

“Verbing” Diversity

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The glorious Jacqueline Woodson has said, “Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together.”¹

As someone who has struggled these many moons to pinpoint what “diversity” means for libraries, I’m blown away by this definition. Only Jackie could capture the essence of such a complex idea while at the same time drawing out its intentionality and purposefulness. Diversity isn’t just something we think about. It’s something we do.

Seriously, do you know what this means? Diversity is an action word!

I know, I know. “Diversity” isn’t technically a verb. But you’ve met me, right? (Slightly irreverent. Bucks tradition. Rocks an elevator speech. But I digress.)

So nouns, *shmouns*. Let’s give semantics a rest, shall we? If we’re going to make a meaningful difference for the children and families we serve through libraries, we need to do more than just talk the diversity talk. We’ve got to follow Jackie’s lead and walk the diversity walk together.

Everyday Advocates, it’s time to “verb” diversity!

But a caveat lest we take leave of our senses: I’m not saying we don’t need a clear sense of what diversity is and how we’re defining it as a profession. Sometimes, though, you just need to get out of your own way and start doing. Are you ready? ‘Cuz here we go!

Use the five tenets of Everyday Advocacy—Be Informed, Engage with Your Community, Speak Out, Get Inspired, and Share Your Advocacy Story—to take the first or next action steps toward diversity at your library.

Be Informed

If you’re going to do only one thing, make sure it’s this: Read “The Importance of Diversity in Library Programs and Material Collections for Children” (find the PDF at www.ala.org/alsc/importance-diversity). Written by Jamie Campbell Naidoo, this white paper asserts ALSC’s position on diversity and outlines two key areas—programming and collections—for library staff to use in building bridges to children’s cultural and global understanding.

Next, find out how diversity fits into your library’s mission, vision, and strategic plan. Not sure? Go ahead and ask. A pointed



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conversation with your supervisor and/or library administrator can clarify expectations and help shape the direction of present and future diversity efforts at your library.

Engage with Your Community

With your newly minted knowledge-is-power approach, call upon your allies both within the library and beyond it to help move the diversity action forward. Whether you're part of a youth services team or the only children's staff member at your library, rally your coworkers to help you assess the strengths of your current programs and collections, highlighting areas for growth and improvement.

Now turn your eagle eye toward possible collaborations outside the library walls. That means getting out there and meeting with kids, parents, caregivers, teachers, principals, business owners, and other community leaders. Invite them to plan diversity programs and services *with* you, taking care to treat them as more than just intended audiences. Make them your diversity partners now, and they'll become your biggest advocates later.

Speak Out

Surprise! It's time for a diversity elevator speech. For a unified approach, craft a core message that everyone—library staff, board members, volunteers, and Friends groups—can feel confident sharing with community members. Be sure your speech puts the focus squarely on children and the ways in which diversity programs and collections impact them positively.

And don't forget about spreading the word at formal meetings (think library board, city council, and parent-teacher association and local school council; informal gatherings like Family Reading Nights or neighborhood festivals) and via print and digital media outlets. Sometimes a quick phone call or e-mail is all it takes to help get your library on the agenda or publication schedule.

Get Inspired

In search of fresh ideas for walking the diversity walk? Check out ALSC's award-winning Día initiative (<http://dia.ala.org>) for oodles of free resources, including downloadable booklists perfect for collection development, family book club resource guides, and a press kit for promoting your diverse programming.

And be sure to learn more about the fine folks at the We Need Diverse Books campaign (<http://weneeddiversebooks.org>), winners of a 2015 *Library Journal* Movers & Shakers award for their roles as change agents for children and teens. They're the epitome of Everyday Advocacy in action!

Share Your Advocacy Story

How are you verbing diversity in your library community? Let us know so we can share your successes with other ALSC members. Write a piece for an upcoming issue of *Everyday Advocacy Matters* (It'll be fun, I promise!) or e-mail the details to everyday-advocacy@hotmail.com so we can include them on the Everyday Advocacy website.

Remember, Jackie Woodson says diversity is about all of us—and that includes you!

Reference

1. Jacqueline Woodson, quoted in Claire Kirch, "BEA 2014: Jacqueline Woodson: Remembering a Brown Girl's Childhood," *Publishers Weekly*, May 30, 2014, accessed June 1, 2015, www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/62630-bea-2014-jacqueline-woodson-remembering-a-brown-girl-s-childhood.html.