Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Through Literacy

Using the Resources Guide

Audience: Administrators, Coaches/Teacher Leaders, Classroom Practitioners

Description: This guide provides materials and resources to ensure that a diverse and equitable educational experience is provided to all students. The Start Here Guide allows a variety of paths to support teachers with the resources that are listed. The following are optional suggestions where leaders and teachers may select a few options but all are highly encouraged.

Option One: Provide and adopt a common definition that promotes clarity of the term diversity and is prominently displayed in public areas so that anyone who sees the definition understands the position that is held by the classroom, school or district. The NEA statement provided is a widely accepted stance by educators. View the YouTube video regarding *ILA Classroom Libraries as Windows and Mirrors: Ensuring Diverse, Representative Books for Our Students*. Some questions that can be asked of staff include:

- What three take-aways can you connect with regarding your literacy instruction?
- What does windows/mirrors mean to you after hearing this panel discussion?
- What books do you have in your library that could be a teachable moment? (i.e., *The Five Chinese Brothers, June Bug*).
- What are your next steps in diversifying your classroom literature? (i.e., creating parent allies, asking students to assist with diversifying library materials)

Option Two: Provide the International Literacy Association Literacy Brief: *Expanding the Canon: How Diverse Literature Can Transform Literacy Learning*. Discuss what classics are shared in the classroom that might have a current representation, that when paired, can offer an opportunity for students to compare and contrast.

Option Three: Begin your year or a school improvement day by asking teachers to come prepared with their thoughts and answers to the Common Beliefs Survey. This survey is about 10 questions long and while not all questions have to be answered, it is encouraged to do so. Discussing a few at a time at meetings all year can promote open discourse among staff. Whomever may lead that discussion can utilize the Common Beliefs Descriptors. This discussion can facilitate educational opportunities that may be missed otherwise.

Option Four: Audit the literature materials that are provided throughout your school.   The understanding is not to engage in a censorship of literature but to engage in what represents the current population of students.

- Classroom teachers can utilize the Diversifying the Classroom Library Checklist. Students and parents can assist with the audit but remember that the questionnaire is NOT a test. If the questionnaire answers reveal large gaps in inclusivity, view it as an opportunity, not a failure; now there is a roadmap to find the new titles. Once the strengths and (most importantly) the gaps have been located in collections, be strategic with the book budget and acquire books that capture students' experiences or shows them the broader world beyond their communities.

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- Aim for diversity within diversity. For example, if there are many books in a library about Latinos, but are only about immigration or holidays, consider adding titles that explore the range and diversity of experiences, voices, and perspectives within a culture and group.
- Remember that diversity goes far beyond racial representation: it can include language diversity, LGBTQ representation, geographic diversity, family structures and configuration, and much more.

Option Five: Ensure that a systemwide glossary of terms is available to staff and students. The Washington University in St. Louis has supported this endeavor.

Option Six: Consider materials, such as advertisements, that showcase stereotypes. Provide the time for educators to have the conversation about why the materials are stereotypical (i.e., athletes may only be shown as men, specific body types are showcased to represent women). Consider a definition for stereotypes and consider how that might be infused into classroom discussion. Audit classroom and school libraries for common stereotypes and use the texts to engage in conversations with staff and students as to why the texts are considered stereotypes. If there is a curriculum staple or personal favorites, please keep using it. However, consider ways to add a "read alike" that makes it more contemporary or relevant to students. We Need Diverse Books has a wonderful read alike collection of blockbuster titles and classics paired with award-winning diverse titles.

Option Seven: Explore the concept of mirrors, windows, and doors for students in the classroom/building/district by reading the blog post: *Windows and Mirrors and Sliding Glass Doors: Ensuring Students See Themselves and Others in Literature*. A mirror would be what students see as a reflection of themselves. A window gives readers a glimpse into the lives and experiences of others and doors allow readers to experience what others do. After students complete the Windows and Mirror Task, ask them to complete a survey about their home life. For example, while many families select that they are an English-speaking household, their grandparents may only speak to them in Italian or Polish. These students have cultural knowledge that is underrepresented in many classrooms. Armed with the survey results, turn to classroom/school/district demographic results to populate library materials with quality literature based on those results. Be careful to include a wide variety of poetry and other genre that not only represents cultural backgrounds but also socioeconomic.

Option Eight: Consider and discuss how teachers will plan for inclusion and diversity. It is critical that this endeavor become a natural part of instruction and not another check on the list of things that teachers do. Supporting teachers with already created lessons from reputable groups or developing a repository of lessons that already coincides with the curriculum is a far more effective practice then asking to just include more diverse literature. Using Teaching Tolerance's Learning Plan Builder can alleviate some of the pressure. Posting the materials to a shared drive for use by all is another consideration.

Option Nine: Review the Universal Design Learning Framework and determine if already created units have some of the inclusive elements. Not all units will have every element but are more based upon the students that will be learning from the unit at that time. Videos are available and there is considerable learning needed by professionals to ensure appropriate capacity is built.

Options have been created with the assistance of the following sites:

- CAST and Universal Design Learning: http://udlguidelines.cast.org/?utm_medium=web&utm_campagin=none&utm_source=cast-home
- Center for the Collaborative Classroom: https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/blog/how-to-actually-implement-more-diverse-libraries-at-your-school/
- International Literacy Association: https://www.literacyworldwide.org
- Lee and Low Publishing: https://blog.leeandlow.com/2019/01/08/how-to-build-a-more-diverse-classroom-library/
- Teaching Tolerance: https://www.tolerance.org/
- We Need Diverse Books: https://www.diversebooks.org