanted Canadian content for our club, but it was important to start with a book that would get people talking, and to have these uncomfortable conversations. I suggested we start with *White Fragility* by Robin D'Angelo. I have read this book before, and while it isn't Canadian and it may be uncomfortable for some, we believed this was a great starting point to provoke discourse in the group.

Finally, it is great to see how our school library is getting involved in these discussions. Our teacher-librarian has been very proactive on this issue, and it is great to see staff getting involved in the discussions. While we have a long way to go, this is a start and *White Fragility* by Robin D'Angelo is a great place to begin these conversations. Again, it is not up to me as a Black male to educate, it is up to the individual to make the effort to break down the barriers that have been set in place. One day at a time, but great to see the conversations starting to happen. ■



The Importance of Diverse Author Visits in Your LLC

Jonelle Aubyn

When actor Chadwick Boseman passed away, I was in complete shock and devastated by his loss. His portrayal of so many iconic fictional and non-fictional Black figures had a tremendous impact on the world, but, more importantly, on Black youth. When the movie *Black Panther* came out, the pride within the Black community was great. Finally, there was a mainstream superhero that was Black. T'Challa was intelligent, courageous, heroic, fair and kind—a king that made one proud. Boseman shared many of T'Challa's traits. He was an incredible role model, not only as an actor, but as a human being. Boseman inspired so many young people, and the impact that he had is undeniable.

So, what is the point of this story? Representation matters. Students can envision themselves in particular roles and positions when they see people like themselves in those roles. My school is incredibly diverse in so many ways. That is something that I consider with every book that I buy and with every author that I choose to invite to my school. It is essential to have diversity in the authors you bring to your schools and your students.

On Friday, October 10, 2018, we were fortunate to host a Skype visit with Jason Reynolds. It was a year in the making,

and I wasn't even sure this dream could become a reality. We put in the request in 2017, and to my shock and surprise, his assistant got back to me, and we were able to schedule a visit with our students. Reynolds' presentation was dynamic, engaging, funny and honest. He connected with our students on a level that few authors have before. Why was that? He looked like some of them. He spoke like them. He could relate to their life experiences, and they could relate to him. He was someone who didn't connect with reading until his late teens, proving that it is never too late to love reading or to become a writer. The students could see themselves in him and his books. After his visit, students in attendance could not stop talking about Reynolds. His books were flying off the shelves. There was excitement and enthusiasm. The energy in the LLC was palpable. Best of all, students who never thought about being writers now saw it as a possibility. If he could do it, why couldn't they? What we paid for the visit and what we received was well worth every penny.

Although Reynolds is American, having CanLit authors in your school is critical, and there are several wonderful, diverse Canadian authors that you can invite. Nadia Hohn, Robin Stevenson and Sabina Khan are just a few talented authors that are available. Even if your budget does not allow

for in-house visits, virtual visits, or author talks that authors set up themselves on YouTube or Facebook Live are also great ways to connect. For teacher-librarians in the Greater Toronto Area, I highly recommend encouraging students, teachers and families to attend the FOLD (Festival of Literary Diversity) or FOLD KIDS events hosted by Canadian author Jael Richardson. This annual festival in Brampton boasts a myriad of diverse authors who speak at the FOLD, the FOLD KIDS events and run writing workshops and other events that anyone can attend. It's very affordable and a lot of fun.

Participation in the FOLD has introduced me to many authors I have invited to speak at my school. During the pandemic, though we wanted to have these authors speak to our students, we had them talk to the teachers at school and online instead. Jesse Thistle, the author of *From the Ashes* and Senator Patti LaBoucane-Benson, author of the graphic novel *The Outside Circle*, spoke to our teachers about their stories and the issues facing Indigenous communities. They spoke of resilience and resistance. They shared the triumphs and challenges of their lives. We were so fortunate to have this learning opportunity to help us grow as educators. So much was gained, learned and shared. An author's visit can have just as significant an impact on teachers as it does on students.

This school year, we were able to resume our author visits with our students. We kicked off with Waubgeshig Rice, author of the *Moon of the Crusted Snow*, who I also met through the FOLD. Not only did he read from his book, but he also took the time to answer several questions from our staff and students about important issues such as the reclamation of his name and the names of his children, the importance of elders to his community and his process of becoming a writer. Like so many other children, he was not exposed to diverse writers or writers of Indigenous backgrounds as a student. His education was focused on the canon until his mid-teens. It wasn't until his aunt, an educator herself, took the time to give him novels by famous Indigenous authors like Richard Wagamese, Richard Van Camp and Eden Robinson who he learned that there were Indigenous writers who were writing about their stories and people. Before his aunt gifted him with these novels, he had no exposure or awareness of authors of his culture and heritage. Without the help of his aunt, he never may have become the author that he is today. As teacher-librarians, we must ensure that we are not doing our students a disservice by not exposing them to authors that look like them and who share similar stories and experiences.

Even if your school is monocultural and does not have a

great deal of diversity, it's still important to have diverse authors in your school. Students from all backgrounds benefit from seeing a wide variety of authors. It helps break down stereotypes that they may have about certain groups of people and leads to understanding and empathy. It shatters the narrative of a single story and opens students to the reality that groups of people, no matter their race, ethnicity or culture, are not monolithic. As Rudine Sims Bishop, an award-winning professor emerita of education at Ohio State University who has championed multicultural literature, wrote:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (qtd. in Davis)

Authors are the ones that bring those books to life. Everyone benefits from diversity and inclusion.

Please remember when you are inviting an author that, for many of them, this is their full-time job and that they cannot be expected to do this work for free. Securing funding for author visits can be challenging, depending on whether your school stakeholders see it as a worthy investment. However, haggling and negotiating on the price is unacceptable and insulting. Try to maintain an equitable standard of pay for your authors. Actively seek out authors that your students can relate to and see themselves in. Never in a million years did I think it would be possible to have Jason Reynolds speak to students at Louise Arbour Secondary School, but that dream came true, and everyone was better for it. Equity and inclusion need to extend beyond the books we buy to include the authors we host in our buildings. Future generations of writers may be inspired to tell their stories when they see people like themselves as authors. ■

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Diverse Literature Educates Students and Teachers

Naushaad Suliman

In a talk named “The Negro Child – His Self-Image”, James Baldwin spoke to a group of American teachers on Oct. 16, 1963 regarding education and the education of African-American children. The talk is worth revisiting often. It can guide the realignment of a teacher’s moral compass and purpose, support navigating ministry and board initiatives, and aid in the fulsome delivery of the curriculum.

The benefits of exposing children to diverse literature are not limited to the children. I reference Baldwin, including his “Talk to Teachers,” to demonstrate that the teacher is the lesser-known grand beneficiary of diverse children’s literature. The teacher, too, is a participant in the journey of thinking and rethinking their conception of the world.

By diverse children’s literature, I mean stories that reflect our common and differing identities. Diverse literature to me contains characters of various cultures, histories, and philosophies. It is literature that includes Turtle Island, Canada, the world, the identities of the school population, and the identity of the greater community.

It is important for children’s consciousness to see themselves represented in the literature they experience at school. This is an important feeling — being seen and acknowledged, allowed to have agency, and be part of the cultural present. Students recognize that they, too, contribute to society, the world, history, and culture. They create community along time and space. They feel connected to communities different from those they belong to. Baldwin said:

You read something which you thought only happened to you, and you discover that it happened 100 years ago to Dostoyevsky. This is a very great liberation for the suffering, struggling person, who always thinks that he is alone. This is why art is important. (Baldwin, 2014, 31)

Stories help us to feel less alone. The more stories we identify with, the more connected we feel.

I believe that diverse children’s literature enables teachers to not only help students see themselves, but to also allow teachers to see themselves too. In a typical week, I may read five to ten stories to children. There is the potential to visit

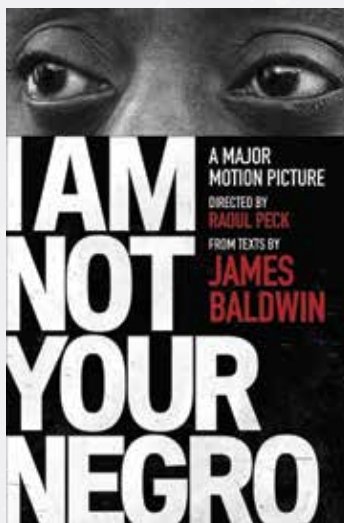
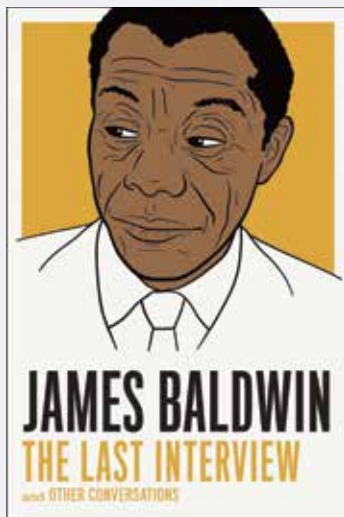
five to ten points of view, histories, cultures, and ways to celebrate our similarities as well as celebrate and contend with our differences. We invariably will see ourselves identify with people who have lived in a different time or place, and we begin to see how interconnected we are. Beyond feeling connected, what is the purpose of this work?

On this point Baldwin is clear:

The purpose of education ... is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. (Baldwin, 2020)

In this situation of reading diverse children’s literature, I say it is teachers, too, who are being educated. If we are not the ones looking at the world for ourselves, making our own decisions, and cultivating our own identities, then, as philosophers and pundits have put it, we are akin to sheep. Moving toward the goal of being “educated,” reading and thinking about those five to ten histories, cultures, and points of view each week, we cannot help but to reconsider our experiences individually and communally. There is a point where we realize that what we are reading to children and how we have been taught to see the world, may not align. This begins the painful process of cognitive dissonance — the schism we find when we hold two opposing ideas. Baldwin described the moment of conscious awareness while watching “Old West” films. Baldwin, watching Gary Cooper fighting (read clearing) the “Indians”, cheered for Cooper until he realized that his experience of the world made it painfully clear that in everyday life Cooper was in fact fighting Baldwin; this film was a metaphor for his oppression. Finding out what one has come to believe to be true is in fact untrue makes for a busy mind. The busy mind is one being educated because it is asking questions.

Reading diverse stories allows us to be conscious of and begin to deal with cognitive dissonance. We must then begin to evolve how we think, and in what way we are thinking it, if we



are to agree to be educated and thereby in a position to educate others. If we do not, we stop evolving and begin to devolve into old, familiar, and possibly untrue scripts. Reading diverse children's literature can be uncomfortable for us, but it is entirely important to continue to hold on to our humanity by seeing the full nature of us, the "other", and our impact on one other.

Which brings us to the conception of identity — both the student's and the teacher's. How do we see ourselves? How do we see the many "others"? What shapes and forms our identity? How has our identity changed in the past 20 or 30 years? We walk many identities. When do we choose to don one and doff another? How do those identities impact each other? These are hard questions. Hard questions often require much contemplation.

Baldwin's remarks on identity may seem rather American at

discomfort with the Canadian propagation of genocide? How do we tell students that the "True North strong and free" was not free for everyone? What does it signify for the histories we have come to believe about our Canadian past? How do we deal with the pain? How do we deal with knowing this was not the only example of the systemic destruction of communities in our history? How do we stop lying about the past?

Pain, heartbreak, and feelings of isolation can begin to be relieved through the sharing of stories. This is true for all participating. Baldwin says, "Only if we face these open wounds in ourselves can we understand them in other people" (Howard, 1963, 89). Diversifying the stories we tell and share in our classrooms is not about mere curriculum. It is the fundamental first step to transforming ourselves as educators — recognizing our vulnerability and our need to change. I fear our students might be more ready for transformation that we are. ■

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first:

What is upsetting the country is a sense of its own identity. If, for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history. And the reason is that if you are compelled to lie about one aspect of anybody's history, you must lie about it all. If you have to lie about my real role here, if you have to pretend that I hoed all that cotton just because I loved you, then you have done something to yourself. You are mad. (Baldwin, 2020)

The American past is different in many ways from that of Canada, but some might suggest the differences are not that great at all. It is worth understanding the past, its impact, and how we might create a more equitable future together. Take, for example, resistance to teaching about the horrors of residential schooling as a part of reconciliation. One comment I have heard teachers make is that the students are too young to hear about this kind of inhumanity and suffering. I wonder about this resistance and reluctance. Is it, in fact, about finding a way to talk about this with children, or is it about our

Positive Space and Me

Susan Ruscinski

Back in 2009, a social worker asked at a staff meeting for a teacher to consider volunteering to lead our school's Positive Space Group for students. It was time for all the schools in the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) to have supportive groups for our LGBTQ, two-spirited population. At that staff meeting, I think we were all hoping someone else would volunteer. However, after a month had passed and no one had decided to lead the group, I figured it was time to step forward. As the mother of four children, I decided I would want a Positive Space Group for my children if they needed it, so shouldn't I do the same for other young people in my school?

That nudge to volunteer turned out to be the most important influence on my teaching career. Sometimes I am learning more than teaching, but that is a good thing too. Our society depends upon people being open minded and responsive to change for our world to embrace diversity. We have to fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identities. I have been a full-time teacher-librarian since 1999,

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LGBTQ youth who experience high levels of family rejection are more than 8 times as likely to report a suicide attempt and nearly 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression as peers with accepting families.

— Family Acceptance Project, 2009

egale.ca/awareness/lgbtq-youth-suicide-prevention-supportive-behaviours-for-parents-and-families

”

and I have continued to serve as the Positive Space Lead since 2009. That added responsibility has given me a strong sense of making a difference and supporting others, while also being part of the movement to encourage evolution in our society. Every person should be allowed to be the person they are meant to be – that is our main philosophy at the Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School Positive Space Group.

As the teacher-librarian at my school for many years, I see the Library Learning Commons as the heart of our school and the ultimate safe place. It is also convenient because I am usually easy to find and very accessible. It is important that students know they are not alone. They do not have to remain isolated. I do the morning announcement for the weekly meeting to ensure everyone at the school knows about it. The more students hear about the Positive Space Group, the more students become accustomed to the presence of the LGBTQ community at our school.

Should young people feel they are rejected by the society they are trying to be a part of? No, we must allow people to be who they want to be, while those around them learn to accept diversity, rather than being afraid of it. As educators, we are guiding others in an evolutionary process. It's taking time, but we are winning. One of the steps in that process is monitoring language. Will we ever rid ourselves of the expression “that's so gay”? If educators intervene, they can teach students that this type of abusive, discriminatory, negative language is unacceptable. Do not pretend you didn't hear it. This is a step toward reinforcing mental well-being for all, while acknowledging the power of words.

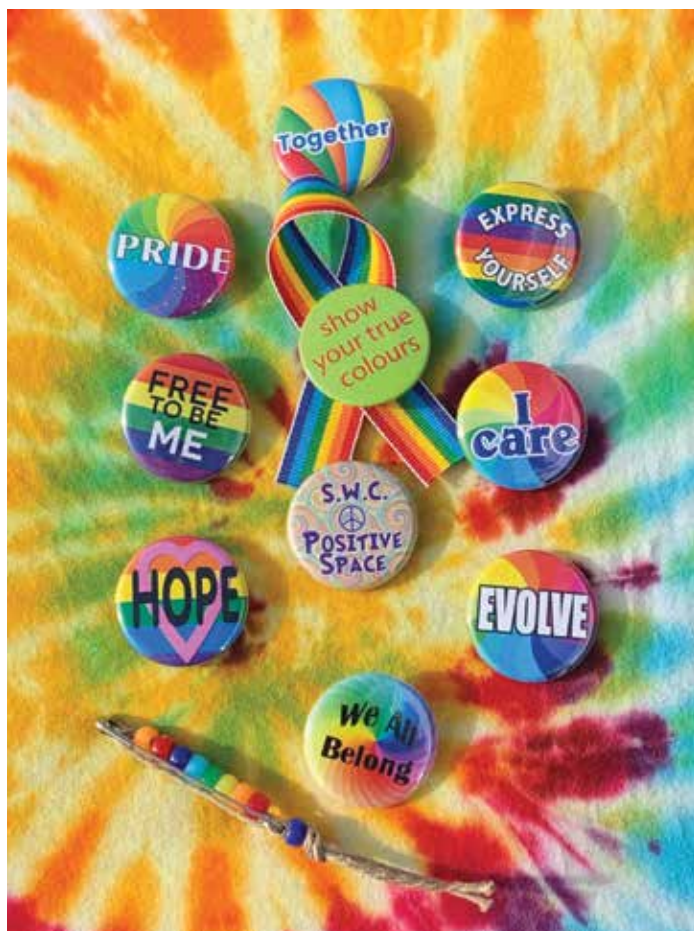
Along with weekly meetings, students in the HWDSB Positive Space Groups look forward to events that allow them to meet other members of the LGBTQ student community. In a year that is not restricted by pandemic guidelines, there could be other Positive Space events spread out among the high schools, such as a coffee house, trivia contest, movie night, or a Valentine's Day dance. The annual entertainment highlight for the community is the spring Rainbow Prom dinner dance.



Another important event is the Day of Difference, an educational and motivational conference for our Positive Space Groups that has become an HWDSB tradition since it began in 2008. Students hear guest speakers, participate in various workshops, and complete the day with snacks and an afternoon dance party. In May 2013, Premier Kathleen Wynne sent a video welcome message to Day of Difference attendees: “Every one of you is unique, and every single one of you deserves to be celebrated, to feel safe and valued. You know I’m the first female premier of the province and I’m the first openly-gay premier as well.” She went on to describe her vision for Ontario as “a place where every person is treated with respect and valued for who they are.” That is the vision we strive to achieve.

Over the years more and more people within the school system have become involved in the Positive Space movement, including various social workers, educational assistants, advisors for indigenous students, public health nurses and teachers. Members of the LGBTQ community also have become more involved as educational speakers, role models and advocates for youth drop-in centres. However, students in the Positive Space groups will tell you they are still waiting for the school curriculum and the textbooks to truly reflect their community.

Several years ago a student came to me because I was the Positive Space Teacher. We talked for a while and together called COAST, the Crisis Outreach and Support Team. That closeted gay student spent some time in the hospital because he was afraid that he would kill himself. I was able to visit him and was one of many people who convinced him that life would get better. How could I not continue to be a Positive Space Teacher after that? ■



Sir Winston Churchill's Positive Space Meetings went online last spring because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online meetings will continue until student groups are allowed to meet face to face again. In June HWDSB staff put together a “Rainbow Pride 2020” video celebration for all Positive Space students and the LGBTQ student community.

The Value of a Diversity Audit

Do you know how diverse your library collection is? How can you find out? Why do teacher-librarians need to collect this data?

As a teacher-librarian concerned with curating a collection that is accessible and engaging for everyone, these questions are uppermost on my mind.

Context

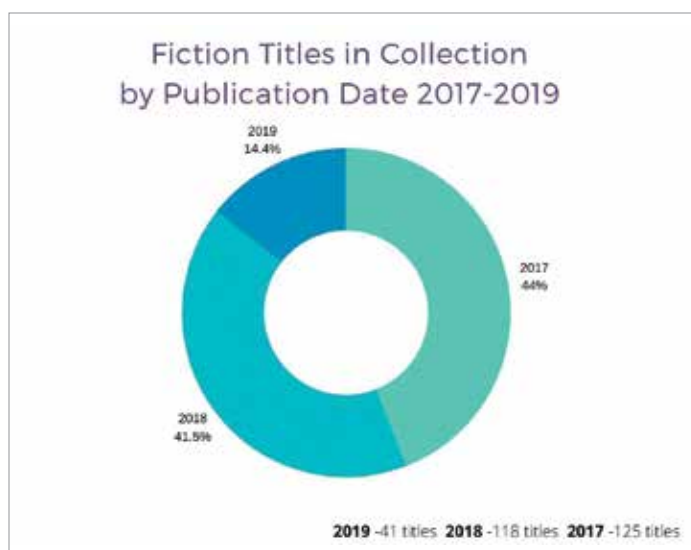
When Deborah Dundas, books editor for the *Toronto Star*, presented research from her article “Who do we see in kids’ books? Star survey puts numbers to the state of diversity” at the Canadian School Libraries Treasure Mountain conference in February 2020, I was inspired to conduct my own audit.

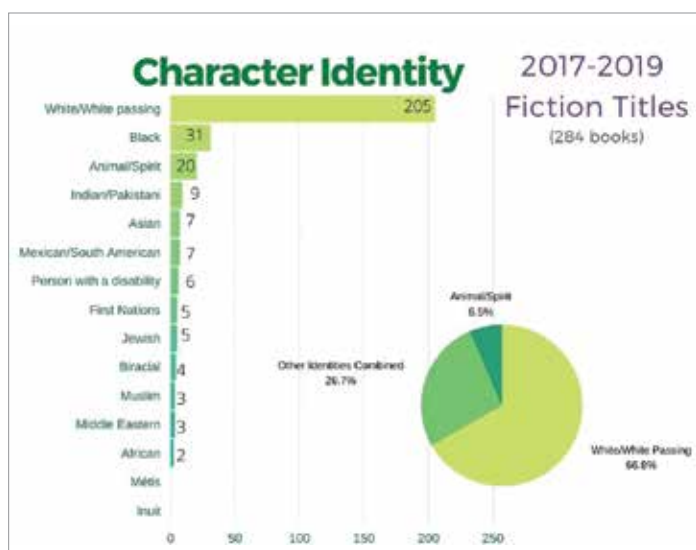
She collected data about the main characters in Canadian books published in 2018 from three categories: picture books, middle grade books and young adult books. Data was collected in broad categories about the character’s ethnicity, gender and disability. The findings from this article are consistent with other diversity audits of the publishing industry which show the diversity in children’s literature is improving, but also question and challenge the lack of diversity in the publishing industry itself.

It made me wonder how diverse my middle school library collection was compared to the research of the broader publishing sector. I started to collect data about my collection to guide my purchasing decisions and to start conversations with other teacher-librarians. I thought that seeing data from my Brampton middle school library might encourage others to look at their own collections. My library collection has fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, and picture books in both French and English. I started the audit by focusing on titles from the 2017-2019 English fiction collection. This left me with about 284 titles to consider.

Findings

I quickly noticed patterns in the data I was collecting. Books by white authors and about white characters made up most of my collection, which is consistent with the data from the publishing audits I have read. I arrived at this library in September 2019 and was purchasing books to increase the diversity of the





collection. I was able to increase the representation of some underrepresented voices, but others are still missing, for example, books by disabled, Métis, and Inuit authors. While I had a selection of books by Black authors, none are Canadian. Representation of LGBTQ authors and characters is also very low. I learned through my research it can be difficult to find an author's specific identities, because if they are part of the disabled or LGBTQ communities they may not feel safe to share this publicly. We can ask ourselves why this is the case, what we can do as librarians to be allies and use the privilege of our positions to amplify a variety of voices.

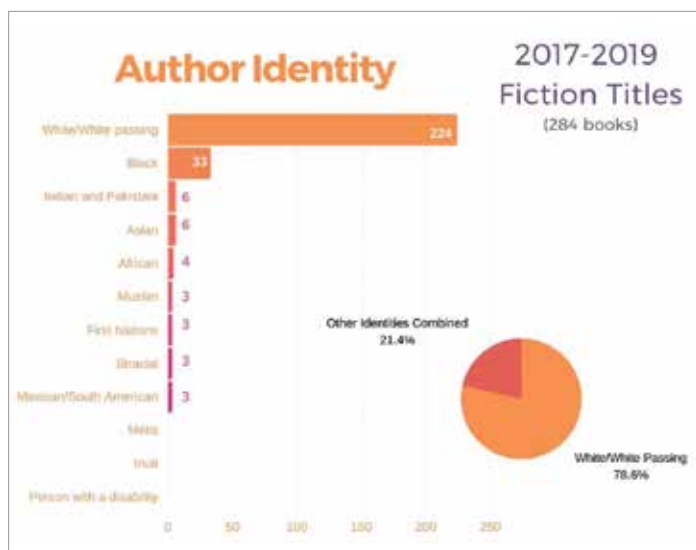
#OwnVoices

The hashtag #OwnVoices was started on Twitter in September 2015 by @corrineduyvis "to recommend kidlit about diverse characters written by authors from that same diverse group." It has become a way for readers to identify when a "protagonist and the author share a marginalized identity." In my diversity audit, I found a strong correlation between the racialized identity of the author and the identity of their books' main characters. This is not to say authors can only write about their lived experience, but I found that authors in general tend to write about characters that reflect their own racial identities. My research did not identify any disabled authors but did include disabled characters which leads me to the conclusion that able-bodied authors are writing about disabled characters. In some cases, this may be an appropriation of marginalized experiences, which can be problematic. If we want students to see themselves reflected in the books in the library and be able to learn about identities different from their own, we need to purchase books that represent a wide range of identities for students to choose from. It is also important to involve students in the critical thinking required for diversity audits to help them understand their book choices. Students can participate in choosing books for the library once they understand the purpose and goals of building diversity in the collection.

Next Steps

Once my audit was complete, I started to search for titles to add to my collection that would address the missing voices. Due to COVID-19 and the reorganization of staff, I became an online teacher and am no

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longer working in my school library. Although my plans for this research are on hold for now, I am using what I have learned about underrepresented voices as a homeroom teacher. I am looking forward to using a wider variety of books than ever before and am always looking for #OwnVoices books by authors that represent diverse perspectives. Having the opportunity to share these books with students and get immediate feedback is one of my favourite parts of being a classroom teacher and a TL. When I return to the library, I will continue my work building a diverse collection and involving staff and students with purchasing decisions based on the findings of my audit. I hope to continue collecting data for the other areas of the library collection.

Supports Teacher-Librarians Need

When books are entered into a library's catalogue system, the metadata entered can be chosen with intention. The location of the book on the shelf, the age of the material, and the publisher are all details readily available to library users. There are other categories of metadata that would be very useful for readers to access. How can we include details that tell us about the diversity of our collection right in the metadata of each text? It takes a lot of time for individual teacher-librarians to collect data to complete a diversity audit. If school boards collected this data and shared it with all teacher-librarians, they could better use their time analyzing the data of their collection and making informed purchasing choices. ■

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How to Start Your Own Diversity Audit:

1. Use your library software to create a list of the type and years of books you want to audit. Some programs will sort by genre while others only allow for material type.
2. Choose the spreadsheet program you will use to collect your data (i.e., Google Sheets, Microsoft Excel, Apple Numbers etc.)
3. Import your titles and authors into your spreadsheet.
4. Choose the categories you want to collect data about (i.e., gender, ethnicity, religion etc.). Specific categories are best to include as many voices as possible, read other diversity audits to get some ideas.
5. Start by year or alphabetical order and use a variety of sources (i.e., Goodreads, author websites, book reviews) to collect data about authors and main characters.
6. Show your data using graphs to help present your work to your school, administration, parents, colleagues. Make your work attractive by using programs like Canva.

Want to know more? I have written an extensive explanation of my audit process for Canadian School Libraries. Visit journal.canadianschoollibraries.ca to read more about my work.

If you have questions, feel free to reach out to me via Twitter @toni_a_duval.

Using Inquiry to Engage Students in Diversity

Shelley Vohra



Multiculturalism is the foundation on which Canadian identity was built. Despite our diverse society, we need to acknowledge that our country still faces very real issues and challenges; there are various communities that have faced and continue to face systemic racism and discrimination. Canada has an unpleasant and unacceptable history regarding treatment of its Indigenous communities, its Japanese internment camps, and its Chinese Immigration Act. While recent news has focused on racially motivated events in the United States, we need to adopt a Canadian-centric lens when it comes to addressing issues related to anti-black racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and the treatment of our Indigenous communities.

The first step is to critically examine our curriculum. We need to be cognizant of the fact that it is not neutral; it is inherently based on colonialism and euro-centrism, often excluding many groups which are represented in our student populations, and demonstrating to them who and what is important from a Canadian perspective. It was only five years ago that Indigenous history was added to every grade level, due to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We have curriculum expectations that are very explicit in terms of the content students are supposed to learn, but there is also the “hidden curriculum”. Hidden curriculum is non-academic learning that is as important as academic instruction and which has educational significance in schools (Vallance, 1973). Examples include citizenship, cooperation, diversity, and multicultural perspectives. The ways in which the hidden curriculum is integrated into classrooms depends on the educator’s knowledge of anti-oppression, from anti-racism to examining biases and assumptions. We must go beyond talking about these issues only during specific months (Black History in February, Asian Heritage in May, and National Indigenous History in June) and focusing solely on cultural components of these various groups. Making culture the foundation of learning can lead to “tokenism” (i.e., practice of making only a symbolic effort), leading to a false belief that groups are monolithic, and gaining a surface level understanding and appreciation of racialized and marginalized groups (which can also lead to cultural appropriation). Therefore, we need

to go much deeper and introduce the “hidden curriculum” concepts of equity, inclusion, and social justice to our students in ways that foster critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration in order to initiate change.

There are several ways in which we can accomplish this goal. One way is to infuse Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) in teaching and learning. Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy is a research-based framework that has been around for many years. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) first introduced the term “Culturally Responsive Teaching” to discuss the importance of integrating students’ lived experiences, background knowledge, and culture in the classroom to ensure equitable outcomes for all. Gay (2000) and Villegas and Lucas (2002) extended this idea to illustrate that students learn differently based on factors such as language, family dynamics, experiences, and identity. Here are some CRRP discussion questions you can ask students:

- What part of your identity do you think people first notice about you?
- What part of your identity are you most comfortable sharing with other people?
- What part of your identity are you most proud of?
- What part of your identity did you most struggle with growing up?

Related to Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy is teaching from an anti-oppression mindset. There are individuals from all walks of life that are consistently excluded in a variety of situations and areas; this can be due to a myriad of reasons such as the colour of their skin, their gender, their sexual orientation, their ability, their class, and/or their age. More often than not, intersectionality plays a role; a poor white student will be treated more favourably than a poor black student due to the colour of their skin. Likewise, a straight white student will most likely be treated differently than a gay white student due to their sexual orientation. Teaching with an anti-oppressive mindset means acknowledging and

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engaging in meaningful discourse about power and privilege. Concepts such as anti-racism, anti-sexism, anti-heterosexism, anti-classism, anti-ageism, and anti-ableism must be discussed in the classroom to dismantle power dynamics. We must teach our students to challenge the dominant power structures and systemic barriers in order to empower groups who find themselves consistently oppressed.

Inquiry is an effective learning model to use when integrating the principles of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy and the components of anti-oppressive practice. Inquiry based learning allows students to take ownership of their learning, develop skills that are transferable, enhance learning, and boost engagement and motivation. Wiggins (1998) stated that it is important to think about backwards design when planning, but it is more than just mapping your day-to-day lessons and checking off expectations from the curriculum. The objective is to plan backwards in such a way that students are achieving worthy goals, concepts, ideas, skills, and processes that are transferable by using big ideas and driving questions. The big ideas “go beyond discrete facts or skills to focus on larger concepts, principles, or processes” (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). Some examples of big ideas related to equity and inclusion are:

- Identity
- Power
- Privilege
- Change
- Conflict

A driving question related to identity can be, “How have your experiences shaped your identity?” For change, it might be, “What’s one thing I can do to make a difference?” Additionally, a question for conflict could be, “Is conflict necessary for change?” You can jumpstart these inquiries with an artifact (e.g., video, visual, object, infographic, or quote) and a “See Think Wonder” protocol. Posters from unlearn (unlearn.com) are fantastic for leading inquiries around issues related to social justice.

Literacy supported with access to diverse literature, whether it is a picture book or a novel, is an integral part of both inquiry and social justice in the classroom. For younger students, it’s

important to ensure they are exploring a variety of topics when discussing diversity (e.g., same sex families, poverty, identity, gender roles). Having a follow up discussion is vital so students can consolidate and reflect on their learning. Students also can complete a variety of activities as a class, group, or individually, such as writing poems and letters or creating drawings and logos to represent their feelings. For older students, it’s important to provide choice when selecting novels, they can read related to the big ideas discussed in the classroom. Due to the increasing diversity in our classrooms, we need to go beyond the single class novel. Many students feel they are not represented in the learning process because the books they are required to read do not represent who they are, or their lived experiences. They struggle with making connections, engaging, and constructing meaning from the novel because they can not relate to the events and ideas in the book. For example, some students might not connect with the books *Holes* or *The Outsiders* because they can’t relate to the main character’s experiences. By allowing students to select the book they want to read that relates to the big idea (e.g., identity), we are providing students with voice and ownership over their learning.

Give students time to peruse books and read the first chapter or two. This is what good readers do; they skim and scan the book to see if it catches their interest. If not, they move on to the next book. As adults, we do this all the time when we are shopping for books at a store like Indigo. So, why not model this behaviour for our students? We also need to keep in mind that the skills related to literacy are the same, whether they are reading a book like *There’s Something About Sweetie* by Sandhya Menon or *Free Throw* by Jacqueline Guest. The teaching and learning of strategies such as summarizing, synthesizing, or inferring, do not change. By giving students choice and letting them create their own book clubs (i.e., literature circles) around novels that inspire and appeal to them, we are creating a learning environment that will lead to meaningful discourse and dialogue.

This is not to say that picture books and novels related to the big ideas around diversity and social justice are limited to language classes. These books and novels should be integrated in subject areas like social studies, history, and science:

Picture books that can support culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical discussions

Jacob's New Dress by Sara Hoffman

Who Are You? by Brook Pessin-Whedbee

Pink is for Boys by Robb Pearlman.

Examples of diverse literature for inquiry and social justice

Mommy, Mama and Me by Lesléa Newman

I am Jazz by Jessica Herthel

Chandra's Magic Light by Theresa Heine and Judith Gueyfier

Where Are You From? by Yamilé Saied Mendez.

Follow-up questions for a single resource: *I am Jazz* by Jessica Herthel

- Jazz says that her favorite colours are green and silver. What are your favorite colors?
- What do you have in common with Jazz? What are some things that are different?
- In the book, Jazz identifies as transgender. Can you describe what transgender means?
- If Jazz came to our school, what would you do to help her feel safe and welcomed?

- In social studies, we can use the big ideas of “privilege” and “power” and read picture books such as *I Am Not A Number* by Jenny Kay Dupuis and Kathy Kacer and *When I Was Eight* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
- In history, students can examine “identity” and “power” by reading *Fatty Legs* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton and *Sugar Falls* by David A. Robertson
- In science, students can explore the concept of “power” and the “environment” with the novel *Flush* by Carl Hiaasen or *Feed* by Matthew Tobin Anderson.

In other words, how are we supporting students to make connections between the various subject areas and the big ideas in anti-oppression teaching? How can we use literature in our classes to make connections to reading, writing, and oral communication? How are we extending the big ideas to include “resilience” and “survival”?

The United Nations SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) is another great resource to introduce topics related to diversity and equity. For example, if we look at Goal #6, Clean Water and Sanitation, what connections do we want students to make to our Indigenous communities? We can use the book *Nibi's Water Song* by Sunshine Tenasco to further the discussion and learning regarding clean water in our Indigenous communities? If we explore Goal #1, Poverty, how can we use books like *Something Beautiful* by Sharon Dennis Wyeth and *Front Desk* by Kelly Yang to discuss the concept of intersectionality? By sharing these books and novels with our students across all subjects, we are not only opening their eyes to the diversity around them, but we also are sparking conversations about various issues related to social justice with the intent to create social change agents who want to make a difference.

We know that many students experience an achievement gap because of an engagement gap, which can lead to opportunity gaps later in life. By framing learning in a way that values their voice by providing choice, we reinforce autonomy in learning. The use of big ideas and driving questions that focus on diversity and inclusion, allows students to use their own experiences and stories to meet curriculum expectations and engage in critical dialogue, thereby putting themselves at the center of the experience. Through the exploration of different topics, they make connections, ask questions and learn more effectively as they consolidate their understanding. When students recognize that their voice is valued, they become more engaged in the learning process and are motivated to dig deeper and ask better questions. ■

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Doing the Work

Amanda Potts and Melanie White

Melanie White and Amanda Potts are English teachers and department heads in Ottawa. They talk about anti-racism and equity for their students in their podcast, [Just Conversations](#), and they each write a blog as part of their teaching practice. Here, they share both why and how they have chosen to emphasize

Amanda:

Our school's cramped book room is filled with giant rolling wooden shelves. To access a row of books, teachers grab a handle attached to the outside of a behemoth bookcase, then haul until a narrow aisle appears between shelves and the air becomes thick with dust.

On entering the room, visitors invariably suck in their breath: "Wow! Look at all these books!" But they are deceived; the books are outdated. Shelves and shelves of books that no one has taught in 20 or more years. Books held together by duct tape. Class sets of donated books that have languished in place since the day they arrived. Books everywhere, but few relevant. I once found an entire class set of books published in 1941 – older than anyone on our staff. Those covers that are undamaged show representations of white heteronormative ideas; our parents or even our grandparents might have studied many of the titles. During my first few years at the school, I never left the book room without an armful of books that simply had to go. I have filled several giant trash bins with old books, and even now I never leave the book room without at least three books to toss. We are, almost literally, overwhelmed by the "canon."

Melanie:

When I moved to a new school last year, I found myself in an historic building, one much like Hogwarts from the outside. I quickly realized that its Gothic Revival style, inspired by the university campuses of Oxford and Cambridge in England, permeates far beyond the structure itself. Inside, too, I was confronted by tradition and the ubiquity of the "English canon".

The canon still dominates many classrooms and book rooms despite its outdated norms and voices. Awakening to these inequities, we needed to disrupt the classroom texts we teach.

We had both read articles and books about racism. We attended a workshop with Penny Kittle and Kelly Gallagher where they talked about their book [180 Days: Two Teachers](#)

[and the Quest to Engage and Empower Adolescents](#) and the importance of book choice, and we introduced many books written by modern authors with varied backgrounds. We were already deeply concerned about equity when we both individually reached a tipping point where we could no longer see understanding as separable from action.

Amanda:

I realized that change could no longer wait when one of my former students came to me, deeply upset, after his white English teacher showed two movies with images of lynchings and the KKK, with white characters using the n-word. The teacher did not discuss or contextualize any of it. The student felt alone in his blackness. Until that moment, I thought that I was doing a good job with equity, but my focus was limited to my classroom. I hadn't used my role as a curriculum specialist to lead in this area because I didn't want to upset the apple cart. As my student and I talked about his hurt and what to do next, I recognized that true equity had to extend beyond my classroom. I made a start, and while it was [a bit wrong-footed](#), I had moved into doing the work.

Melanie:

With a new course at the Grade 11 level, we were already making changes to our books by using Indigenous voices as the core texts and getting support from Indigenous coaches, but this [highlighted the predominance of a particular type of whiteness](#) represented in other courses. As we shifted, I wasn't ready for the challenges from white students and parents who made assumptions that these texts were not scholarly. To combat this, my principal suggested a parent book club which we arranged and hosted in our library learning commons. This gave us an opportunity to connect with the community in a larger conversation and make the connection to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's](#) goals for education.

We started meeting at a coffee shop weekly to share our struggles, talk about our concerns and think about next steps.

Both of our schools have majority-white populations and are well respected. Nevertheless, racism was present and hurting our students. And we both felt alone in our work: we needed each other's support so that we could test our thinking, consider how best to make change, and acknowledge, discuss and reflect on our mistakes without causing more harm to students who are marginalized by the system. We also needed to study collaboratively and to hold one another accountable so that we didn't fall back into the status quo.

As two white cis-gendered, straight women, we fit the demographic of the majority of teachers in Ontario. Eventually, we recognized that the conversations we were having might be helpful to others like us who were struggling to make change in their own schools. Though it required us to be vulnerable, we started recording our conversations and publishing them as [a podcast](#). And we had to keep learning.

We read books like Ibram X. Kendi's *How to be Anti-Racist*, Robin DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, and Desmond Cole's *The Skin We're In*. We intentionally updated our social media feeds so that we were following teachers and academics who identify as part of the global majority or people who specialized in social justice and equity work. We were reading Tricia Ebarvia, Dr. Kim Parker, Sherri Spelic, Dr. Byron McLure, Dr. Sheldon Eakins and many others to expand our understanding. We attended webinars and courses to dive deeper. Simultaneously, we began reading novel after novel by BIPOC authors, trying to develop a solid foundation of books about characters who represented groups that had been marginalized in our school systems. We needed to hear the stories told by them.

The more we read, listened, and learned, the more our understanding changed. We experienced a paradigm shift. We had to come to terms with our own racism and the damage we have done, both personally and as a society. Even harder was acknowledging the ideas we still hold on to. But we couldn't unsee what we had seen: Racism is both omnipresent and incredibly damaging, not only to people of the global majority but to all people. Dehumanizing any group of people makes us all less human.

We attended "Hard Conversations on Racism", a workshop at the University of Ottawa. There, we heard from [Carl James](#), [Ibrahim Awad](#), and [Jacqueline Lawrence](#). Then students from our school system spoke. Hearing from students about the harm some books inflict, especially when white teachers mismanage terms or ideas, shook us to the core. Again, we had to face the choices that we make in positions of power and privilege.

Melanie:

In my school, I spent intentional time listening to BIPOC students as a teacher supervisor of our Diverse Student Union. I bought them books by Asian and Black authors, with Muslim and LGBTQ themes, and I offered these same books to the predominantly white students in my classroom. There was a surge of interest in reading and talking about books. The

DSU students built on this and decided to write "Dear White Educator" and "Dear White Student" letters which they read aloud at an assembly during Black History Month. The white staff and students were startled by their raw honesty. It was a moment of intense discomfort, which is something that I have come to realize is essential for anti-racist equity work.

Amanda:

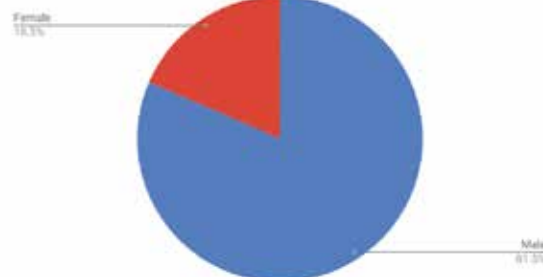
At my school, the previous sponsor of the Black Student Association was on leave and some students asked if I could help. At first, I was unsure, but I knew these students needed a safe space and I had finally understood that it was not their job, nor the job of BIPOC staff members to create it.

We could no longer ignore the fact that our book rooms centred white male voices, though we knew that other teachers thought it "wasn't that bad." To show just how bad it was, we both did a book room audit.

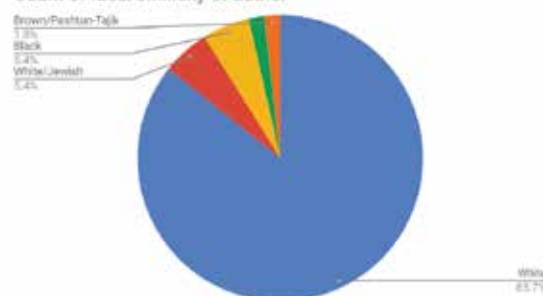
Snapshots of Our Book Rooms in 2019

Amanda's School

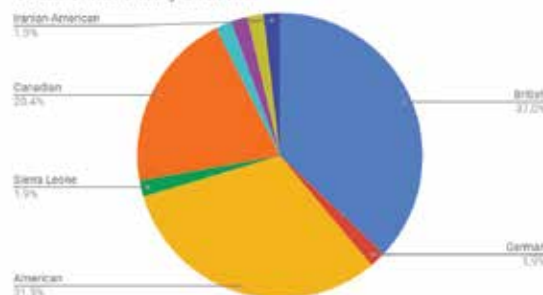
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Count of race/ethnicity of author



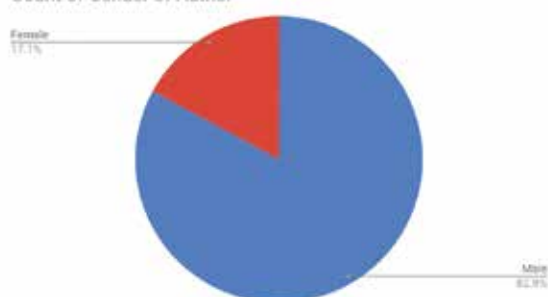
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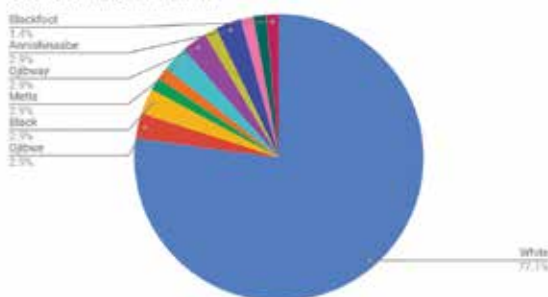
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Melanie's School

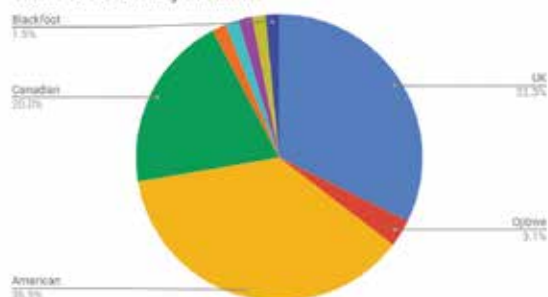
Count of Gender of Author



Count of Race of Author



Count of Nationality of Author



We were deeply committed to anti-racism and equity work, challenging our assumptions, and changing our ideas. So why hadn't we, as department heads, changed the texts our departments were teaching? When our Equity Reading Club read the article, [Avoiding Racial Equity Detours](#) by Paul Gorski of the [Equity Literacy Institute](#), we realized that we were falling into the detour of "pacing for privilege" which Gorski says happens when "an equity approach coddles the hesitations of people with the least racial equity investment while punishing people with the most investment." We had to take another hard look at ourselves and our choices.

Melanie:

I physically removed racist books from our bookroom shelves, knowing that I would face pushback from teachers and parents. But I did this knowing that our director of education and my principal supported me.

Amanda:

I didn't remove any more books from our bookroom after

attending these workshops. My administration was less supportive, and I was afraid that pushback from the teachers and parents would derail my long-term efforts. I needed to build a community of support before I charged in because, as Tricia Ebarvia says, "[diverse texts are not enough](#)." I ran the risk of replacing racist texts with new voices but continuing to do harm if teachers approached them with racist attitudes. Instead, I continued to share articles with teachers and found a small group of like-minded teachers who were ready for new books. Pacing for privilege? Maybe. But this move to diverse texts needed to be a long-term change, not a short-term fix. Sure enough, since a new principal arrived, we have been able to decentre the problematic texts. We have a growing group of teachers who are doing the work of becoming anti-racist. And our department is exploring new texts to add to the curriculum.

In both cases, we made choices knowing that our students needed books that offered them "[mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors](#)" and that the presence of these "classics" was harming them, particularly when white teachers used them without acknowledging their problematic content and power imbalance. We had to both build capacity and change the structure of the book room concurrently. We wanted to include books that empowered our students, celebrating the successes and fullness of their lives, not consistently showing their trauma. We knew that teachers needed support to find these novels. We learned that we need to ensure racial equity [in the yearbook](#), in the curriculum, and in a sense of belonging for everyone in the school culture.

This is what we know: it is easier right now to be racist in a school than anti-racist. When we disrupt white supremacy, even simply changing a few books, others will dismiss us – "she pushes too hard" or "yeah, I've seen how you get all fired up about this stuff" – or argue – "we can't just censor books" or "we need to consider the history of the novel" (which might be appropriate in a university-level course, but not in a course where students have no choice in their reading, little power to speak up, and almost no reason to trust the system). We have heard teachers ask: "Are white men becoming an endangered species?" and say, "None of my students have ever complained." We have had parents call us racist because we talk about race in the classroom, and parents call us radical because we insist that all students benefit from learning about other perspectives. We have had administrators who have allowed this to happen.

We could provide lists of books to read, but anyone who is interested can easily find lists that will be more thorough than ours. We can share how we came to understand the importance of anti-racism — people to follow, webinars to attend — but each white teacher must do this work. This is a moral imperative.

When we who benefit from the status quo understand that the system and our current behaviours are hurting students, then we will not only diversify the books we teach but we will also transform ourselves. ■

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Pandemic Pivot in the Library Learning Commons

From The Teaching Librarian Editorial Board

From Mary Doyle



It's amazing just how busy a closed library learning commons can be. Since returning from the spring shut down, the physical space is closed, but I have been busy running the hallways and riding the elevator of my elementary school to bring the library experience to the classroom. This doesn't look the same in every classroom, as I navigate how to best serve each student and education worker.

Many primary classes want me to bring a cart of books, do a story time and have a socially distanced book exchange. Some just want books, some just a story, and I think all of it is good. Some junior and intermediate classes prefer having students use a Google form to request exactly what they want and have it delivered to the room, while others want the cart of books brought to the class for browsing. Another teacher has opted for a book bin for the class. There is a lot happening, but at the end of the day, I am connecting with students, and they are getting books in their hands.

I did find that leaving my book cart in the hallway and allowing older students to come out one at a time to choose books, rather than doing it inside the classroom, has been working well. It allows students to choose books that interest them without worrying about the prying eyes of their peers.

Our ebook statistics also are up. While we still aren't where I'd like to be in terms of usage, having more buy-in from students now will put us in a better position if we face another shutdown. It is helpful to be building that capacity while we are all able to be together (socially distanced, and with our masks on, of course).

I can't wait until I can invite students into the library learning commons again, but we are making it work, and I'm accumulating a lot more steps.

Pandemic Baby

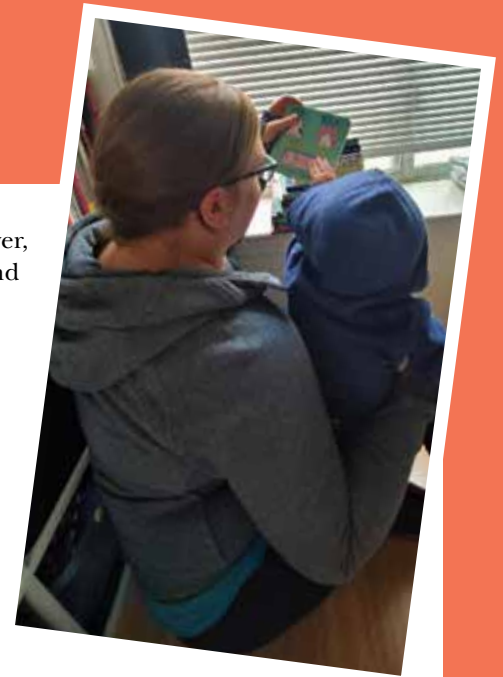
From Kasey Whalley

When the two-week extension of March Break was announced, my first thought was: “I’ll only have a week back at work before my maternity leave begins.” As the lockdown orders were extended, I announced my pregnancy and subsequent leave (a well-kept secret at that point) through email with the hashtag #PandemicBaby2020. Things were definitely going to be different.

Adjusting to new protocol and policy changes meant reevaluating my expectations. My husband was no longer allowed to be with me in prenatal appointments and could only stay for a couple of hours after the birth of our son. I wasn’t allowed any visitors in the maternity ward. When I was readmitted with an infection a week after giving birth, my husband was permitted to drop off necessities, but the baby had to stay home. Even after I was released, things were still incredibly different; we had a visitors list of less than ten people and started ordering anything we needed online.

My son is now six months old. I realize that he meets new people from the nose up, and he’s never seen the inside of

a grocery store. However, he still smiles, plays, and eats like most other children. Giving birth in the middle of a pandemic was never on my To Do list, but I’m doing my best to find the silver lining. I have spent a wonderful amount of time getting to know my son. I have an amazing support network who is able to answer my calls and talk me through difficult moments, regardless of the time of day. I have a husband who, despite working through the entire pandemic, waits for me outside appointments and keeps me grounded when I start to get anxious. I know all new parents have difficult moments, but I’m grateful my son was born at a time when the entire country was focused on helping each other. I think that’s a pretty spectacular time to be born.



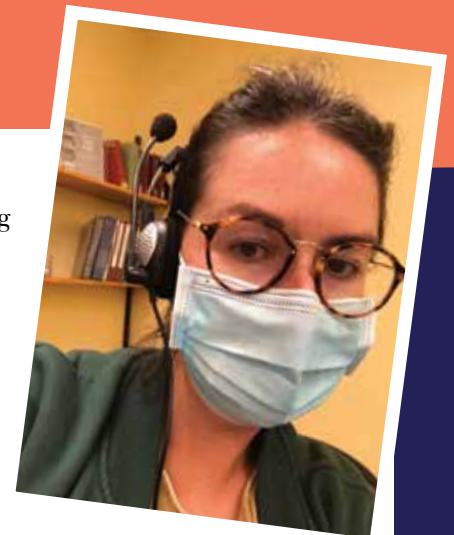
From Heather McTavish

I’m no stranger to online learning. I recently graduated with a Master of Arts in Education and Digital Technologies from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, a fully online program delivered synchronously. Still, the transition to work from home was hard and disconnecting. Slowly, I found ways to reimagine the library in pandemic times and to provide our services to teachers and students virtually. This included producing and hosting Cardinal Léger Secondary School Library’s bi-annual Coffee House streamed “live” on YouTube for the first time instead of in-person at the library.

Initially, I connected with staff and students via email instead of video conferencing, as we all adjusted—melding work and home life. Working from home has been a unique opportunity to collaborate on projects with the rest of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board Library Support Services team, which doesn’t happen as often as I’d like. We are busy supporting the teaching and learning at our respective schools in ways distinct to each school environment’s needs. Collectively, we researched access to many of the free eBooks and other resources provided

to help in the transition to emergency remote teaching and shared these resources with teachers across the board.

Now that we’re back, I’m offering a Virtual Reference Desk to our students during their Study Hall hours, and it has been great to connect with them online. It makes my day! I foresee it being something that I will continue even if education returns to its pre-COVID state. I’ll also be designing and creating a series of library-related instructional videos to support remote and just-in-time learning in the coming months. I hope to make this another joint initiative across several DPCDB libraries. It’s an excellent opportunity to learn new instructional technology!



A Day in the Life of a Teacher-Librarian in 2020

By Beth Lyons

The role of the teacher-librarian (like the roles of all educators) has changed in a myriad of ways since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we returned to school this September, I was worried and nervous about what my role might look like. In the spring the focus became supporting educators as they made the pivot to emergency distance learning. As I reflected on this shift in my role from March to June, I knew that I wanted to be more involved with students during the school year so I decided to create a mind map of how I might best serve the school community. It has been a joy to curate book boxes to be delivered to classrooms for independent reading and curriculum inquiries. I wanted to help educators make use of our outdoor space and created a learning walk for our Terry Fox event that prompted educators and students to think about the land on which we learn and play while interacting with maps, quotes and pictures of Terry's marathon.

By far the most fun has been when I have been able to join online and face-to-face classes for virtual read alouds using Google Meet. Reading to the students and discussing their ideas related to the story brings a smile to my face and makes my teacher-librarian heart happy. Other tasks to support the school community include: completing a tech inventory of the available Chromebooks and iPads and rebuilding tech tubs/carts for classroom use, curating resources for Orange Shirt Day, creating a weekly LLC newsletter for staff to share resources and information, continue to share curriculum resources and helping educators who are teaching virtually, curating book displays for the virtual announcements, and consistently updating our virtual library learning commons site. The days are busy but quiet. I miss the buzz of students and staff in the library space but I feel very privileged to remain in my role as a teacher-librarian and look forward to continuing to reimagine and adapt to our current normal.

Back to the Library — 180 Days Later

From Kimberly Senf

Concierge library services. Gloves. Quarantine boxes. Library return bins in interesting places. Paper bags. Library book drop offs. And, of course, a mask at all times.

This fall has brought about a necessary change in the way the libraries at my school operate, in both our Junior and Senior Schools. This does not mean that fewer books are going out or that students have forgotten about the library. It simply means that instead of creating eye-catching displays that students can browse during Study Hall or over a lunch period in the library, they instead have to head to the library website or to Sora to check out our audio and ebook offerings.



What I have found is that library use has become a lot more intentional this school year. If a student would like to borrow a book, they must learn to use the catalogue – something I have been angling for all students to learn for years

(there are some wins even in 2020). They have to troubleshoot technical issues on their own, and problem solve to find their answers. I am not as easy to locate this year, since I work out of the back-library office. The main library is a classroom that different teachers cycle out of during the day, desks wiped down between students and teachers. What remains is a beautiful space filled with light, and books. I pull books while wearing gloves, moving titles into paper bags, and handing them out to delighted students that I meet in the hall. Instead of conversations with students and teachers at the reference desk, we chat briefly in the hallway, or over email or virtual library drop-ins. Books are still going out to students, teachers are still eager to collaborate and build research and digital literacy skills into their assignments. As much as things had to shift this year, many aspects of library services have remained the same.



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