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the journal of the
Association for Library
Service to Children

LIBRARIES

Recognizing Bias
How Libraries Can Help COVID-Era Youth
Children's Book Creators Go Wild!

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Ana and Elsa are sharing a book in the primary library at their bilingual school in Shanghai.
Photo by Katherine Brewer.

Editor's Note

You *Can* Go Home Again

By Sharon Verbeten

I was thrilled to reconnect with old friend, and CCBC librarian, Merri Lindgren, at the library on the campus at UW-Madison.

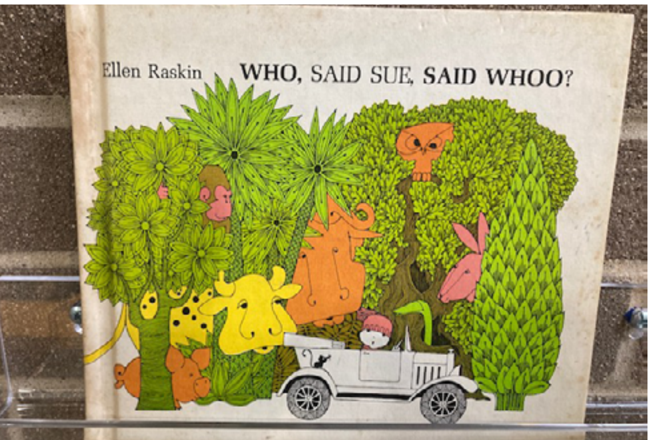
On a crisp Friday in late November, I was supposed to be visiting the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) in Madison, WI, to peruse the starred books of 2023. And I did—tables full of them.

But two things distracted me; first was the amazing historic collection of books, which includes original books and artwork from Wisconsin native Ellen Raskin, author of the Newbery Award–winning *The Westing Game*. Her illustrations were bold, with in-your-face colors and funky typefaces—definitely a force ahead of her time.

I was enthralled by many items in the historic collection—among them a book illustrated by my idol Maurice Sendak that I have never heard of (*Sarah's Room* by Doris Orgel)—which I now must find online to add to my Sendak shelf! I was also intrigued by a tiny volume called *Black Misery* by Langston Hughes, a powerful and poignant poem that spoke to the experience of being black in the newly integrated 1960s.

But in addition to the collection, the second wonderful distraction was the staff—including librarians Merri Lindgren and Megan Schliesman. I've known them for decades, dating back to the early 1990s when I—a lowly library school student at UW-Madison—gained my love of children's books while working at the CCBC as a student assistant under the tutelage of the iconic former director Ginny Moore Kruse. It was a pleasure to "go home again," to see the CCBC with more experienced and appreciative eyes.

It never gets old finding a hidden gem in the walls of a familiar library; for me, both the books and the staff were gems I'll never forget. &



This 1973 classic was written by Wisconsin native Ellen Raskin, whose archives are stored at the CCBC in Madison, WI.

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Sharon Verbeten, De Pere, Wisconsin

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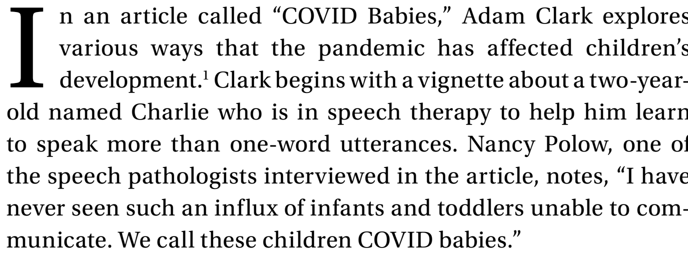
The Pandemic and Preschoolers

COVID Kids and How Libraries Can Support Them

TESS PRENDERGAST

Librarians around the nation must learn how to address preschoolers in a post-pandemic world.



In an article called “COVID Babies,” Adam Clark explores various ways that the pandemic has affected children’s development.[1] Clark begins with a vignette about a two-year-old named Charlie who is in speech therapy to help him learn to speak more than one-word utterances. Nancy Polow, one of the speech pathologists interviewed in the article, notes, “I have never seen such an influx of infants and toddlers unable to communicate. We call these children COVID babies.”

Shuffrey et al. studied two cohorts of babies born shortly after the pandemic began: those whose mothers had COVID-19 while pregnant and those whose mothers did not have COVID-19 while pregnant.[2] Compared to an older cohort of children born before the pandemic, both pandemic-era cohorts showed significantly lower scores on gross motor, fine motor, and social skills than the pre-pandemic cohort. While exposure to the virus in utero does not seem to be implicated, the researchers speculated that the stress that pregnant mothers experienced during the first part of the pandemic might have contributed to some of the developmental lags they saw. They urge long-term monitoring of children born during the pandemic to better understand the impact of being gestated and born during this time period.

Similarly, Deoni et al. conducted a study that indicated that babies born since the start of the pandemic show significantly lower general cognitive scores when compared to children born between 2011 and 2019.[3] Not surprisingly, they also pointed out that the negative impacts of the pandemic are most apparent in lower socioeconomic families and surmised that more affluent families had more resources to draw on to help them through the toughest months of isolation. This likely reduced the pandemic’s harm on their children while poorer children were more vulnerable to its negative effects.

Another study conducted by Raffa et al. explored parental perspectives on the effects that COVID-19 has had on their children’s development.[4] Echoing the concerns voiced by the researchers mentioned earlier, parents indicated that the economic hardships of the pandemic imposed difficult conditions on their families, especially those who lost their jobs. They also noted an upside of pandemic life when describing the extended amount of time they spent with their children, which they believed strengthened their bonds. However, they also voiced concerns about their children’s many lost opportunities for social development.

Tess Prendergast *worked as a children’s librarian for over twenty years. After completing a doctorate in early literacy education, she began teaching librarianship and children’s literature courses at The School of Information, University of British Columbia, in Vancouver, Canada. She has served on many ALSC committees and has recently completed her term on the 2023 Geisel Award committee. She is facilitator of the ALSC Preschool Discussion Group.*

In terms of education, as we know, while libraries provided curbside service and virtual storytimes, children were in virtual classrooms with varying levels of support from their caregivers who may have been busy with younger children or working themselves. In a recent blog post, Dr. Timothy Shanahan said, “Primary grade kids missed out on a lot

of teaching in the teeth of the pandemic. Some managed to parlay their shortened Zoom lessons and mom and dad's kitchen table efforts into adequate and appropriate decoding ability. Hooray! But, sadly, for too many others . . . things haven't worked so well."[5]

These studies likely confirm what many of you have already experienced or observed. As much as we might wish we could put the pandemic years behind us, the truth is that the effects of the past few unprecedented years are still being tabulated. We are seeing, and will continue to see, all of these impacts in our daily interactions with people, and we can also be sure that these same impacts are being felt by the families we don't see in the library. Importantly, we should be asking ourselves how can we help to address some of the ongoing harms brought to children and families by the pandemic?

What are the impacts of this pandemic era on children, parents, and caregivers? We all have personal anecdotes to share.

My friend Fay told me that by the time lockdown was lifted, her three-year old daughter Kennedy was extremely wary of new places and new people. She said, "It took her so long to learn social skills… it took her four months to properly settle into preschool. I put a lot of it down to lockdown."

She explained that Kennedy needed time to figure out how unfamiliar environments worked before she could engage at all. Fay recently told me that Kennedy will soon start junior kindergarten. Plus, she said that the group reading they did at Kennedy's preschool "really brought her imagination to life."

"For her graduation play, they acted out *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, and Kennedy was so proud to play the part of Swiss cheese!" Most importantly, Fay credits the preschool staff with bringing her "little lockdown baby out of her shell."

I think this is a hopeful sign. Children who had lags in their social and emotional domains can catch up with the addition of targeted supports. In addition to high quality, affordable, and accessible early childhood education like what Fay described, I also think that children's libraries can play a role in helping to make up for what lockdown took away from kids. Also, since we already know a lot about how to make things inclusive for children with disabilities, we can apply all those same resources to include kids who are still catching up. These are kids who might have language, motor, and social delays. These might be toddlers who did not have the benefit of in-person babytime when they were infants. These might be kids heading off to kindergarten who have not yet had a chance to be coaxed out of their shells like Kennedy was. These might be school age kids who have missed out on countless outings and playdates with friends and forgot how to share and take turns. These are also school age kids that Shanahan referred to who are still struggling with their reading skills because of their inadequate instruction during Zoom school. Now that libraries are fully open, and storytimes and other programs are in person again, it is important to make sure that these COVID-era kids and their families get what they need to thrive.

We can work together on this. At the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago this year, I facilitated the ALSC Preschool Services Discussion Group. As I am no longer a children's librarian in a public library role, I was curious about what my colleagues out in the field were seeing in their libraries. I was so inspired by the work they were doing and how they were supporting families who had made their way into the library, some of them for the first time.

We talked about how some folks might have no prior knowledge of what a storytime is, what it's for, and how to behave. If the parents don't know, neither do their kids. We talked about slowing things down and using visual schedules to help everyone understand what was happening, and what was happening next. We talked about being welcoming above all else, even when things are not going great. We talked about various approaches to providing resources that point parents towards developmental supports like speech-language therapy. We also talked about my favorite soapbox topic when it comes to inclusiveness—group size.

We agreed that different communities need to take different approaches to how they make decisions to manage their storytimes. What was clear to me was that no one was being turned away and that librarians are working extremely hard to meet their communities' needs for stimulation and socialization. If parents brought kids to storytime for socialization before the pandemic, they are definitely going to bring them in to socialize now because they know their kids need it. Finally, we discussed some recommendations to share.

1. Contact the speech-language and other early intervention support services in your area and encourage them to send their caseload families to the library. Talk to speech therapists about what they are seeing and ask what you can do to help the families they serve. Remind them that your storytimes are a great place

to support early literacy and language growth and that you welcome children of all abilities all the time.

2. Direct parents to resources and supports (like speech therapy and learning disability services) if they voice concerns about their children's development or reading skills to you. Encourage them to return to the library even if their child has a developmental issue that needs to be addressed. They can go to speech therapy *and* storytime! They can get help with their reading skills *and* join in fun, book-themed programs! In the US, as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), every state and territory provides publicly funded early intervention for free or reduced costs for any child (up to age three) who is eligible. If a caregiver has concerns about a child's development, they can contact the early intervention program and have their child evaluated (at no cost) to determine if the child is eligible for early intervention services.

   Beyond the child's third birthday, evaluation and services are offered through local school districts. A caregiver can call the local school district (and request to speak with someone in special education) about having the child evaluated (at no cost) for preschool special education services. Depending on the school district and the services the child needs, the child may qualify for preschool (and other services such as speech therapy that would be offered while at preschool) or for services (e.g., speech and language therapy) offered separately from a preschool classroom.

   More information about early intervention services is detailed at https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/parents/states.html.

   In Canada, free therapeutic services for infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities are typically covered by provincial infant development programs as well as regional health services. Canadian librarians should connect with their local services to learn how to make referrals as needed

3. Adjust your storytimes for a wider range of development. Pandemic era three- or four-year-olds with little social experience might act more like younger toddlers for a while, and that's fine. It's okay if your preschool storytime looks like toddler storytime for a while. If a child is reluctant, let parents know that starting out with just a few minutes or even a few seconds of storytime is great: they should be encouraged to keep coming back to build their child's confidence in the storytime environment. So many of us have stories about kids like this, and we know they slowly come out of their shells and grow to love storytime!

4. Make and use visual schedules in all your programs, not just storytime. You can start with this ALSC Blog post: https://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2018/06/visual-schedules-making-programs-accessible-for-all/.

5. Encourage honest conversations with parents and caregivers about post-pandemic family life and ask what the library can do to help them. They might have some fantastic ideas that you could easily fulfill to make their lives easier. Just acknowledging what they went through (and are still going through) is a good place to start. Remember that many families are still very wary of exposure to COVID-19 due to risk factors that might not be immediately apparent. This is a great reason to continue offering some virtual resources like Zoom storytime. Some families simply cannot come back to the library.

6. Finally, focus on the joy of shared language, literacy, stories, hands-on creation materials, toys, spaces, and all the wonderful activities that you have for families to engage with at the library as well as the resources you can provide for them to use and enjoy at home. The children's library should be a place where families can connect with other families and just let their kids play together. The children's library should be a place they go to get help and ideas about supporting their kids' development and learning, and we all have an important role to play. &

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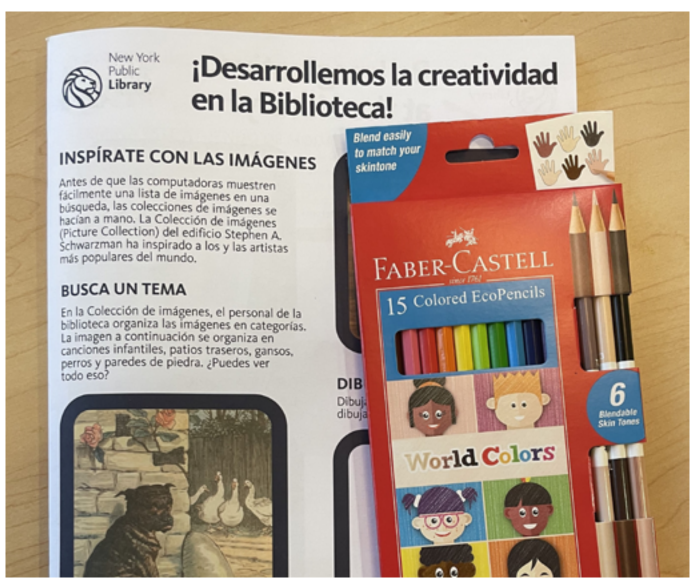
At the Margins

Answering the Call of Newly Arrived Communities

ALEXANDRIA ABENSHON AND ADRIANA BLANCARTE-HAYWARD



A multilingual, art-driven packet in development by NYPL.

There were more than 108 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of last year.[1] Among the numerous serious challenges they have faced is the interruption to ongoing education that such displacement entails.

Now more than ever, public librarians have a crucial role in ensuring that learning happens everywhere. We must be prepared to provide quality, holistic learning experiences for *every* learner within increasingly diverse settings. Amid teacher shortages, the disruptive effects of the pandemic and the climate crisis on formal education, refugees, asylum seekers, and other historically and systemically marginalized communities—all face limited access to quality education. With the wide range of services and the welcoming community spaces offered, libraries are well positioned to meet the social, emotional, and educational needs of these communities.

Of course, addressing the challenges faced by displaced people requires a comprehensive approach, including offering access to education, healthcare, mental health support, legal aid, and community integration opportunities. Libraries cannot necessarily be everything for all people, but can offer a supportive environment. Refugee children entering our spaces may be experiencing depression and anxiety or suffering from the effects of serious and sustained trauma or desensitization to trauma. They may also be experiencing grief over the loss of family, friends, home, or lifestyle. Identity issues may arise, as may a wide spectrum of behavioral issues.

Approximately one hundred thousand asylum seekers have come to New York City since April 2022, and fourteen Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs) and two hundred emergency shelters have opened since October 2022.[2] At The New York Public Library, the Community Outreach and Engagement (COE) team has spearheaded our collaboration with city agencies to help support the newly arrived asylum seekers, including putting together bilingual welcome kits that explain what the library can do to help. These kits begin the task of building local knowledge and cultural fluency as well as providing a guide to our resources.

Once our teams were able to visit HERRC sites in Manhattan, we were better able to understand the space and services available at them. We developed an outreach plan that included participation from bilingual branch staff and from central departments including the Community Outreach and Engagement and Children's Programs and Services teams and mapped out programs we could provide during visits. Our first visits with families on site took place on May 10, at which point we were able to offer information and resource sessions for adults about our career services and courses in English as a second language, as well as activities for children.

We also established a small Book Nook with books and materials in relevant languages for families and children. As a public library, the message that everyone is welcome is core to our outreach. We

Alexandria Abenshon *is Director of Children's Programs and Services, Branch Programs and Services, The New York Public Library;* ***Adriana Blancarte-Hayward*** *is Senior Manager, Community Outreach and Engagement, Branch Programs and Services, The New York Public Library.*

have been able to provide a warm introduction to the concept of public libraries and have encouraged newly arrived people to go to any of our NYPL branches simply to be in a welcoming space and to find community and more resources.

Since May 2023, we have continued to collaborate with city agencies and community-based organizations to provide services and programs in HERRC sites and other locations within our area of service, and through our School Outreach Team, in schools. Flexibility has been important; things may change from one visit to the next, from the space available at the site to the number of people present at any given time and the materials available. We work with what is available to us, adapting to serving those currently in attendance.

Based on our observations, we have found that less formally structured programs fare better. Rather than host traditional storytime sessions as we do in our branches, open-ended opportunities for expression have been popular. In addition to having books available for casual browsing, the team has provided rolls of butcher paper and art materials for kids to draw or doodle.

Suany Canales, one of our outreach associates, said, "Families loved the craft options available; one parent mentioned it being a great opportunity to reduce screen time for her little one." The team is now working to develop an art-based multilingual packet focused on uplifting children's identities and the ways in which we can support their self-exploration. We're considering further shifts in programming as students return to the classroom. Serving patrons at the HERRC centers directly is one facet of service, but equipping NYPL's branch staff to continue to serve the distinct needs of refugees and asylum seekers is at the forefront of our goals.

There are many library-focused resources dedicated to serving this growing population available in a variety of formats, and more resources are made available every day. Here are a few that we reference:

Becoming a Welcoming Space for Immigrants and Refugees. This guide emerged from a 2019 IMLS National Forum grant that brought together ALSC and the Association of Children's Museums. There are many resources to explore here and great prompts to help consider how your spaces, services, and programs can be leveraged to support people who have recently immigrated or sought refuge in the United States.

Toolkit: Library Services to Underserved Children and Their Caregivers. ALSC's own toolkit features a wide range of resources focused on populations that may be underserved in your community, including New Americans and Spanish Speaking Populations. The toolkit features recommended titles, apps, webinars, materials, and other resources that library staff might find useful in serving these populations.

Services to Refugees, Immigrants, and Displaced Persons (SRIDP) Sub-Committee. SRIDP is a sub-committee of the Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services Advisory Committee. SRIDP has also produced *Celebrating Welcoming Week: A Guide for Libraries* as well as a toolkit dedicated to engaging multilingual communities and English language learners. Although these resources are not specific to children, they are valuable resources that highlight deeply relevant and important statistics and opportunities.

Supporting and Educating Migrant Refugee Children. The National Education Association offers links to different resources that define the responsibilities of states, agencies, and other offices that support children and families who may have recently arrived in the United States. Additional resources linked here provide broad awareness of resettled populations and helpful webinars.

The UN Refugee Agency Integration Handbook: Refugee Children and Youth. This comprehensive handbook focuses on working with children as partners in program design and delivery. It includes information on social connection, health, housing, and much more—as well as linking to a variety of international examples of this work in action.

What is asylum? Qu'est-ce que l'asile? ¿Qué es el asilo? Available in English, Spanish, and French, this resource guide from the New York Immigration Coalition is for informational use only and is not legal advice. While the organizations listed are New York City based, the other information included can be useful for the community and as an awareness tool for staff.

Public libraries have long been supportive environments for communities of all kinds. It's in these moments, when our towns and cities are seeing a large influx of new visitors and members—when our services are more necessary than ever—that the heart of our work truly shines. Libraries are places of possibility and positivity, and offer unique opportunities for our newest patrons to build important and enriching relationships. &

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Still Crabby after All These Years

A Crabby Librarian Origin Story

MELANIE LYTTLE

The Crabby Librarian has her roots in the Collaborative Summer Library Program (CSLP) product catalog my co-workers received in fall 2005 before I even started working at Madison (OH) Public Library in January 2006.

The theme for summer 2006 was "Paws, Claws, Scales, and Tales." At that time, if you wanted to guarantee delivery of items in the catalog several months before summer started, you needed to order in the fall. My colleagues (that I didn't even know at the time) thought these crab hats in the catalog looked cute and "someone would use them for something," so they purchased them.

The hats arrived a few months after I started as the new head of the children's department. My new co-workers were sure *I* could do something with the hats, since they decided *they* didn't want to wear them.

The director at the time was expecting me to revitalize our relationship with our local school district and grow our summer reading program through visits to the schools, which they had never done before. And thus, the Crabby Librarian was born.

I love plays on words. I thought since the stereotype of librarians (often) was that they were grumpy, mean, and didn't like children that wearing a crab hat and being grumpy, mean, and stating I didn't like children in the library would be a fun juxtaposition.

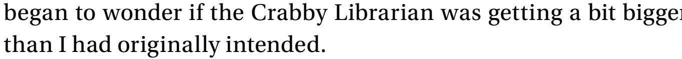
Off I went in June 2006, crab hat in hand, to pretend to be the Crabby Librarian at local elementary schools. We had a good number of children sign up and participate in summer reading that year, and a few children mentioned they had seen me visit their school. But I really didn't think more about the Crabby Librarian until early 2007.

"Crabby Librarian" Melanie Lyttle and her colleague at Madison Public Library, Shawn Walsh.

In early 2007, I had a Boy Scout troop in the library for a program, and one of the boys yelled out, "Aren't you that lobster lady that came to my school last year?" That was the first of many times I would be called that over the years. But this group of boys all started talking about how funny the skit was and how much they enjoyed me coming to school and, most importantly, was the character going to come back to school again that summer?

Over the next two or three months, more kids said they remembered me as "that crabby lady who came to my school," and I

Melanie Lyttle *is the Head of Public Services at Madison (OH) Public Library. She will begin her eighteenth year at the library in 2024. Among her various roles at the library, her favorite is visiting kids at schools, whether or not she gets to wear her crab hat!*



began to wonder if the Crabby Librarian was getting a bit bigger than I had originally intended.

From the summer of 2007 through 2011, different staff members came to the school with the Crabby Librarian as a sidekick. The kids loved how the Crabby Librarian was thwarted in her various dastardly plans of keeping kids from the library, from attending her super fun programs, and from winning awesome prizes. But by spring of 2012, the library had acquired a new full-time staff person named Shawn Walsh, who developed the role of the Crabby Librarian's nemesis.

While he was just "Mr. Shawn" to the kids, he was actively working against whatever grumpy plans the Crabby Librarian had, and the kids loved it. Shrieks and cheers for Mr. Shawn happened at every presentation. He brought the idea that the kids were "in on the joke." They knew that the person playing the Crabby Librarian wasn't really mean, but she was pretending.

One of the boys yelled out, "Aren't you that lobster lady that came to my school last year?" That was the first of many times I would be called that over the years. But this group of boys all started talking about how funny the skit was and how much they enjoyed me coming to school and, most importantly, was the character going to come back to school again that summer?

After posing as the Crabby Librarian for at least eight years or so, something unexpected started happening. High school kids coming to the public library would see me and yell, "Where's your crab hat? Why aren't you dressed as the Crabby Librarian? How come we never get any fun visits anymore?"

My favorite experience happened at a local pizza shop. For several years in our summer reading program, readers could earn "crabby cash" for prizes. I was in line to pay for my pizza, and the girl at the cash register asked me if I was the crabby lady from when she was in elementary school. Then another employee said, "You can't pay for your pizza in crabby cash. You'll need real money today." I thought I was going to tear up right there in line. I couldn't believe these kids remembered that!

Then COVID-19 hit. In 2020 and 2021, we barely had summer reading programs. I donned my crab hat for a few pictures, but there were no big programs, fun prizes, and certainly no promo visits to the schools.

Summer 2022 came, and we now were in the middle of a grant that funded programs focusing on our new mobile maker space. Our summer promotions to the schools needing to focus on books and maker space equipment. It didn't seem like the Crabby Librarian had a place anymore.

But the 2022-2023 school year saw Miss Bailey join the Madison Public Library staff. I credit Miss Bailey's younger sister, Morgan Brotz, with the vision for summer reading promotion for summer 2023. As a younger sister, no matter what your age, it's fun to get your older sister into potentially embarrassing or silly situations.

Morgan had the idea that Bailey needed to be the Crabby Librarian's sidekick, Bailey, complete with bee costume and wings.

Bailey Bee and the Crabby Librarian did presentations to classrooms of children between kindergarten and fifth grade. Bailey

Bee was cheered as she chastised the Crabby Librarian for not demonstrating good school behavior. Bailey Bee was famous, and everywhere Bailey went in the summer of 2023 kids came up to her and said, “Hi Bailey Bee! Do you remember me from school?”

I really wasn’t sure the Crabby Librarian was still worth hanging on to after her COVID-induced hiatus. But as I walked down the halls of the elementary schools this year I heard, “Hi Crab Lady. I really like your hat,” and so, at least for now, the Crabby Librarian lives on. &

Crabby Takeaways

Over the years, I have been asked if the Crabby Librarian is the library’s mascot. And she absolutely is most definitely NOT! What this character functions as is primarily a marketing tool.

- The Crabby Librarian is an inside joke between the kids in schools and everyone else. She is a subversive entity that the children understand and the adults in their lives may not.
- The Crabby Librarian is both memorable and predictable. She comes to visit every spring and provides a novel ten-minute skit when the kids don’t want to be in school anyway talking about the awesome things that are going to happen in the summer giving the children something to look forward to.
- The Crabby Librarian is something to discuss. She can entice people into the library building. Over the years, parents have come to the library with children in tow very confused about this person their children were talking about that was so mean, and often these adults were concerned that the library had sent someone to the school who blatantly didn’t like children. The circulation staff particularly enjoys explaining to people the “secret” of the Crabby Librarian.
- In 2010, the Crabby Librarian got her own Facebook page, even before the library did, because who really knew if Facebook was going to last! Then people started following her—not just local people but other librarians and people around the county. She had branched into a very deliberate use of “reverse psychology.” Whatever she said, it truly meant the opposite.
- In 2010 and 2011, the Crabby Librarian was the star of some of the library’s very first YouTube videos. We went to the studio at the regional library system to have them professionally recorded and edited. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9AjEFNfrEuI and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Rv5GLWsUow Lots of parents and kids tuned in!
- In 2011, the Crabby Librarian even got her own theme music, when my sister, Allison Lyttle, wrote a piece for a college composition class entitled “Reverse Psychology,” and it played in the background of the video. Now we didn’t have the same royalty free music as everyone else!
- A whole summer reading economy was built around the Crabby Librarian, where kids could earn Crabby Cash to exchange for prizes.
- In a small town, it’s all about personal engagement and relationships. The long-term success of the Crabby Librarian also depended on the humans playing the larger-than-life characters being known to the kids. The kids know that the actual humans in the skit respect and adore the kids and genuinely want them to be part of the library; otherwise it wouldn’t be ridiculous and funny.

Truth in Stories

Recognize Bias by Examining Point of View in Fiction and Nonfiction

KATHERINE BREWER

Can students recognize bias and perspective in written works? In this study, the children focused on traditional stories presented in book or digital book format. This question is not only essential to a child's success in school, but it is also a lifelong skill with far reaching consequences. The news has been filled with instances of inaccurate and misleading information, posted by bad actors, bots, special interest groups, or foreign interests to social media platforms.[1] This information can lead a person to action, which can be detrimental to society and the individual.[2] The skill of identifying misleading or inaccurate information is critical for an informed citizenry.

To address this question, we must define bias and perspective. A bias is an individual's belief, perspective is how one's perception affects their understanding.

Why is this recognition of an author's bias and perspective important for children to understand? Children often perceive that the information that they read is true and accurate.[3] Children are rarely taught to question the author's bias in academic materials, though recently there has been an effort to have information literacy embedded into the curriculum in several states.[4] This lack of understanding of bias is not limited to children.

This skill of vetting the information we receive is critical as we are inundated with information daily. The average American has access to limitless information at their fingertips. Ninety-five percent of American students have home internet access,[5] and 85 percent of American adults have a smartphone.[6]

In a survey from Common Sense Media in 2019, more than half of American children by age eleven had a smartphone and 84 percent of teenagers had their own smartphone.[7] Though they have access to a great amount of information, this information can be not only inaccurate, but also deliberately misleading. As different social media and communication platforms attempt to address this problem, they find bots and foreign interests create an alarming amount of content.[8] According to the Associated Press, Twitter claimed in July 2022 that it was removing 1 million bot accounts daily.[9] And although bot accounts only account for an estimated 5 percent of users, they create 21 to 29 percent of the content in the US.[10]

Smartphones are widely used in China, more than 88 percent of Chinese use mobile devices to connect to the internet according to Chinese state media.[11] However, Chinese citizens are not able to access the full breadth of the internet. Many reputable news sites are blocked and individuals are not exposed to differing viewpoints. More than 90 percent of Chinese children and teens have access to a smartphone, with 97 percent of middle and high schoolers reporting that they have access to a remote device. Though the number is lower for children in grades one to three, the majority of children have daily access to remote internet enabled devices.[12] This is unsurprising due to the widespread use of mobile phones in China as a method to access public transit, order groceries, and pay for anything from vegetables in the

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market to taxi fares. Although the Chinese are connected, they are unable to access sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Netflix, BBC, CNN, and various other sites without a Virtual Private Network (VPN).

There is a great deal of false information on the internet, and this information is dangerous. Countless stories of individuals who believed online hoaxes have caused harm, damaged property, created dangerous situations, and much worse.[13] Many of these instances will be familiar to most readers—PizzaGate, where an armed man entered a family pizza and ping-pong restaurant with the intent of "freeing children" held there by various liberal celebrities. Or the instances of citizens in the UK setting mobile phone towers on fire because they believed the towers were spreading COVID-19.[14] These online hoaxes create a dangerous situation for those who believe them and for innocent bystanders.

The information shared via social media platforms is often designed to mislead, and many individuals are surprised to learn how easily they have been misled.[15] Many adult users of Facebook unwittingly shared false information; in fact, older adults were more likely to share inaccurate stories than teen social media users.[16] How, then, can we prepare children to navigate this vastness of information to find and utilize true and accurate sources?

English Language Learners (ELL) are more likely to struggle with evaluating the information they encounter. Their unfamiliarity with the vocabulary and cultural clues may make it more difficult for them to distinguish what is a joke, hoax, or accurate information.[17] Chinese pupils may find the task especially challenging, as state media is likely the only source they encounter. Chinese students do not have media literacy as a regular part of the curriculum and are not exposed to news outlets sharing information with different points of view. Although the students in the study do have access to a VPN and regularly encounter information not ordained by official government sources, they are rarely taught to question facts that are presented to them. How would these students perform on tasks where they had to question the reliability of sources? Could they be taught skills to critically evaluate information presented to them?

Literature Review and Underlying Theories

In recent years, there has been a great deal of research and discussion concerning misleading information. Politicians have declared "fake news" to describe any news that is unflattering or inconsistent with their worldview and have encouraged their followers to dismiss information they do not agree with. However, the issue of actual fake news, deliberately inaccurate and misleading content, is a real problem for individuals and society as a whole.

Concerns have been raised for decades as each new medium—newsprint, radio, television, the internet—creates an environment for people to spread information more widely and inexpensively. The fear is that this information will be more biased and the standard the information is held to is less rigorous. With each new medium, there was always a financial barrier to entry. Rarely were individuals able to disseminate information that reached a large audience without incurring some significant cost. With the internet, individuals are able to spread information across the globe with a small investment of a smartphone and a bit of time.

Now it is possible for individuals with niche interests to share across borders. There are obvious benefits to this community that can be formed—caretakers of family members with dementia, parents with children with food allergies, people with specialized needs—can all connect with others facing the same challenges and support one another.

The concerns are also obvious. Those with hateful world views can find community with others. Groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) have been very successful utilizing social media to recruit new members.[18] Oath Keepers and other fringe groups also find community and new recruits through social media.

Another concern is the "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles."[19] It is possible to only seek and consume news that fits with your existing worldview. An individual who only reads and hears news that conforms to the beliefs they already hold will easily dismiss information contrary to their beliefs whether or not the source is reputable.

As "fake news" and how to identify and avoid it is frequently in the headlines, some advocates of truth in the media are finding themselves threatened. Sites, such as Brietbart, tell their followers to go after those who question Brietbart's credibility.[20] This not only cultivates an "us versus them" attitude among fringe group listeners and discredits reputable sources, it also puts those who question these biased sources in danger.

Are there people more prone to believing fake news? A study at Stanford with more than 7,000 participants found that age did not always help people to determine whether information shared was accurate and credible. The study looked at high school students, undergraduates, and history professors and compared their ability to assess the news presented to them with professional fact checkers. Though history professors are well versed in research, this newer medium of the internet often stumped them. They did no better than the students. History professors often relied on irrelevant aspects such as domain name and "look and feel" of a website to determine whether it was accurate.[21] In fact, studies have demonstrated that older people are more likely to share inaccurate news stories online, with senior citizens sharing on average seven times more false news stories than those who are eighteen to twenty-nine.[22]

These differences are often found along party lines. According to research published in the journal *Science*, in the US, 18 percent of self-identified Republicans shared at least one misleading news story, versus 4 perecent of Democrats.[23] In a study at The Ohio State University, researchers found that of stories that went viral, only 10 percent had a liberal view. This study found that not only were conservatives more likely to believe false information, they were also more likely to believe that true information was inaccurate. The researchers attempted to discern why conservatives are

more susceptible to false information, but found no conclusive answer.[24] One theory is that this disparity between liberals and conservatives is due to echo chambers that conservatives often, though sometimes unwittingly, place themselves in and that they are more likely to be bombarded with false information.

How, then, do we teach individuals to be accurate seekers and users of information? Sam Wineburg of the Stanford History Education Group found that the most effective method of teaching students to evaluate the accuracy of sources on the internet was to put them in front of a computer and demonstrate lateral reading. Rather than have a checklist or some other sort of tool to determine whether a site is accurate, students were given a laptop and a list of sites to evaluate. Students were taught to look for the sponsor of the site, open another tab and do a google search to determine if that sponsor was credible. This method of lateral reading is effective because students are able to determine quickly whether a site is accurate, even catching the especially difficult "PR firm fake websites"—websites by lobby groups that promote information that is inaccurate for specified special interest groups such as big pharma, oil, and chemical companies.[25]

In a partnership with MediaWise, young adult author John Green has created a ten-part series on Crash Course to follow the curriculum developed by Sam Wineburg and the Stanford History Education Group. Researchers at Stanford followed up with Green to evaluate the success of the course. Students watched the series and participated in website evaluation tasks. Students found the videos informative and entertaining and their performance on website evaluation tasks were markedly improved.[26]

Green's Crash Course is relevant and relatable to today's teens. Students have direct experience with fake news and they can understand the connections to their own lives. When the content is meaningful and authentic for the students, they are more likely to engage with the instruction.[27]

Education researcher Joy Egbert implemented an activity designed by the Center of Media Literacy to specifically help English Language Learners (ELL) learn how to identify false information shared online. Students were given common internet hoaxes (in this example, that there are abandoned pet alligators in the New York City sewers) and asked to evaluate whether the information was true. Using a kit from the Center on Media Literacy, the teacher models and scaffolds to support the ELL students. The students used tools such as Snopes at Netrekker to research whether the claims are accurate. The teacher supported with vocabulary and modeled posing a question. Through this process, the ELL students were more successful in identifying inaccurate information.

Green's Crash Course effectively teaches high school students how to recognize bias and find accurate information. The Center for Media Literacy Kit can be effectively used with ELL students. Can we teach even younger students how to find bias? Can primary students recognize bias in fiction and nonfiction works?

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has developed standards for school media instruction.[28] These standards are comprehensive guidelines for high-quality school library programs. The AASL standards have six core foundations—include, collaborate, curate, explore, create, and engage. Through these foundations, students are taught the skills necessary to be effective, ethical seekers and users of information. These standards guide school librarians in their curriculum. The main obstacle is that only a few states, such as New Jersey and Illinois, mandate media literacy education.[29] And the requirements for library funding and staffing vary greatly from state to state.[30] Though there are great resources and standards for teaching media literacy, many students do not learn these skills.

Methodology

Students (5 classes of 24 students in each class, 120 children) involved in the study were Chinese children in grade 3 at an elite private bilingual school in Shanghai. Most of the students have attended the same English private preschool affiliated with the school, and most were in their third year of the primary program at the school. The students have had foreign teachers since their preschool years; over half of the teachers were from the UK; the others were from Ireland, the United States, Canada, and Australia. All international teachers hold a teacher certification from an English-speaking country; all local teachers are certified to teach in the Shanghai public schools. In the bilingual primary program, 60 percent of the content was in English and 40 percent in Chinese. The children's English fluency was on par with children in English-speaking countries.

The primary students had a forty-five-minute library lesson in English each week delivered by an American teacher librarian. The lesson familiarized the students with library resources, such as accessing the catalog, searching in databases (Gale Elementary) and accessing e-books and information literacy skills. The school was staffed with two certified librarians, both of whom were also certified teachers, and two library assistants.

At the start of the school session, students listened to two versions of Rapunzel read aloud: Paul Zelinsky's *Rapunzel* and *Really Rapunzel Needed a Haircut: The True Story of Rapunzel as Told by Dame Goethel* by Jessica Gunderson.

After the stories were read aloud, students were given a paper survey with five questions:

- From whose point a view is the story of Rapunzel traditionally told?
- How does the story differ when told from the witch's point of view?
- Why is it important to recognize the point of view in a story?
- What do you think could affect the author's point of view in the story?

- Could the author's point of view affect a nonfiction (true) story?

Students were asked the same questions again in December after specific instruction on bias and an author's point of view. (One group did not take the survey again due to closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.)

In December, students listened to two stories about Christopher Columbus and his voyages to the Caribbean. Students listened to *Encounter* by Jane Yolen and *In 1492* by Jean Marzallo. *Encounter* tells the story of Columbus's arrival from the point of view of a young indigenous boy. *In 1492*, a simple rhyming text, tells of Columbus's voyages. In this instance, the children compared the two nonfiction texts to determine if the author's perspective influenced the story.

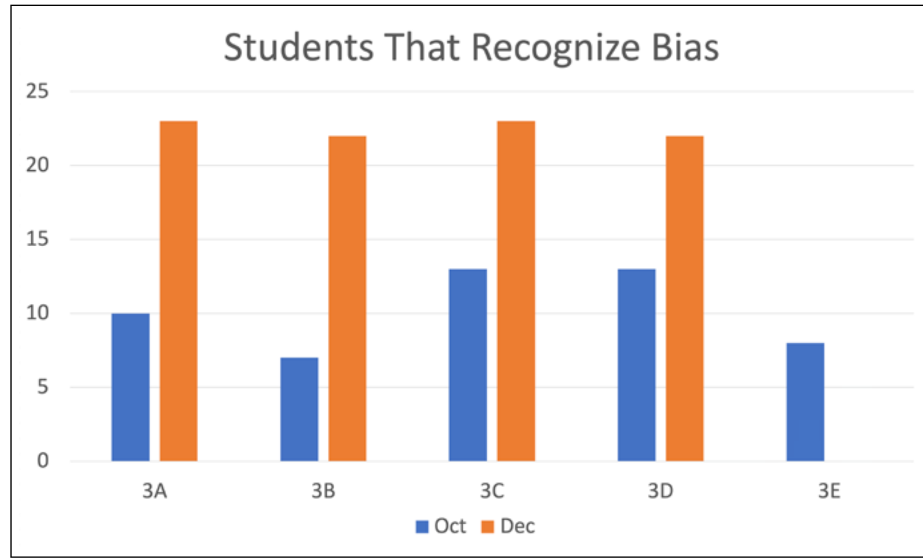

Figure 1. Students That Recognize Bias

Summary of Findings

Analyzing the October results, we found that less than half (42 percent) of students believed that an author's point of view could affect the story. In one class group (3B), only 29 percent of students believed an author could have bias. Students stated "nothing can affect nonfiction information" and "a fact can't be changed." After several weeks of weekly information literacy skills lessons, including other examples of narratives told from different sides, lateral reading in print and digitally, students were given the survey again.

In December, there was marked improvement in the students' ability to recognize bias with more than 90 percent of children in all classes (mean 93.7 percent) stating that an author's bias could affect both fiction and nonfiction stories. Children responded: "everyone has their own opinion" and "a nonfiction story can have a point of view."

In this survey, children were presented with information through traditional book formats or e-books. Further study is needed to conclude whether the students were able to apply what they learned to information found in other formats, such as news media, and to critically analyze the news media that is presented to them. Although more than half the children initially believed that facts could not have a bias, after six weeks of information literacy lessons, the children gained an understanding of how bias can affect a story whether fiction or nonfiction.

Discussion of Findings' Significance

This survey's results are similar to other's findings: many people of all ages are unable to identify bias in written works without specific instruction. Also similar to other research, once individuals are given the skills, they are much more effective at identifying bias.

As we hold our students to high standards in literacy and math, it is important to also include information literacy skills in state curricula. As a society, we need citizens who are critical seekers and users of information. We have seen numerous examples of how when indoctrinated with poor quality or misleading information people can become radicalized or driven to participate in dangerous activities. It is crucial that we educate all people to recognize bias and to identify inaccurate information.

Implications of Findings for Practice

A full spectrum of information literacy skills must be included in our schools' curricula. Every student should be taught skills such as identifying bias, lateral reading, citing sources, and preventing plagiarism. School librarians are uniquely placed to deliver this instruction, yet school librarians are in a precarious position due to budget shortfalls in public school districts.

The National Center for Education Statistics reports a 15 percent drop in school library positions between 2009 and 2016.[31] In 2011, the Pennsylvania School Library Study found that in schools with a certified librarian, students performed better on standardized tests. Low-income students in schools with a certified librarian were twice as likely to graduate high school as similar students with no librarian in their school.[32] The Stanford Research Group's study demonstrated that after just six hours of instruction on identifying false information online, the high school students in their survey improved markedly on the tasks.

The evidence is clear—every student should receive an education that includes information literacy skills. Every school should have a library staffed with a certified professional librarian. &

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Intention and the Unexpected

Manifesting the Storytelling Librarian's Goals

SUE MIRKIN

Telling stories to children requires planning and creativity. With thorough plans and tools, the storyteller librarian intends to benefit children.

However, what often occurs during storytime is ultimately not in the librarian's control. One can hope storytime goes well, but transforming that hope into a manifested outcome begins with intention. Intention is a means of activating our will and creativity to do what is necessary to accomplish goals. Setting intentions for dealing with the unexpected includes what we desire to happen. This helps create a type of container for storytime that includes skills, tools, and desires.

Here I'll explain how to work with intention in ways that benefit the storyteller librarian, referred to in this article as storyteller.

Intention as Container

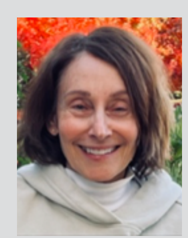
Intention directs thinking; feelings influence the storyteller and overall storytelling atmosphere. Safety is an essential quality when working with the imagination. Feeling safe is a prerequisite for self-expression for children and storyteller. Therefore, setting an initial intention for safety is a good beginning point. Moving from the rational concept of safety to the feeling or sense of safety, imagine that the storytelling space is a container. The container can be the room, your grandmother's rose vase, or somewhere or something that brings up a sense of safety. Feeling safe allows everyone to relax, enjoy the stories, and express themselves, should that be part of circle time. Carrying the image and sense into the actual space may result in implementing changes to the space. Perhaps the seating is changed, or a vase of roses, an object, or a picture is brought in and placed somewhere to remind the storyteller of the space being safe.

Desired outcomes for the storytelling session expand the container. These intentions, when created prior to circle time, help storytellers stay aligned with their goals. It is important to clarify desired outcomes because they shape intentions.

For my summer fieldwork in graduate school, I took a storytelling workshop taught by story coach Kendall Haven. We had to bring a six-minute story to work with during the four-and-a-half-day workshop after which we would tell the story on the last day.

I had two intentions for this workshop. The first was to experience telling stories, and the second was to learn something new about the stories I wrote for others, so I wrote a story for myself to tell. The story flowed out easily on paper, however unlike any other story it had no ending. The thought of telling a story in front of people terrified me, but I decided not to indulge the fear and instead be open to new experiences.

I took my first step to becoming a storyteller on the first evening, following the formal class and peer reviews. My peers, all professional storytellers, wanted to know how I met the character in the story and advised me to use it as my introduction. Haven told us to "tell it [story] to learn it; don't learn it to tell it."[1] I discovered the introduction by talking about my character and how we met. Not unlike writing, I told this in several different ways until I was



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satisfied. After four days of doing different exercises to improve our storytelling skills, it was time to tell our stories. I still did not have an ending. At this point, I hoped that images would appear to complete this story as I approached the time limit.

Swiss psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung wrote that "when we concentrate on an inner picture and when we are careful not to interrupt the natural flow of events, our unconscious will produce a series of images which make a complete story."[2]

Dreading the worst and excited that I, too, would be learning about this story, I volunteered to go first. Jung's words came true; the images appeared sequentially, and I finished the story successfully. My intention to learn more about the stories I wrote manifested in synchronistic experiences, not unlike what happened to my clients.

Storytelling Tools and Intentions

Below are several tools I learned during the workshop that storytelling librarians can use to create intentions.

- Storytelling is an intimate type of performance. Therefore, it is important to create an intimate relationship with the audience. This is achieved just before telling the first story by looking briefly into the eyes of each audience member (or as many as possible).[3] Haven emphasized that when we are telling "we are the center of the world."[4] When telling stories to an audience, it is "as if" you are telling your friends a story and accompanying them on a wonderful journey.

- Bringing listeners into the story's world includes the sensory details. For example, if the story takes place in a forest what is the temperature? Is it damp? What are the smells around you? Is it still or are there monkeys chattering? If it takes place near water, are frogs croaking or is water splashing as they dive in? These small details help listeners deepen their imaginal journey.

- Finally, storytelling is a co-creative experience in that the audience contributes to the story in unspoken ways. For example, if you have told a particular story many times you may have noticed how each time you tell the story it differs slightly from the previous telling.

Setting intentions based on the above tips begins with finding a story you love and want to share. As you practice telling or reading the story, consider adding sensory details. Prior to being with the children, remember that as a storyteller you are the center of the world. In front of the children, establish rapport through eye contact, trust what pops into your head during the telling. This may include changing the planned story after the one being told.

For example, it is important that children are fully engaged during the whole session. Therefore, an intention could be holding the children's attention. Assuming this is your intention, do you feel you have enough storytelling tools to do this? How do you want to respond and feel when the children seem uninterested?

Perhaps feeling self-confident, nonplussed, and positively challenged may be the intention set for each session. It may be helpful, then, to imagine a storytelling session in which you feel confident, calm, and the children provide stimulating challenges. Imagining is a way to embody the feelings that you can remember in the future. How do you want to respond and feel when the parents or nannies are distracting?

Answers to these questions may be calmly saying something or even getting them involved. Imagine a scenario that requires setting limits for the adults, so the children can remain focused. If something unexpected happens, how do you want to respond and feel? Perhaps creative and able to think on your feet. This will be your intention in these situations.

After intentions have been made and experienced with your imagination and feelings, it is time to let them go and trust that the intentions that were set will manifest. Deepak Chopra wrote, "Like real seeds, intentions can't grow if you hold on to them."[5]

Trust may not come easy to many people; however, consider the entire process above as a fun, playful experiment and, like a child, watch what happens. Numerous scientific experiments on the effects of intention are reported in Lynne McTaggart's book. She also devotes several chapters on how to create intentions. In Dr. Wayne Dyer's book, *The Power of Intention: Learning to Co-Create Your World Your Way*, Dyer discusses discusses intention and what to look for when evaluating its effects.

The intentional container is a combination of thinking, imagining, and feeling. Determining the goals storytellers desire to accomplish with the children, how one wants to respond to the children and unexpected circumstances, and how one wants to feel during storytelling time can be intended. Creating intentions, when cultivated as a practice, can pave the way for a beneficial and enjoyable storytime for everyone. &

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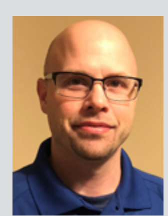
A Missed Opportunity

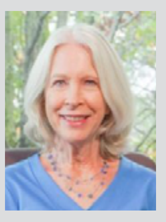
Increasing the Use of Inclusive Library Programs and Practices

DEREK T. M. DASKALAKES, MELISSA STORMONT, CAROLINE GOODEN, CAROL RUSSELL, MARIA CAHILL, DENICE ADKINS, BOBBIE SARTIN LONG, AND ALICIA K. LONG

Libraries are meant to be welcoming places, offering a multitude of supports for the community, families, and young children. Given that libraries should reflect the fabric of a community, it is vital that all children and their families feel welcome at the library, and have meaningful access to the resources that libraries provide. This includes young children with disabilities and/or developmental delays (YCwD/DD) and their caregivers.

Public library spaces and programs are usually designed to be accessible to all members of the community. As a result, there is reason to believe that libraries possess many of the essential tools needed to make their resources accessible to YCwD/DD and their caregivers. As part of an ongoing multi-state research project focused on ways that libraries support YCwD/DD and their families, we conducted focus group interviews with early intervention service coordinators in three Midwestern states to learn about their perceptions of libraries, including what libraries do well and how they can improve services for this population. Topics these practitioners mentioned included more visible inclusive programming for YCwD/DD and their caregivers, training and professional development to equip librarians to work with YCwD/DD and their caregivers, and intentional collaboration between children's librarians and other community members to support the needs of this population. Below, we draw on this data in offering recommendations for how children's librarians can meet the needs of YCwD/DD and their caregivers.





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Need for Increased Access and Inclusivity

Public libraries are widely recognized for offering high quality environments that include a range of developmental support and learning opportunities for young children with and without disabilities.[1] The provision of early literacy resources and educational opportunities are mainstays of library services.[2] Additionally, libraries are essential community hubs serving as central sites for community social interaction and information sharing.[3] Providing access to resource and opportunity-rich environments is beneficial for young children.[4] However, recent research suggests that aspects of current library environments and practices may not be inclusive or accessible for YCwD/DD and their caregivers.[5] Specifically, research has highlighted the following barriers to active library use:

- Scant advertising of inclusive services and programming for YCwD/DD and their families.[6]
- Insufficient training and professional development resources for librarians.[7]
- Few programming options designed to meet the library needs of YCwD/DD.[8]
- Limited consideration of the accommodation needs of YCwD/DD and their caregivers when designing and implementing library programs.[9]
- Impression by caregivers of YCwD/DD that libraries and library programs are not suitable for their children.[10]
- Two additional barriers that affect YCwD/DD and their caregivers identified in focus group interviews conducted as part of the present study include potentially unique transportation needs, and the limited operating hours that libraries sometimes maintain in the evenings and on weekends.

Libraries are actively working to improve aspects of their service provision to address these shortcomings,[11] but it is clear that additional steps are needed to make libraries fully inclusive of and beneficial for YCwD/DD and their caregivers.[12] Considering that more than 1.2 million children ages 0–5 received early intervention and special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act during the 2018–19 school year,[13] the inclusivity of public libraries for YCwD/DD and their families is an important issue affecting a significant portion of the child population in the United States.

Librarian Knowledge and Training Opportunities

Librarians are the heartbeat of public libraries. It is through their efforts and dedication that libraries are able to build and maintain the relationships that are essential for effectively supporting the local community. Equipping librarians with practical tools to understand and support differences in library-based experiences and needs is one way to increase the inclusivity of library spaces and programming for YCwD/DD and their caregivers.

Knowing the Barriers

Normal, everyday aspects of library materials, spaces, and programs sometimes present significant barriers to access for YCwD/DD and their caregivers. Obvious examples include broad aspects of library practices that are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, such as the accessibility of the physical environment, the availability of adapted literacy materials, and the inclusivity of programming for all people.[14] Some less obvious examples can include noise-related rules, transportation needs, limited operating hours, and awareness of library services that can uniquely affect YCwD/DD and their families. One early intervention service coordinator stated, “It would be good, first off, to make sure that [library] programs can accommodate children with disabilities.” Another coordinator suggested revisiting “the behavioral expectations [in libraries]. The traditional expectations of a library maybe needs to be loosened.” A third coordinator echoed this suggestion by indicating a need to “relax some of the rules . . . to have room and opportunities for socialization.” The potentially unique transportation needs of YCwD/DD and their caregivers was also acknowledged by the early intervention service coordinators that we interviewed. One coordinator described, “The amount of families I have that don’t have transportation . . . I mean, the library may or may not be on a bus line. That’s a whole lot to ask for a family who is just trying to get by and then they have a child that might need extra assistance. I wouldn’t expect them to get on a bus to such and such or even walk.” Another coordinator noted, “Getting to the library can be a problem [and] some libraries maybe don’t stay open late.” Further, it may be especially important for librarians working in more isolated communities to be attuned to these and similar needs. As another early intervention service coordinator observed, “More urban areas have more programs for young children than the rural areas do.” Librarians need to be aware of the barriers in their libraries and understand how those barriers can prevent populations within the community from accessing and benefiting from the vital public resources that libraries offer.

Training and Professional Development

Just as important as knowing the barriers that can affect YCwD/DD and their caregivers is librarians’ capacity to address them through the implementation of inclusive practices. Although libraries excel in areas of service provision in general, library programming needs to serve all individuals in the community. Librarians need access to additional resources and tools to meet the access needs of YCwD/DD and their families, and this can be done by expanding training and professional development opportunities. One early intervention service coordinator recommended, “Some professional development . . . [consisting of] what can we do to make the library more accessible for children with delays and disabilities. What might that look like? What can we do

that doesn't cost a lot of money . . . ? Just basic, like, here are some things you can do. Here are some things you cannot do. Here's ways you can support parents who have a child on the spectrum who is a young child. . . . What can you reasonably expect from infants and toddlers and infants and toddlers with delays and disabilities and preschoolers with delays and disabilities? And how do we make it welcoming to all people?"

Another coordinator added, "I think with some education librarians could better accommodate children who are disruptive." Recent studies have shown that while librarians are committed to providing services that are accessible and beneficial for this population, many librarians feel underprepared to meet their unique needs.[15] One avenue for training would be to focus on the use of evidence-based strategies for adapting and potentially redesigning library programs to meet the needs of YCwD/DD and their caregivers, or to make spaces more accessible. This suggestion echoes previous calls for expanded training opportunities to better equip librarians to meet the library-based needs of YCwD/DD and their caregivers.[16]

Increased Communication, Collaboration, and Partnerships

Collaboration is an essential part of nearly all aspects of current library practices. That is, libraries work not only for but with communities in order to understand and provide appropriate services to meet their information and social needs. Effectively collaborating with caregivers and other community service providers is essential for making library spaces and programming accessible for YCwD/DD and their caregivers.

Communicating with Caregivers

Librarians already recognize the importance of communicating frequently and effectively with caregivers regarding child participation and support needs. As suggested by our early intervention coordinators, there are three areas of awareness that we believe would facilitate communication specifically with caregivers of YCwD/DD. First, librarians should consider that caregivers are often very vulnerable when accompanying YCwD/DD in library spaces. That is, these caregivers don't always feel welcome in libraries,[17] which can make them less likely to come to the library and communicate with librarians about the needs of their children. As one early intervention coordinator stated, "I think that stigma is so prevalent to this day . . . I mean, I can see where families would be like, 'that's the last place I want to take my sensory seeking child.'" Another coordinator added, "I sometimes wonder if there was a way to explain to families that everybody's welcome. We're here to help you. We want you here. We understand if things aren't perfect . . . I haven't run into a library yet that has said don't come. They're all happy to have us, but I don't always know that parents feel that or know that." These comments suggest how important it is for librarians to recognize that making the library a welcoming and supportive place for YCwD/DD often begins with proactively communicating with individual caregivers.

Secondly, librarians should recognize the value of socialization for caregivers. It is widely acknowledged that providing opportunities for children to socialize is an important benefit of library spaces and programs. It is less well known that caregivers greatly value and benefit from opportunities to socialize with other adults. This point is particularly important for caregivers of YCwD/DD who can be at greater risk of social isolation.[18] One early intervention coordinator stated, "Parents in therapy that I knew were dying for some socialization with some other parents who were dealing with the diagnosis of or having a child with disabilities." Another coordinator added, "I definitely think different support groups would be wonderful . . . because oftentimes that's what parents are seeking out. They want to know other parents that have children just like theirs." Increasing the inclusivity of library spaces and programs for YCwD/DD has the added benefit of making caregivers feel seen, heard, and included by librarians and other caregivers.

Sharing Messages of Inclusivity

Libraries already actively engage in disseminating information regarding their services and programs within the community. For many libraries, though, it is not clear whether those services and programs are inclusive of YCwD/DD and their caregivers. For example, a study of Canadian library websites found that libraries often did not identify services and programs that were inclusive for this population.[19] Further, our research team's recent review of library websites in three Midwestern states produced similar findings. Communicating more widely and clearly on the inclusivity and accessibility of library services and programs can benefit both families and other service providers in the community.

One early intervention coordinator recommended, "Telling those families more about the storytimes and those social interaction groups that those children can possibly go to. Sometimes we do, but not all the time. So, I think we can do a better job just helping to communicate what the library offers." Another coordinator added, "The other piece is just getting that word out that all are welcome . . . just sometimes families need to hear that it's OK," and a third coordinator suggested that libraries should "really put it out there that they are an inclusive location for people of all abilities of children or adults."

These comments suggest that libraries could significantly expand the inclusivity of their services and programming by being more intentional and transparent in their communications with families and service providers within the community. Messages of inclusivity should be conveyed through all forms of library communication: messaging and signage within libraries as well as on library websites and social media postings and on all promotional materials. Specifically, such messages need to indicate with words and images that children with all types of disabilities, delays, and needs are encouraged to come to the library.

Collaborating with Other Community Service Providers

Libraries already maintain a wide range of partnerships both within and across communities. For example, it is very common for librarians to sit on early childhood councils, collaborate with local child care and education institutions, and participate in community health fairs. Despite those efforts, it is not clear to what extent these partnerships specifically serve to address the access needs of YCwD/DD and their caregivers. Here we offer two recommendations to potentially address this concern.

First, libraries might consider establishing community-wide collaborative networks and procedures with other service providers. As one early intervention service coordinator suggested, "I don't think it needs to be monthly, but maybe even like once or twice a year where we connect and kind of swap schedules, like this is what [the state's early intervention program] is doing, and these are the programs libraries are offering now. That way we can share with our families, and they can share with their families." Collaborative routines could potentially take many forms that might enable libraries to effectively leverage their partnerships to reach and serve all members of the community. Second, libraries might consider leveraging existing collaborative relationships in order to expand access to resources related to service provision for YCwD/DD and their caregivers. In particular, partnerships with local education partners may represent an untapped resource for expertise, materials, and strategies that librarians could implement within library spaces and programs. Another early intervention service coordinator stated, "Getting those librarians or whoever their youth representative is to those meetings . . . not just early intervention, but parents as teachers and early childhood special education, to know what resources are available and what programs they have to offer would be great." Doing so could position libraries to better accommodate the varying access needs of different populations within their service community.

Conclusion

Libraries are intended to provide welcoming environments that offer vital information and social resources that are accessible to all members of the community. Despite that, it is clear that more is needed to ensure that library spaces and resources are inclusive of and accessible to YCwD/DD and their caregivers. Using data collected through focus group interviews with early intervention service coordinators across three Midwestern states, we offer recommendations for libraries to consider implementing in aspects of their daily practices to address this issue. The recommendations provided here focus on equipping librarians with practical and effective tools and structuring collaborative practices with caregivers and other community service providers to potentially enhance library service provision for YCwD/DD and their caregivers.

We recognize the absence of easy solutions to the issues that we have raised here, and our recommendations should be read as plausible possibilities for libraries and librarians to consider using in their work. As one early intervention service coordinator suggests, "How do you make sure that that child can flourish in your community, wherever that might be, whether it's rural or urban, or however, with this special need? So that's a place that libraries could contribute a lot." We echo that sentiment and call on libraries to use their resourcefulness and expertise to expand services for YCwD/DD and their caregivers within their respective communities. &

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Leading with Intent

Museums and Libraries and Collaboration, Oh My!

KATHRYN JONES AND SHERRI KILLINS STEWART

A family at the Berkshire Athenaeum "Me, You, We" Social Emotional Learning Program.

More than two hundred children's museums in the United States support interactive learning opportunities for young children.[1] In contrast, there are more than 17,400 public libraries, including central, branch, and mobile libraries.[2]

However, some families do not benefit from these anchor institutions. Five main factors were found to impact individual use of public libraries alternatives, awareness, and understanding of universally free libraries or understanding them as only providing books, access hours operation, location and transportation, experience or not feeling comfortable, or previous bad experiences and interest.[3]

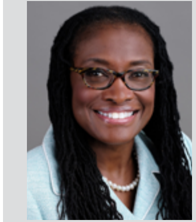
The Project

Through a Cooperative Agreement with the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Boston Children's Museum undertook the nationwide IMLS-funded Building a National Network of Museums and Libraries for School Readiness Project to address persistent gaps in early childhood education and school readiness.

This work led to a guide *Building Supportive Communities: with Libraries, Museums and Early Childhood Systems*.[4]

The framework for the project evolved from three primary origins:

- direct work in the state of Massachusetts with the Boston Children's Museum
- work with IMLS to understand and craft intentional partnerships within states between museums and libraries
- state early childhood leaders with the BUILD Initiative.



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Taking it to the streets with the mobile outreach van from Harrison County (IN) Library System.

Over the three years of the project, library and museum teams in six states worked to build their local capacity through partnerships and coalitions to reach populations in their communities currently not being served. Staff from participating libraries and the museums engaged with project staff through conference calls, webinars, site visits and leadership institutes to share and learn approaches to intentionally seeking out children and families in their regions—especially those experiencing socio-economic hardship, non-English speaking, Native American, or dual language learners—to listen and respond to their interest in activities to support child growth, development, and family wellbeing.

Partnering to Reach Families

Existing relationships between the libraries and museums varied across the states. As a result of the project, they developed a shared interest and benefit to guide their work together.

South Carolina

Charleston County Public Library (CCPL), South Carolina State Library (SCSL), and the Children's Museum of the Lowcountry (CML) are working together to reach economically disadvantaged communities, young mothers, those in foster care, and/or in rural areas. CCPL and CML have visited local neighborhoods to bring storytime and the museum's Pop-Up Tinker Shop to children when school is out of session. CCPL and CML also partnered to increase access and reduce barriers for families who may not be able to travel to downtown Charleston or afford parking.

The museum also provides free entry passes to library card holders and those who participate in our reading challenges. In addition to meeting the community where they are, CCPL, SCSL, and CML are providing trainings for the general public about early childhood development and for library staff across the state of South Carolina about the importance of play.

Iowa

The IMLS project has also strengthened the relationship between the Coralville (IA) Public Library and the Iowa Children's Museum. Initially, each organization worked independently to provide children's programming, but staff discovered that their reach into the community was wider when they worked together, sharing unique skill sets, resources, and connections.

Storytime at Brightview Village Apartments, downtown Charleston, SC.

The partners intentionally reached out to families and discovered that neither the library nor the museum were successfully marketing their services to the specific groups of bilingual children and families. Through grant funding, the museum worked with a translation service and bilingual staff to translate promotional documents for programs and literacy information into Arabic, French, and Spanish. The library's connection with HACAP Head Start blossomed into a partnering opportunity when museum staff joined monthly storytime, creating an educational, playful experience for all of the children.

Mississippi

The Harrison County (MS) Library System and Lynn Meadows Discovery Center are partnering to bring library and museum services to underserved populations. They selected a population of children and families within an income-restricted neighborhood located not far from both the organizations.

Due to the lack of sidewalks, bike lanes, or sufficient bus routes, families overwhelmingly reported transportation as a persistent barrier to participating in activities or services at both venues. The first solution to the transportation barrier was to bring services directly to the children in the form of books and learning kits on site in the residential community.

The second solution came in the form of collaboration with the local public bus company, Coast Transit Authority (CTA). On the last Friday of each month, the bus transports families to and from the neighborhood for a free night at the museum. The third solution came with the acquisition of a mobile library vehicle through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The vehicle now makes stops in the neighborhood twice a month and brings library services such as Wi-Fi and computer access, material checkout, and summer reading materials.

Massachusetts

Staff at the Berkshire Athenaeum (Pittsfield, MA) and Berkshire Museum have learned that communication isn't just a two-way street. They have learned through this process that community building and creating adaptive programming means continual and dynamic communication. Their partnership has required listening and sharing to tweak and align their expectations of each other, and their engaged families have come to expect the same sensitivity and flexibility. By working together and talking with participants, they are finding natural ways to bring social-emotional learning and STEM/STEAM concepts together. Furthermore, it has meant finding ways to welcome bilingual caregivers and children to programming.

New Mexico

Santa Fe (NM) Public Library was able to create a deep partnership with the Santa Fe Children's Museum that went far beyond creating joint programming. Together, their organizations were able to pose the question, "Who are we not serving?"

By asking this question, they were able to create a support system for each other in their emphasis to serve the young children in Santa Fe and their caregivers. They will continue to ask questions about how they can better serve the community, and together, they can seek joint funding opportunities, create collaborative marketing and outreach, and garner community support to ensure they are broadening their audiences and helping remove barriers to participation. Listening to those who visit their libraries and museum is important, but intentionally looking to determine audiences missing from their programs to ensure they are providing support for all in their community is a key administrative practice.

Their offerings through this collaboration have allowed local organizations such as Many Mothers, Head Start, Kids Campus at Santa Fe Community College, and Growing Up New Mexico to use their shared museum and library spaces for their audiences.

Virginia

Richmond (VA) Public Library and The Children's Museum of Richmond have a long history of partnering, but this project deepened that partnership by cross connecting with families in intentional ways. Both organizations have a mission to support caregivers and young children, so it was easy to find new ways to reinforce their shared message.

They used funding for mutual benefit by purchasing the book *In Kindergarten*, created by the Berkshire Museum (also a participant in the project), to distribute through the library, through schools, and through joint Kindergarten Readiness events. The museum hosts two events and the library hosts an additional six events.

At each event, they will have cross-representation of museums and libraries. The library will offer library cards at the museum events and the museum will attend and provide bilingual support at half of the library events. They have co-planned all the events and have submitted an IMLS proposal for expansion of these types of events and supports in the future.

With limited staffing capacity, the biggest challenge has been finding time to meet and align. They love working smarter and sharing the load. This project has made them more intentional about seeking and responding to family voice and some of the new approaches are a direct result of what they have heard from the families.

Lessons Learned

Participants have indicated that when libraries partner with museums and other local organizations it extends and amplifies what they are able to achieve. Libraries increase the number of families they are able to engage and can tailor the programs and services they are able to provide to be responsive to families. Through broadening their knowledge and practices around how to better engage families in feedback loops, libraries have the opportunity to reach families in their community currently not benefiting from the range of services they offer. &

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Beyond a Single Identity

Family-Themed Picture Books Depicting Intersecting Identities

LISA CZIRR, CHRISTINE ULIASSI, MARGARET GICHURU, AND PATRICIA ROIGER

Picture books have been described as written artifacts that convey cultural and social messages.[1] The messages shown in picture books can perpetuate societal problems by excluding diverse groups or promoting stereotypes.

On the other hand, inclusive children's literature can combat socialized forms of oppression.[2] Sharing inclusive children's literature from an early age can promote positive identity development. Messages in these texts normalize the diversity of experiences and identities that may be reflected in students' lives or the experiences of their peers. Diverse portrayals, particularly those depicting individuals at intersections of multiple marginalized groups, are underrepresented in children's texts. Diverse students negotiate the complex implications (e.g., cultural, historical, social, and political) of having multiple identity markers.[3]

Therefore, our libraries must be representative of these rich, complex, and layered identities. These books can address intersectional concepts for students of all age levels, introducing these topics in ways that are relatable and appropriate.

Because children's lives revolve around their family unit, picture books often tell stories depicting the centrality of families. These texts can send messages about the way families are and the way they are "supposed to be."[4]

Although few studies focus specifically on family-themed picture books, the available literature reveals a lack of intersectional identities represented.[5] When families with non-dominant identities are focused on, often whiteness and upper-class identities are privileged.[6]

We have seen this theme in our own work with teacher candidates' analysis of family-themed picture books. For about five years, Lisa Czirr, a State University at New York (SUNY) Cortland Memorial Library teaching librarian, along with teaching faculty, joined forces to support our early childhood and elementary teacher candidates' critical analysis of the portrayal of families in picture books. From the beginning, our candidates noted a lack of diverse intersectional themes. Reflecting on this and considering recent social movements (e.g., Me Too movement, Black Lives

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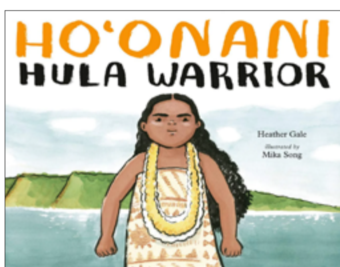

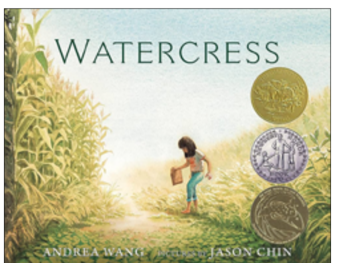

Matter, or the refugee crisis and response) as well as resulting backlash (e.g., anti-trans policies, book banning), we decided to systematically examine more recently published picture books.

Using an intersectionality framework, we used a content analysis method to analyze more than one hundred recent children's books to identify what identities are represented and analyze how those identities are portrayed. In this article, we provide an overview of our methodology, the predominant findings from the analysis, and a bibliography that highlights texts depicting the richness of families embodying diverse and intersecting identities.

Theoretical Lens

We acknowledge that our positionalities affected the research process. Collectively, we share a lens of critical literacy. We celebrate multiculturalism and advocate for social justice in our communities, libraries, and classrooms. As we examined texts, our own identities, family experiences, and values influenced our interpretation and analysis of each family-themed story. Among the four authors, we differ in our identities related to race, culture, language backgrounds, and family structure.

We used an intersectionality framework to determine what identity markers (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation, language, culture, ability, and gender) are represented and how they are portrayed in the texts. Intersectionality suggests that we should think of each aspect of a person's identity as linked to fully understand a persons' lived experiences and shared experiences. Moreover, a paradigm of intersectionality can be used to understand how injustice and inequality occur on a multidimensional basis.[7] This recognizes that issues of oppression that deal with race, class, and gender are all interconnected.

According to Lester, "Intersectionality acknowledges that various systems of oppression are interdependent, and that many people experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously that cannot be fully understood by examining each form of oppression singularly."[8] Importantly, it is too simplistic to reduce an individual to a single aspect of their identity.

Similar to individuals, families themselves are also reflective of complexities potentially combining multiple intersectional aspects. These complex and dynamic intersectional families can thereby encounter oppression in a multitude of ways. For example, children living in an alternative family arrangement (e.g., single parents, divorced, living with grandparents) will often confront a label of "broken" while children of same-sex parents are judged for not being from "traditional" families.[9] Therefore, we used intersectionality as the framework to identify and analyze the depictions of diverse identity markers in family-themed books.

Search Techniques

A specialized collection within Memorial Library, the Teaching Materials Center (TMC) at SUNY Cortland, includes preK-12 books and other classroom materials that preservice teachers can borrow. The collection development goals of the TMC reflect the current curricula and overall needs of the School of Education. Among these priorities is a strong focus on books with themes related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a result of this focus, recently published picture books with culturally diverse topics are generally well-represented in the collection. All books were therefore chosen from within the TMC for ease of access, along with the availability of relevant diverse topics.

With a research team of teacher candidates, we conducted a critical content analysis for inclusion of intersectional identities in over one hundred family-themed picture books published between 2016 and 2021. Each researcher analyzed fifteen books using a checklist, before we met to debrief on our texts. Books were selected for this project based on specific criteria, including publication date, format, and content.

We conducted searches within the library's discovery service, ONESearch (Primo), using specific parameters to limit to books meeting these criteria. To ensure that books were current, the publication date was set to 2016 to the present. This data range was chosen specifically to determine whether the availability of intersectional family-themed books had changed relative to our previous work and findings. The format was also limited to picture books within the TMC's Easy collection, to likewise maintain consistency with the previous project.

To ensure that family was the main focus of the books rather than a stray keyword in the record, the search filter of "Subject contains phrase: Families" was selected. An additional search into other TMC areas containing picture books was also conducted, limiting to a subject of "picture books" within the TMC's Nonfiction, New, and Biography collections. The initial result lists that were generated from these searches were downloaded in spreadsheet format. Certain obviously irrelevant titles were eliminated immediately based on not meeting the criteria: publication date out of scope (the "creation date" in the system caused them to appear), other language (Spanish), content (if very obviously

not applicable), and duplicates. The resulting list of 121 books was then divided between researchers for further analysis.

Additional books not on these main lists were occasionally added when applicable, whether from additional searches within classes, or otherwise encountering them outside of the project. For instance, other family-oriented or diversity-related terms were often useful for students working on projects for the family and community course. Occasionally, one of the researchers of this project would serendipitously notice a book that did not appear in the initial search. It is always essential to be aware that search records may be limited. For instance, although a book might not contain the word "families" in its subject, a family might still feature prominently enough within the story to be relevant. Additionally, a book's record might include terms for more specific details, such as family members (mother, father, sibling, etc.), but the broad word "family" might not appear at all. For this reason, comprehensive searches should be strategically built, to thoroughly explore all possible books that are available on a topic.

Methodology

Each researcher individually examined the books from their list, further eliminating strongly irrelevant books (animal characters, no family present, etc.). Any relevant books were then more closely examined through a critical content lens to observe specific identity-themed elements. Critical content analysis is a research method for analyzing texts as written artifacts to describe and interpret their messages. To conduct an examination of what Beach et al. say reflects "the critical in *critical* content analysis,"[10] we used an intersectionality framework. This allowed our analysis to uncover biases, consider power dynamics, and examine inequalities within the stories. Both text and illustrations were examined, as often one or both of these elements would provide a clue to the main characters' identity. Each researcher used a chart to organize their findings, listing examples of direct evidence from the text and illustrations of the books. The different elements examined included race, gender, culture, language, sexual orientation, disability, and class. A section for "other categories" was also included, to capture any further identities not already represented, as well as a "notes" field for additional comments. This chart served as a checklist to help individuals to summarize and organize their findings so that they could be better compiled and articulated to the research team.

Along with what was depicted, evaluators considered *how* these items were represented to determine whether and how themes of intersectionality impacted the characters and plot of the books. A particular identity might be present, but not a main focus of the plot. For instance, although a Black female might experience oppression in different ways due to her gender, race, or both of these aspects, a character's gender-based experience might not factor into the story being told in the book. However, the reader encountering this story would still visually see both of these aspects of their identity represented on the page. Throughout the analysis, evaluators considered how closely these intersecting identities related to the plot, if at all. Even if it was not central to the plot, they still made note of the differing identities as they appeared. After the analysis, the evaluators determined whether intersectionality was actually represented in the book, answering the question as *yes, no*, or *unsure*.

A group discussion allowed for the researchers to share findings about books that clearly contained intersectionality, and further consider the books labeled as "unsure." This meeting was essential to clarify questions, and better determine how to classify the uncertain books. For instance, many researchers noticed that some books included multiple categories of identity, but not within a single character's experience. Even in this situation, these books still had a variety of identities represented that a reader could easily observe, which is still a positive finding. They would still count as strong examples of diverse literature. However, the group determined that these were not true intersectional books, since the identities were spread out between many individuals and not closely connected. True intersectionality occurs when the overlapping categories of identity impact a specific individual and their family's lived experience.

Limitations

This paper has potential limitation with an inability to generalize the findings when addressing the values of intersectionality in children's picture books. Although a thorough search was conducted to locate a wide variety of books, the study was limited to books that were available within the TMC; the findings do not represent all of the potentially available picture books that have been published. As previously mentioned, catalog records also do not always necessarily supply all of the relevant details about a book, especially when intersectionality is not embedded within the plot. Varying search terms and strategies were used to mitigate this limitation, but it is possible that some titles may have been missed due to this lack in catalog information. This study also focused specifically on picture books and the topic of families, so it does not account for intersectional children's literature in other formats featuring additional themes. Identifying books as intersectional additionally proved to be occasionally challenging, with ambiguity in some titles leading to uncertainty about whether they could be included. Some of the picture books that were read by the authors were excluded from this paper because they accentuated one or two characteristics in the storyline despite the books portraying socially significant and critical identities.

Findings

Our results were encouraging, with several titles that included intersectional identities, although the exact representation varied, from intersectional themes that were central to the plot and often depicted character struggles, to themes that were implied within illustrations, but had little bearing on the storyline. Both multiple and single experience books were identified throughout the process; although both have importance, the latter represents a true depiction of an individual's multifaceted experience. Many

Example Books: Varying Identities and Levels of Intersectionality Depictions

Title and Author	Intersectionality
Arnold, Elana K. *What Riley Wore.*	Identities: gender and race Level of Depiction: Race is in the illustrations only, gender identity is central to the plot Riley is shy at school and decides to wear a bunny suit. Each day Riley wears something different to school, to the dentist, to the hardware store, etc. Riley is accepted by friends, family, teachers, and members of the community no matter the outfit being worn.
Avingaq, Susan, and Maren Vsetula. *The Pencil.*	Identities: culture/language, race, and gender Level of Depiction: Culture and gender roles are central to the plot The author, Avingaq, shares childhood memories of growing up in an iglu. A large wooden box kept things safe, such as tools for cleaning skins, needles and sinew for sewing and even a pencil! One day Anaana, Inuktitut word for 'mother,' temporarily leaves to help another family. Ataata, Inuktitut for 'father,' stays home with the children. Does Anaana let the children use the pencil?
de Anda, Diane. *Mango Moon: When Deportation Divides a Family.*	Identities: race, culture, socioeconomic status, and mental health status Level of Depiction: Multiple aspects all factor into the plot. Maricela and her family live together in the United States. Maricela and her brother attend school while her Mama and Papi work. When Maricela's Papi is taken away, Mama works two jobs but cannot support Maricela and her brother, so they must move in with their relatives. At first Maricela is happy to live with them, but when she faces bullying at school, she becomes anxious.
Ehrenberg, Pamela. *Queen of the Hanukkah Dosas.*	Identities: culture, race, and religion Level of Depiction: Culture and religion factor into the plot, race is depicted in the illustrations Explains traditions in celebration of Hanukkah and making of dosas as well as singing the Dreidel song and attending Hebrew school. The main character buys food from a Little Indian Market but it is an unlikely visit for other Hebrew families: "I am very sure I have never seen anyone from the Hebrew school at the Indian shop." The parents are a mixed-race couple from different cultural backgrounds.
Gale, Heather. *Ho'onani: Hula Warrior.*	Identities: culture and gender Level of Depiction: Culture and gender are both central to the plot At school, Ho'onani Kamai takes on a role that is normally for males. Her sister, Kani, does not want Ho'onani Kamai to break the culture's tradition. Her parents are very accepting and proud of her. Will Kani accept her sister for who she is? (Note: the story uses female pronouns for Ho'onani).
Javaherbin, Mina. *My Grandma and Me.*	Identities: culture, religion, gender, and multiple generations Level of Depiction: Multiple aspects all factor into the plot. Gender in relation to religion/culture is mainly in the illustrations. Grandmother and granddaughter share their daily activities in Iran. Morning prayers were said, a basket filled with bread sent up to their window with ropes, visiting their next-door neighbor, a grandmother and granddaughter too. A lovely story of different faiths (Muslims and Christians), friendship, and love.
Kirst, Seamus. *Papa, Daddy, and Riley.*	Identities: race and sexual orientation Level of Depiction: Sexual orientation factors into the plot, while race is only shown in illustrations. A classmate questions Riley's family structure by asking her which of her fathers is her "real" dad. Riley, a Black girl, ponders her similarities to both of her fathers, who are shown in the illustrations to be an interracial gay couple.
Maillard, Kevin Noble. *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story.*	Identities: race, gender, socioeconomic status, and multiple generations Level of Depiction: Multiple aspects all factor into the plot. Features a mixed race, extended family of all different ages and skin tones. The author's notes provide a strong context for intersectional themes (poverty, race, gender, etc.). It's a thoroughly researched book, with many sources cited. The author is a cultural insider and discusses his own experiences.
Narh, Samuel. *Maisie's Scrapbook.*	Identities: culture and race Level of Depiction: Race and culture both factor into the plot. Mama is White and Dada is Non-white, different cultures are shared in the story. Mama plays violin, dada plays marimba, mama wears linen, dada wears Kente clothes, includes two different cultures to relate to.
Neal, DeShanna and Trinity Neal. *My Rainbow.*	Identities: gender, race, and disability Level of Depiction: Multiple aspects all factor into the plot. The main character Trinity is transgender, autistic, and Black. She worries that she must grow her hair long in order to look more feminine. Her mother is very accepting of her identity, and comes up with a creative solution to her problem.
Phi, Bao. *My Footprints.*	Identities: sexual orientation, race, gender, and culture Level of Depiction: Multiple aspects all factor into the plot. The main character is Vietnamese American and has two moms of different races. Her identity (race, gender, and her moms' orientation) is central to the storyline, and they use cultural stories to empower her.
Smith, Heather. *A Plan for Pops.*	Identities: sexual orientation, disability, and race Level of Depiction: Multiple aspects all factor into the plot. This story follows Lou and her gay grandparents, Pops and Grandad. Throughout the book they talk about what the three of them do every Saturday during the day when they get to see each other. In the middle of the story, Pops falls and has to be put in a wheelchair. Pops becomes very sad and does not leave his bed. To cheer him up Lou comes up with a contraption to try and get Pops out of bed. It works and Pops goes outside to see that they built him a ramp.
Wang, Andrea. *Watercress.*	Identities: culture, race, and multiple generations Level of Depiction: Multiple aspects all factor into the plot. Explains the traditions of eating together and using chopsticks in Chinese culture. There is cultural conflict over the type of food prepared and the shame of picking it at the roadside.

of the single-experience books portrayed the lives of characters who might belong to multiple marginalized identities, but grappled with only certain aspects within the book's narrative.

From our original list of 121 texts, we narrowed it down to 34 books that had intersectional identities or were marked unclear. After discussions, we ended with twenty-two titles for our bibliography of picture books depicting intersecting identities.

Diverse, Not Intersecting, Identities Depicted Across Characters

Some books depict various aspects of identity that are dispersed among several characters who are not always necessarily family members. While these titles might still include excellent portrayals of marginalized people, they do not involve intersectional themes in their plotlines. For example, the book *Magnificent Homespun Brown* by Samara Cole Doyon is a poetic celebration of brown skin and African American culture.[11] Traditional cultural details appear in the illustrations in the form of activities, objects, and patterns.

The main character is a young African American girl, and throughout, she is shown engaged in various activities with her family. There are a few other underrepresented identities which appear briefly in illustrations, such as disability (a character identified as a brother is in a wheelchair), or religion (an unidentified character in a hijab). The young girl wearing the hijab additionally appears to have a skin condition, which may also be a factor in how she is treated by others. These various aspects of identity are only shown on the surface within illustrations, however, and are not part of the story's main focus on celebrating race. They are, however, still distinct depictions that serve as a reminder of the diversity that exists within the African American race that is the central focus of the book. There are many examples of books like this, which serve to broadly illustrate diversity: for instance, the book *Love Is Love* by Michael Genhart involves a similar portrayal of numerous families of differing racial appearances within the book's main LGBTQ+ focus.

Intersectionality Depicted, But Only One Identity Central to Plot

In many other books, different facets of a characters' unique identity are present in a way that demonstrates intersecting identities, but that do not necessarily factor into the story. In these cases, these additional identities are often only depicted in the illustrations. For instance, in *Papa, Daddy, and Riley* by Seamus Kirst,[12] the main character Riley is a Black girl whose fathers are an interracial gay couple. The fathers' orientation plays a role within the story, as Riley experiences uncertainty about her family structure, when compared to that of her peers. She is unsure whether one or the other is her "real" father, and considers her similarities to each of her dads, finally concluding that both of them deserve the role. The fathers' identity as a gay couple particularly factors into the story, and, although race is evident in the characters' appearances, in this case, it is not central to the overall story's message. The fathers are not treated any differently by other characters because of their race, but by their family structure. When Riley's friend comments on her family, she is entirely focused on the gender of her parents ("But which one is your *dad* dad? And where is your mom?"[13])

Riley later notices that she resembles both of her fathers to some extent, and has similar traits to both that are independent of race. Riley's identity as female is likewise not a factor in this story, but could still make her character relatable to a child who is Black or female, in a family with mixed race or same gender parents, or some combination of any of these intersecting identities. The appearance of additional identities outside of the main theme of the book normalizes them by smoothly integrating them.

Intersectionality Central to Plot and Characters

The strongest intersectionality examples portray main characters and their families in a multifaceted way. Along with showcasing more than one aspect of their identity, the characters themselves appear throughout their narrative as authentic individuals, with their own unique personalities and backgrounds. Two especially illustrative examples will be described in detail, but further examples are additionally listed in the bibliography.

One exceptional title is the book *My Rainbow*, by DeShanna Neal,[14] which features a main character, Trinity, a young transgender girl who is additionally Black and autistic. In this case, Trinity's varying identities each have an influence on the story overall. Trinity's main struggle is the length of her hair. She is concerned that as a transgender girl, she must grow it out to be better perceived outwardly as female. Her disability additionally makes her especially sensitive to textures ("She loved soft things, just like many kids with autism"[15]). In the illustrations, she has curly hair that is common to individuals of African descent. Both her disability and race play a role in her dilemma to look more feminine: "Trinity struggled to grow her hair long. She hated how it made her itchy when it was growing out."[16] The texture of her hair, as well as her unique reactions as a person with autism both impact her self-expression. Since she cannot grow her hair out, she worries that she is less "female" in her outward appearance and feels a pressure to conform that differs from cisgender girls. Her specific identities as Black and autistic tie into the story again later, as her brother and mother shop for wigs that do not touch Trinity's neck, and are authentic to her race ("She's a beautiful Black girl and her curly hair is *already* perfect"[17]). Ultimately, her mother creates a wig that perfectly captures Trinity's identities, without overwhelming her sense of touch (autism), and combines rainbow colors (broadly representing LGBTQ+) with a curly texture (Black).

Another outstanding example of intersectional themes including race, sexual orientation, and gender occurs in the book *My Footprints* by Bao Phi.[18] The main character, Thuy, is a girl of Asian descent, and is raised by her two mothers who are of different racial backgrounds. Although all three differing aspects are not

technically represented in one character, it is still tied closely to the family overall, and Thuy is consequently treated unfairly by her peers because of these multiple aspects.

At school, Thuy experiences bullying related to the various identities of her family. "I want to be the biggest and strongest and scariest monster . . . so that if kids at school make fun of me for having two moms, or tell me to go back to where I come from, or call me names, or bother me because I'm a girl, I can make them stop!'"[19] Thuy's mothers are very supportive of her, allowing her to express her feelings openly and in her own time. They also encourage her by sharing parts of their respective cultures, joining in her quest to determine which animal can best withstand her classmates' behavior.

By the end, Thuy invents a new creature that "has black hair and black eyes, it's both a boy and a girl, and its skin keeps changing color from black to light brown . . . not to hide, but because it always wants to be different shades of pretty."[20] This uniquely imagined beast combines the names of all three family members, and also depicts both a fluidity and acceptance of their various identities, ultimately celebrating them. Instead of bowing to the social oppression that she encounters, Thuy finds a way to not only overcome it, but transform the situation into something affirming and positive.

Discussion

Crucially, our findings show that intersectional identities are more apparent and prevalent in recent picture books than in those examined previously (see Lester's 2014 study). For instance, *My Rainbow* depicts a combination of identities (a transgender person of color) that have historically not been well represented within children's literature.[21] Although marginalized groups are still less frequently represented in picture books than the predominant white middle class demographic, intentional searching can lead to many excellent results. It is especially promising that the recently-published books we located tended to be culturally accurate and avoidant of stereotypes, regardless of whether they incorporated an intersectional portrayal. While it may initially seem like a high expectation to fit such complex identities within the short span of a picture book, our findings actually indicate that intersectional themes can be effectively incorporated into this format, and may appear to varying extents.

Some picture books (*My Rainbow, My Footprints*) may include intersectional themes as an essential part of the plot, while others might only depict some aspects within the illustrations (*Papa, Daddy, and Riley*). The former category of books, in which more than one aspect of identity is explored in a single individual or family are the most influential examples, because these portrayals are a more authentic reflection of real-world diversity.

Reaching beyond a single identity can result in more nuanced character depictions that avoid stereotypes, giving a voice to groups that are often silenced.[22] The inclusion of these multidimensional books in library and classroom collections sends a welcoming message to children, acknowledging that all family situations and structures are valid.

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Recommendations

Libraries should have a wide variety of picture books that represent diversity to support different identities. Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations when selecting children's literature that portrays intersectionality:

- **Choose picture books that reflect a diverse range of identities.** This has a noticeable impact on readers in establishing their own self-identities. A study carried out between 2003 and 2008 showed that limited representation of identities in picture books may lead to children having a negative perception of their own identities, competence, and self-worth.[23]

- **Identify editors and publishers who write picture books from an anti-bias stance.** Children's book editor Laura Atkins argued that books are shaped by editors' preferences, the culture of publishers, and targeted readers.[24] From a broader standpoint, publishers should try to hire diverse editors for increased representation of identities in the picture books.

- **Purchase and encourage selection of picture books that represent intersectionality.** The library should buy current books that embody intersectionality, which reflects human characteristics that are evolving. Additionally, librarians should promote and provide accessibility of the newly acquired book collection to everyone and especially to the instructors who train teacher candidates to use as educational tools.

Conclusion

Picture books are an excellent vehicle for discussing complex topics with children in relatable and approachable ways. These stories can provide both mirrors and windows to topics related to identity and family and incorporate a nuanced view of intersectionality within a seemingly limited space.

While our analysis shows the prevalence of intersectional themes in children's books, intersectional titles can still be challenging for teachers and librarians to locate and share. Even when librarians and teachers have access to these texts, some may not share them with children and families for fear of repercussions.

There can be challenges in locating these stories. For instance, many picture books may focus on only one particular aspect of character identities, and publisher summaries or catalog records may leave out details not relevant to the main plot. As a result, it is especially essential for teachers and librarians to seek out a wide range of diverse literature related to families and familiarize themselves with it. Educators should ultimately "consider what literature is available, which identities are being portrayed or excluded, and what explicit and implicit messages are conveyed."[25]

It is not enough to simply locate diverse books; their quality should also be considered, so that children receive a message that is both accurate and respectful of the complex and diverse identities in today's families. &

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Where the Wild Things Are

Children's Book Creators Team Up for Conservation Work with Wild Tomorrow

SHARON VERBETEN

CBCC authors on their trip to South Africa get up close and personal with rhinos.
Photos courtesy of Hayley and John Rocco.

Plenty of children's book authors write about wild things. This past fall, a group of children's book authors and illustrators put their words into work—taking a collective trek to South Africa, with a purpose.

The newly formed Children's Book Creators for Conservation (CBCC) spent two weeks on a volunteer trip in South Africa with Wild Tomorrow, a nonprofit focused on reconnecting and restoring habitat for threatened wildlife in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The CBCC was created by Caldecott Honor-winning author/illustrator John Rocco and his wife, children's book author Hayley Rocco. It aims to bring passionate and conservation-minded children's book creators together to collaborate in hands-on conservation work while inspiring conservation-minded books for young readers for the greater good of the planet. In addition to the Roccos, the group included Candace Fleming, Meg Fleming, Brian Floca, Jessica Lanan, G. Neri, Sherri Duskey Rinker, Eric Rohmann, and Corban Wilkin.

The authors on the trip were scheduled to participate in ringing birds for research, searching alongside rangers for poachers' snares, volunteering at the local orphanage and creche (preschool), removing alien and invasive plant species from reclaimed land, and rhino conservation work such as dehorning/trimming and assisting at the local rhino orphanage.

The CBCC hopes to raise $20,000 towards the conservation efforts being made with Wild Tomorrow.

"We are extremely excited that CBCC's esteemed group of children's book creators will spend time working hands-on helping conservation efforts at Wild Tomorrow's Greater Ukuwela Nature Reserve and at our partner reserves in South Africa. Often, we hear it said that animals can't speak and need our voice. Wildlife and their wild spaces need our creative talents too, to move hearts and minds to take action to save our planet," said Wild Tomorrow's founder and executive director, John Steward. &

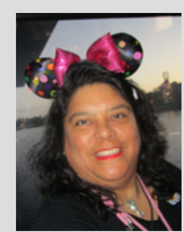
For more information, visit www.wildtomorrow.org/cbccdonate.

***Sharon Verbeten** is Youth Services Manager at the Manitowoc (WI) Public Library; this is her twenty-first year as editor of* Children and Libraries.

Speaking of Pronouns

An Interview with Author/ Advocate Maya Christina Gonzalez

Ana-Elba Pavon



*A Spanish services specialist for over 30 years, **Ana-Elba Pavon** is enjoying retirement from Oakland Public Library.*

Author and illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez is known for her award-winning bilingual (English/Spanish) books such as *My Colors, My World* and *I Know the River Loves Me*. But this progressive educator and independent scholar/researcher has also delved into the world of pronouns.

Call Me Tree was written without any gender identifying pronouns, and she has since written substantially on the topic as well as writing and illustrating three children's books on the topic, including *They She He Me: Free to Be!, The Gender Wheel*, and *They, She, He Easy as ABC*. I asked Gonzalez to share about the importance of pronouns.

You wrote *Call Me Tree/Llamame Arbol* without gender identifying pronouns. What has been the readers' response?

I notice a growing trend toward acceptance that has recently been battered with fear. In 2014, when *Call Me Tree* was first published, the gender conversation was just tickling the edges of the public sphere. Parents, educators, and librarians were looking for gender expansive materials. *Call Me Tree* was there. But I had to point it out.

I asked my readers to specifically address gender assumptions after a review unnecessarily and incorrectly used pronouns to gender the main character. I slowed things down a bit, past the assumptions and the be-yourself framework and toward aligning with the strength and diversity of nature and what the bigger implications of that were regarding gender.

Since then, the gender conversation has exploded. Addressing gender assumptions has forced us to look at bigger issues beyond pronouns like our humanity, what we've been taught, and what we believe. This has created necessary movement and a great deal of turmoil.

We're crashing up against the power structures that hold us in place and force us to limit and divide ourselves. Amidst so much division, confusion, and reevaluation, we need something that reminds us of our unity.

Call Me Tree moves us beyond social constructs. It shows humans as an intrinsic part of nature. When we include the presence and necessity of body, gender, and relationship diversity throughout all realms of nature, we will have a profound shift in our mindset.

It will become easier and easier to understand that *he* and *she* can't hold us when we see ourselves within the greater flow of all life. *Call Me Tree*º was a seed. We're still growing. Only time will tell how high we'll reach, but it's hard to grow in fear.

You and Matthew SG have created Reflection Press. You use a nature-based, decolonized, holistic gender mode in your teachings that has grown into your Pronoun Protocol. Tell us about your upcoming book.

The Pronoun Protocol includes twelve agreements to create a gender-inclusive

environment while addressing your own assumptions. In the book, we will drop into each one, how some of the agreements function in the world plus anecdotes from parenting with *The Pronoun Protocol* in real life.

Maya Christina Gonzalez and Matthew SG

The first three agreements establish how to remove assumptions and reclaim fluidity. The next four give inclusive ways of speaking while respecting privacy and safety. The last five work to create systemic change.

Engaging any of the agreements is valuable and makes a difference. Some are as simple as always using gender-inclusive words like people and parents. Others take more consideration like, unless it is a confirmed safe space, don't ask someone's gender or pronoun—it is theirs to tell or not when ready. This means navigating notions of safety for gender nonconforming kids and learning how to use people's names or a formal pronoun for everyone equally without differentiation.

The Pronoun Protocol doesn't stand alone. It rises from the Gender Wheel Approach, a multidisciplinary foundation that includes nature, history, society, and more that we can teach kids. This gives strength and purpose to the protocol so everyone can relax into their own understanding and see for themself how everything's connected.

I think a lot of times, people want to be respectful and gender inclusive but are afraid to say or do the wrong thing. Having a framework that provides the larger context of gender helps make sense of why gender expansion is important and what you can do about it. It becomes less about knowing what the right thing to do is based on an ever-changing society in struggle and more about your own awareness and commitment to changing the big picture of gender oppression.

Most people reading this work with children. What advice can you offer for conducting all-gender welcoming storytimes and class visits?

Librarians have the power to create safe spaces that open minds. The most fundamental agreement of *The Pronoun Protocol* is seeing people as people first without gender assumptions. When you dive into this agreement, you set the stage for everything else to fall into place.

If you come in without assumptions about who kids should be and how they should act based on their sex assignment at birth then you have done some of the most important work there is and the pronouns and other language will make sense and be easier to implement.

But gender assumptions run deep. You may not even know that you have them, but all of us do. Become aware. I explored how to uncover assumptions recently, using the children's book I illustrated, *I Can Be . . . Me!* written by Lesléa Newman. Ask yourself if a child is assigned male how should they dress? How should they act? How should they be treated? What books should they like? Again, with female? Challenge yourself to release these assumptions and just let kids be kids. &

Find more tips and resources at www.genderwheel.com.

Challenges Are Escalating

How to Prepare for Program Challenges

Lisa Bintrim

Lisa Bintrim *is the head of children's services at the Potomac branch for Montgomery County (MD) Public Libraries. She is a member of ALSC's School-Age Programs and Services Committee.*

Book bans have garnered national attention this past year with a surge of challenges in both school and public libraries. But books aren't the only front in the so-called culture wars. Library staff increasingly need to respond to challenges to programming, as well.

The number of program challenges reported to ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) has grown over the past ten years from one or none each year to a peak of sixty-nine challenges in 2019. And these are just the instances that have been reported to the OIF. Most challenges go unreported.[1]

Programs related to LGBTQ+ themes are the most likely to be challenged. Of the forty-two reported challenges in 2022, 81 percent were in response to LGBTQ+ events.[2]

I had some first-hand experience when the library branch where I worked at the time held a Drag Story Hour.[3] After a local news station reported on the upcoming event, several groups spoke out against it and community members received phone calls encouraging them to join planned protests. Fortunately, the local community was overwhelmingly in favor of the program; the opposition mostly came from outside the community, and we had at least four times as many people come out to demonstrate in support of the program as we had people demonstrating against it.

Many other libraries are not so fortunate. Protestors may harass children and families, attempt to prevent or disrupt programs, and threaten library staff members.

As with challenges to materials, library staff need to be prepared to respond to challenges to programs. For its 2022–23 term, ALSC's School-Age Programs and Services (SAPS) committee was charged with creating a toolkit to help libraries prepare for and respond to program challenges.

Books vs. Programs

Challenges to programs have a lot in common with challenges to books and other materials. The hot-button issues are often the same—gender, sexuality, race, and religion. And would-be censors may use the same arguments; they want to "protect" children from inappropriate content, reinforce the "moral standards" of the community, and ensure that public funds are being used "appropriately."

Challenges to programs, however, can have some important differences. Challenges to programs are more likely to threaten the physical safety of participants, library staff, and presenters. Although some current book banning efforts have elevated the vitriol to include threatening library staff, challenges to programs more frequently put families, staff, and presenters directly in contact with protestors.

Libraries are often less prepared to respond to challenges to programs. While almost all libraries have a collection development policy, including a procedure

for handling challenges, many do not have a written program policy, official procedures for challenges, or training for staff.

The toolkit developed by the SAPS committee is designed to address these needs by identifying specific steps that library staff can take before, during, and after a program challenge, as well as by providing templates for creating your own program policies and procedures.

Before the Challenge

The adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is never truer than with program planning. As a children's librarian, I put a lot of work into planning my programs. I think about the purpose, the logistics, and the appeal factor for any programs that I provide. And because I work with children, I also think about what could go wrong. *Are there any safety concerns? How big of a mess will this create? What is my backup plan if the presenter is late or doesn't show up at all?*

The toolkit identifies additional areas to consider when planning a program that could attract negative attention. For example, you may want to strictly enforce age requirements, limit or prohibit photography and recording devices, or work with community groups to create a "safe passage" corridor for participants and performers. You may also want to conduct additional training for frontline staff on how to respond to hostile customers, protestors, and the media.

Clear, consistent communication is perhaps the most important preventative measure. By involving internal and external partners early on—including library leadership and staff, board members, security personnel, and community partners—you can establish much-needed support while putting a damper on misinformation campaigns.

To help library staff with the planning process, we've included templates for a library program policy and a program proposal form that you can adapt to your situation.

During the Challenge

When a program challenge does arise, we emphasize de-escalation, documentation, and communication. Although most library staff members probably already know that you can't outshout an angry customer, we all can get agitated in the moment.

The toolkit can serve as a sort of flight safety card by reminding staff of best practices for de-escalating a situation without caving to the protestors' demands. As with the planning process, the toolkit includes templates and samples for public comment forms, complaint tracking, and response letters that you can adapt to your library's needs.

One area the toolkit addresses—one I hadn't given any thought to before being on the SAPS committee—is the impact of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) rules on communications among library staff members. Depending on the FOIA rules in your state, your planning documents, emails, and even private text messages with coworkers could be subject to public scrutiny, which makes it essential for all library staff to adhere to best practices in documentation and communication.

We, of course, always prioritize the safety of library staff members and program participants, so the toolkit also offers ideas for how to continue serving your community in the event that you do have to cancel a planned program.

After the Challenge

Regardless of whether you had a smashing success, were forced to cancel the program, or experienced something in the middle, we recommend taking time to regroup and assess. *What worked well, and what needed improvement? Do you need to revisit and revise any of your policies, procedures, or communications tools? Where do you go from here?*

Two crucial to-do items after a program challenge—check on the library staff's well-being and thank key supporters. After a difficult program, it can be tempting to put it in the rearview mirror and move forward. But be mindful that staff members may have ongoing feelings of trauma as a result of the program challenge, especially if they are members of a minoritized group targeted by the protestors.

In developing this toolkit, we were fortunate to have many terrific resources to inform our work. ALA, ALSC, and other professional organizations, as well as individual libraries and community groups, have created toolkits, guidelines, and templates for challenges to materials and for specific programs (particularly Drag Story Hour) that we drew on and adapted for this toolkit. On behalf of the committee, thanks to all who have generously shared their experience and knowledge. &

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New Sendak Book Set for 2024 Release

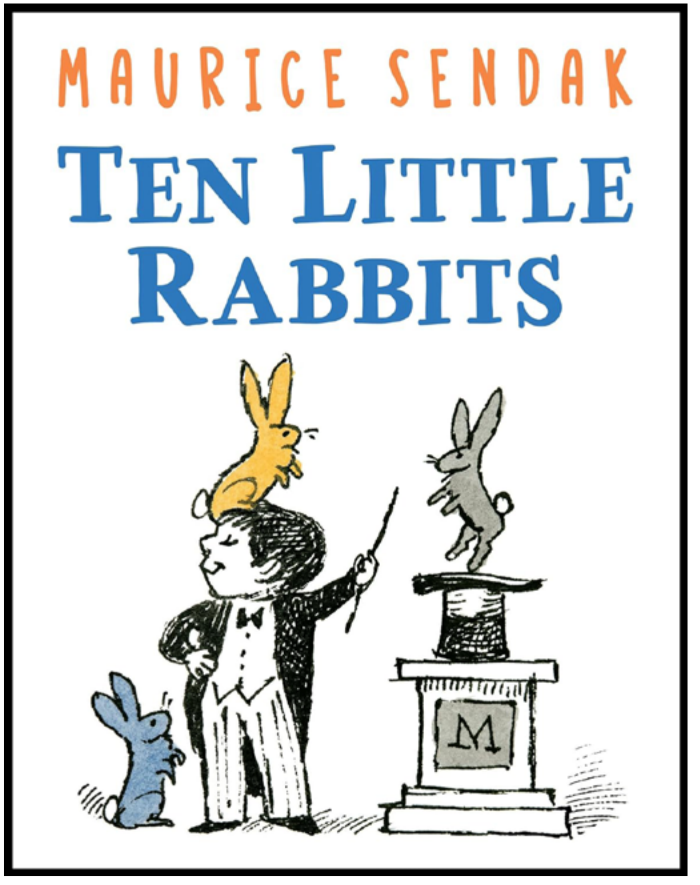
By Sharon Verbeten

Among my many surprises and joys coming out of the ALA Annual Conference in June was my learning that a previously unpublished picture book by my idol/icon/favorite author Maurice Sendak is production stages. *Ten Little Rabbits* will be released by HarperCollins on February 6, 2024. Rights were acquired from the Maurice Sendak Foundation.

The story introduces young magician, Mino, whose act involves a wand, a magic hat, and a parade of ornery rabbits. Illustrations have a similar style to Sendak's earlier works, such as the *Nutshell Library*.

Ten Little Rabbits was originally created in 1970 as a small paperbound pamphlet for a fundraiser for Philadelphia's Rosenbach Museum. The new book will be published in a 7-by-9-inch format.

This November marks the sixtieth anniversary of Sendak's Caldecott Award-winning *Where the Wild Things Are*, originally published November 23, 1963. &



Sharon Verbeten *is Youth Services Manager at the Manitowoc (WI) Public Library; this is her twenty-first year as editor of* Children and Libraries.

Got a great, lighthearted essay? A funny story about children and libraries? Books and babies? Pets and picture books? A not-so-serious look at the world of children's librarianship? Send your Last Word to Sharon Verbeten at childrenandlibraries@gmail.com.

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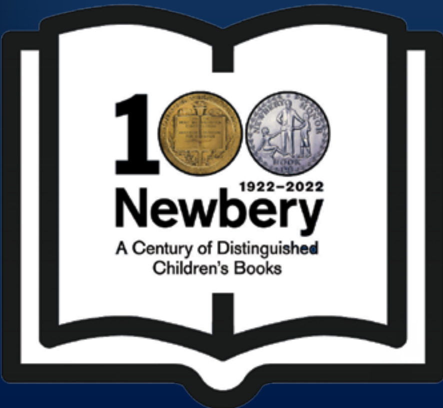

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