

Book Review

Michael Fernandez, editor

Curating Community Collections: A Holistic Approach to Diverse Collection

Development. By Mary Schreiber and Wendy K. Bartlett. New York: Bloomsbury Libraries Unlimited, 2024. 328p. \$60.95 softcover (ISBN 978-1-4408-8098-8); \$54.85 ebook (ISBN 978-1-4408-8099-5).

In today's libraries, the focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is more than a goal; it is an essential practice for building collections that truly reflect the communities they serve. *Curating Community Collections: A Holistic Approach to Diverse Collection Development* provides a timely and comprehensive guide for librarians and staff, regardless of their experience level. This book reinforces the idea that libraries and their collections can drive significant social justice initiatives while also offering practical tools and insights for librarians ready to embrace this important role. If you do not already see your library as a force for social change or as DEI advocates, this book will certainly make you reconsider. As Schreiber and Bartlett assert, "We believe libraries are uniquely positioned to effect real change in contemporary society" (18).

The book is divided into three parts, methodically encouraging a holistic approach to creating a comprehensive framework for overhauling current methods of integrating DEI into library collections—a framework born from the authors' frustration with traditional approaches that have repeatedly fallen short. Both emphasize early on that their frustration with current DEI practices "was not a collection problem" (8), but a cultural one that demands both an overhaul and broader dissemination.

In part 1, "First Steps," the authors set the stage by examining the deep-rooted history of privilege and exclusion in libraries, highlighting the ongoing efforts to challenge these systemic issues. The authors want readers to understand how libraries have historically been a powerful entity in perpetuating societal biases. In doing so, we are encouraged to reflect on and dismantle these long-standing biases. In chapter 2, "The Role of the Diversity Audit," the reflection continues by addressing these biases with a practical guide, cautioning that while diversity audits provide essential data, they have their limitations and should be seen as a starting point, not an end in and of themselves. Despite being part of a well-resourced, forward-thinking library system, both authors found that diversity audits often offered only superficial solutions. Building on this, chapter 3, "Selecting a Diverse Collection," stresses the importance of prioritizing quality over quantity when diversifying collections, with a deliberate focus on community authenticity explored through cultural humility. For any reader interested in weeding collections, chapter 4, "Weeding a Diverse Collection," provides best practices, which can be particularly challenging when considering diverse perspectives within the community and library administration. However, it is somewhat generic in its approach, and while the authors acknowledge that it may create friction, the reader would benefit from additional cautionary guidance on navigating these potential pitfalls. Guidance such as providing stories from others who have faced similar challenges and how they overcame them, demonstrating that attempts may not be successful the first time—and why that is okay. Overall, the first part sets the tone that DEI is a cultural demand and raises important questions: Are

diversity audits having an actual impact? What do these actions mean to you or the community? Does the focus remain on numbers and statistics, or is there a deeper strategy at play?

The next part of this book transitions into a more community-driven, engagement-centered initiative with the title, “Community Collection Approach,” where the authors connect their holistic internal assessments and strategies with the practical implementation of DEI principles through collaborative efforts both within and beyond the library. Part 2 is ideal for readers looking to expand their expertise and efforts through partnerships, while also reflecting on whether current initiatives might be hindering community connections. The goal is to better align with communities’ needs and expectations and to strengthen engagement with overlooked users of the library. Chapter 5, “Community Collections Curation,” goes into the topic of floating collections. The authors first define what a floating collection is and briefly explain how it came to be, but then ask the question if floating collections can inadvertently favor more privileged communities. Chapter 6, “Satellite Community Collections,” is more relevant to larger institutions, well-funded public libraries, or those with strong community partnerships, as these efforts require significant resources and commitment that may not be feasible for all libraries. “Connecting with the Community,” the following chapter, provides valuable insights on how libraries can proactively engage with their communities, better understand their needs, and ensure their collections and services reflect these needs. This chapter may be particularly useful for those looking to justify evaluation of a traditional policy or collection and to develop a strategic plan. Chapter 8, “Sharing Your Success: Community Collections and Stakeholders,” concludes that transparency and communication with stakeholders are important in community collections. It provides a roadmap for translating diversity audit findings into tangible progress, emphasizing that DEI is an ongoing commitment that requires continuous evaluation, adjustment, and support.

The third and final part, “Considerations Beyond Collection Development,” recognizes that the success of DEI efforts depends not only on external community engagement but also on the commitment and capacity of library staff and leadership. Chapters 9 and 10 delve into the complexities of diversifying collections, underscoring that DEI work is not just a task but a fundamental shift in how the library operates. Chapter 9, “Helping Staff Be Successful,” offers valuable guidance for managers and leaders who are responsible for navigating their teams through the often challenging process of implementing DEI principles. While chapter 10, “Defending Our Communities’ Right to Read,” emphasizes strong collection development policies and solidarity among librarians, it also touches on the real-world challenges librarians face, such as dealing with virtual attacks related to banned books. The stories are only a glimpse into these challenges, so the reader should not expect a step-by-step approach. Instead, readers will gain practical insights, recognizing that handling such issues often requires tailored, situation-specific strategies and ongoing support from others. This underscores the need for ongoing vigilance and flexibility in DEI efforts, as introducing a more holistic approach can sometimes be met with resistance or dismissive responses when traditional methods are questioned.

Overall, *Curating Community Collections* is a starting point for librarians who want to integrate DEI principles into their collections but who may be stuck or unsure of where to begin. The book combines a

solid theoretical framework with practical and strategic steps, encouraging readers toward meaningful change through a well-rounded approach that emphasizes community input, clear DEI objectives for positive impact, and an understanding of the cultural and historical contexts relevant to social justice. There is practical advice and real-world examples at the end of each chapter titled “Perspectives from the Field” and “CCC Toolbox,” offering real-world insights from librarians across various backgrounds—public, school, academic, and special libraries—and additional readings. While the book may not address every possible scenario, it highlights the most critical aspects of DEI work and provides practical tools that can be immediately applied.—*Michelle Navarro (msnavarro@copp.edu), California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, California*