Rachael Elrod and Brittany Kester

Diverse BookFinder

BIPOC collection development for children's and young adult collections

The Education Library at the University of Florida (UF) supports the teaching, research, and learning needs of the College of Education (COE), including early childhood education, elementary education, English education, ESOL/bilingual education, and reading and literacy education programs.

As a support to preservice teachers, students, and researchers, the Education Library has a robust children's and young adult (YA) collection. This collection consists of approximately 13,000 titles appropriate for preK–12th grade. It also supports several children's and YA literature courses that require reading a wide variety of titles, including those focusing on diverse subject matters.

Feedback from students in these courses suggested an increase in the number of books about diversity and/or featuring Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). In addition, a three-year patron survey asked participants the question "What would make the Education Library better?" The responses showed a desire for an increase in the number of recently published children's books.

In the past, yearly purchases for this collection focused on purchasing award-winning and honored children's and YA books. Based on these patron comments and following a collection inventory, we decided to make research tools and strategies available to assess the collection in terms of diversity of main characters and subject matter. This goal fits with both the UF Libraries' Strategic Directions as well as the COE's Mission Statement.

The UF Libraries' Strategic Directions, recently revised, include an increased emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) that states, in part, that the libraries "will foster and maintain a culture that supports diversity, equity and inclusion, as values which are foundational and permeate all aspects of our organization."

Two other goals within that Strategic Direction tie in with the purchase of diverse children's literature: "Ensure that the Libraries are a safe, supportive, and welcoming learning environment for all of our users and potential users" and "engage diverse, underrepresented and underserved populations within the University and our local communities to support learning and the transfer and curation of knowledge."[1] COE's mission statement states a desire "to collaborate with others to solve critical educational and human problems in a diverse global community."[2]

As early as 1965, librarians and others with a vested interest in children's and YA literature lamented its lack of diversity.[3] In ensuing years, numerous book awards have been created to recognize the outstanding work of authors and illustrators that depict a wide variety of multicultural characters and issues. For

Rachael Elrod is director of the Education Library, email: relrod@ufl.edu, and Brittany Kester is education librarian, email: brittany.kester@ufl.edu, at the University of Florida

example, in 1969, the Coretta Scott King Book Awards were founded. The Coretta Scott King Award is given annually to African American authors and illustrators of children's and YA books that portray "an appreciation of African American culture and universal human values."[4] However, in 2002, only 5% of children's books published primarily in the United States had a Black main character. By 2018 this had increased to 11%.[5]

While these statistics show some improvement, a 2018 article in School Library Journal pointed out that books with diverse content are still hard to find, especially books that feature characters with disabilities, Native or Indigenous main characters, and characters who are English Language Learners.[6]

In light of the mission and values of the UF Libraries and COE, requests from students, along with documented and anecdotal knowledge about the lack of diversity in children's and YA literature, we wanted to take a step towards promoting more diverse titles in our children's and YA collection. We set out to examine our collection to see if we could improve representations in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, bilingualism, immigrant and refugee stories, and internationally published books for children and YA.

We started analyzing our collection by conducting a catalog search with natural language terms related to race and ethnicity. For example, a catalog search filtered to the Education Library's Children's and YA Collection and narrowed to the subject heading of "African American" resulted in 450 books or roughly 4% of the collection. Searches for other racial and ethnic demographics yielded similar or fewer results. Yet this only told us who was represented in these books, not how they were represented.

In addition, we searched for online resources that could help us increase the diversity of our collection. We located three useful resources: The Diverse BookFinder (DBF),[7] the Diverse Families Bookshelf,[8] and the Database of Award-Winning Children's Literature (DAWCL).[9] While we had planned to analyze our collection in broader terms of diversity, we transitioned to a focus on BIPOC representation based on the fact that the DBF focuses on BIPOC characters and was the only resource that provided an analysis tool of the diverse representation in children's literature.

Diverse BookFinder

DBF was designed by researchers at Bates College as part of an IMLS-funded grant. DBF consists of a searchable database of picture books published since 2002 featuring BIPOC characters. It also includes a Collection Analysis Tool (CAT) that provides data on not only *who* is depicted in these books but *how.*

The DBF collection allows users to search for picture books and filter results using several broad facets: race/culture, tribal affiliation/homelands, ethnicity, immigration, gender, awards, religion, settings, content, and genre. One facet simply called "Categories" provides information that describes the "dominant messages conveyed" within the books, the how.[10] These categories include:

1. Any Child: Books in which a BIPOC main character is set in an everyday setting but their racial or cultural membership is not central to the plot.

2. Beautiful Life: Books in which a BIPOC main character explicitly focuses on specific cultural components and are central to the plot.

3. Biography: Nonfiction books about a person or group.

4. Cross Group: Books portraying "relationships between named characters across racial or cultural differences."

5. Folklore: Books featuring the folklore of a particular group of people.

6. Incidental: Books where BIPOC characters are nonprimary, secondary, or background characters.

7. Informational: Nonfiction featuring BIPOC characters, but in which race or culture is not always central to the content.

8. Oppression & Resilience: Books with BIPOC characters who experience injustice and/or struggle for justice.

9. Race/Culture Concepts: Books that "explore and/or compare specific aspects of human difference."[10]

Collection Analysis Tool (CAT)

CAT provides users with information to develop a deeper understanding of their collection in terms of how BIPOC char-

that match the DBF's collection. The DBF collection includes books that meet these criteria: English/English-bilingual or -multilingual, published or distributed in the United States since 2002, suitable for grades K–3, physical books, and both fiction and nonfiction.[11]

Results

In our initial report, conducted in January 2020, we uploaded an XLSX file of 10,358 ISBNs of our children's and YA collection to CAT, which included two columns, one for ISBNs and the other for titles. While

	Asian / Pacific Islander / Asian American	Bi / Multiracial / Mixed Race	Black / African / African American	Brown-Skinned and / or Race Unclear	Latinx / Hispanic / Latin American	First / Native Nations / American Indian / Indigenous	Middle Eastern / North African / Arab	Multi-Racial Cast of Characters	Totals
Any Child	4	6	11	14	6	0	0	6	47
Beautiful Life	7	4	11	1	31	10	1	2	67
Biography	5	3	29	1	14	3	1	1	57
Cross Group	4	2	18	4	3	3	1	0	35
Folklore	2	0	2	1	1	1	3	0	10
Incidental	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	5	8
Informational	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Oppression & Resilience	0	2	32	3	2	4	2	1	46
Race / Culture Concepts	1	2	5	1	4	1	1	3	18
Totals	24	19	109	26	62	22	9	19	290

Results from Diverse BookFinder (January 23, 2020).

acters are depicted in the stories, based on the nine categories above. CAT takes ISBNs from the DBF collection, compares them to the ISBNs in a submitted file, and generates category information about the titles in common. It also provides a snapshot of who is represented in the collection and their connection with the categories. This allows the submitter to identify gaps in their collection related to the representation of BIPOC characters in their picture books.

To run a CAT report, the submitter will first need to create an XLSX, CSV, or ODS file with a listing of ISBNs and titles in the collection to be analyzed. CAT looks at both the ISBN 10 and ISBN 13 numbers. CAT will only provide feedback on books

we have about 13,000 books in our collection, only 10,358 had an ISBN associated with them. Of those, CAT recognized 6,230 items, with 186 duplicates that could be analyzed.

While not comprehensive, the report provided us with information on ways we could improve our collection. For example, of the 186 titles analyzed, there were significant gaps in the collection and an increased awareness that a majority of the books were stories at the intersection of African American characters and the dominant message of oppression/resilience. This was the largest crosstab, "Black/African/African American" and "Oppression & Resilience" with 32 books as shown in the table above.

The CAT report showed that the Education Library's largest category was "Beautiful Life," and the smallest was "Informational." The largest race/culture category in our collection was "Black/African/African American," and the smallest was "Middle Eastern/North African/Arab." Sixteen crosstabs had zero books, and 19 had just one book represented.

These results prompted the immediate purchase in February 2020 of 95 picture books to start to fill in these gaps. We used the categories and searched the DBF collection to locate titles to purchase. In a few instances, DBF was unable to provide a book selection that we did not already own; therefore, we conducted a search of picture books outside of the DBF.

After adding the 95 picture books to our collection, we ran a second report to compare to our initial report. At this point we realized that the first report was missing hundreds of IBSNs, since it had dropped the leading zero in the ISBN. None of these books were included in the generated results report from CAT. This explains the difference in the number of books that we originally submitted (10,358) and the number CAT recognized

(6,230). We generated a new report of our existing collection using a CSV file to avoid this issue. This new CAT report recognized 248 duplicate results. We then added the 95 new books, and the CAT report recognized 322 duplicate results as shown in the table below.

Discussion

These CAT results prompted an increase in the diversity of our collection in terms of several categories and a renewed focus on purchasing stories that reflect the lives of BIPOC. Even though we were unable to get a full snapshot of the diversity of our collection, we were able to increase the number of contemporary BIPOC children's picture books in our collection.

DBF does have some pros and cons. The main pro is CAT and the ability to quickly see gaps in a collection in terms of how BIPOC characters are represented. In addition, the DBF collection is searchable by several categories, including race, ethnicity, immigration, tribal affiliation/homelands, gender, awards, religion, settings, content (activism, bi/multilingual, disability, diverse family, economic struggle, LGBQ, STEM, and skin tone and color), and genre.

	Asian / Pacific Islander / Asian American	Bi / Multiracial / Mixed Race	Black / African / African American	Brown-Skinned and / or Race Unclear	Latinx / Hispanic / Latin American	First / Native Nations / American Indian / Indigenous	Middle Eastern / North African / Arab	Multi-Racial Cast of Characters	Totals
Any Child	5	9	18	15	6	3	3	6	65
Beautiful Life	16	7	17	5	42	15	8	6	116
Biography	8	7	46	4	22	4	5	3	99
Cross Group	10	6	25	10	8	3	5	1	68
Folklore	4	1	6	4	4	3	4	0	26
Incidental	3	3	4	5	3	0	1	7	26
Informational	3	3	5	3	3	3	3	4	27
Oppression & Resilience	5	5	49	6	4	4	5	2	80
Race / Culture Concepts	5	4	9	3	5	3	2	6	37
Totals	59	45	179	55	97	38	36	35	544

Results from Diverse BookFinder (June 26, 2020).

However, the CAT results do not provide a complete snapshot, as it can only compare the matching titles in one library's collection and the DBF collection. The DBF collection currently includes 3,210 titles.

Another limitation is that the CAT results do not provide a list of the titles that are included in the analysis. It also does not provide information on the intersection of race and the other categories in its metadata.

As of summer 2020, DBF continues to add newly published picture books to their collection with a continued focus on picture books published since 2002. The addition of older titles, middle grade, and YA books would increase the accuracy of a comprehensive collection analysis using the CAT.

Conclusion

The UF Education Librarians used the CAT results to create a list of 95 diverse picture books to purchase. This is just the beginning of what is hopefully an ongoing and purposeful collection-building strategy.

While DBF and CAT provided a means to diversify our collection in terms of race and ethnicity, we are hoping to conduct a second phase of review focusing on gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, and other diverse aspects for inclusion in the collection.

It is also our hope that DBF will expand to include middle grades and YA books to its collection and analysis tool with the possibility of training volunteers to conduct a controlled crowdsourcing movement. We would also like to see an expansion of the CAT report to include more detailed results, such as a list of the duplicate titles used in the analysis and the intersection of all of the DBF categories for a deeper understanding of the diversity in children's and YA literature.

Notes

1. University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, "Strategic Directions," http://library.ufl.edu/pers/documents /Strategicdirections2018web.pdf.

2. University of Florida College of Education, "Mission Statement," https:// education.ufl.edu/mission-history/.

3. Nancy Larrick, "The All-White World of Children's Books," *The Saturday Review,* (Sept. 11, 1965): 63-65, https://tinyurl.com /yxjd4r6b.

4. The Coretta Scott King Book Awards, http://www.ala.org/rt/emiert /cskbookawards.

5. Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, "Publishing Statistics on Children's/YA Books about People of Color and First/Native Nations and by People of Color and First/Native Nations Authors and Illustrator," (2019), http:// ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats. asp, "Data on books by and about people of color and from First/Native Nations published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison."

6. Kathy Ishizuka, "Can Diverse Books Save Us? In a Divided World, Librarians are on a Mission," https://www.slj. com/?detailStory=can-diverse-books-save-us.

7. Diverse BookFinder, https:// diversebookfinder.org/.

8. Diverse Family Bookshelf, https:// diversefamilies.org/.

9. Database of Award-Winning Children's Literature, http://www.dawcl. com.

10. Diverse BookFinder, "Learn How We Categorize Multicultural Picture Books," https://diversebookfinder.org /our-categories/#book-categories.

11. Diverse BookFinder, "Collection Analysis Tool: CAT," https:// cat.diversebookfinder.org/create -my-file. ✄