

DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors to Lifelong Literacy Learning





As part of goal 2 of Michigan’s Top 10 Strategic Education Plan—to improve early literacy for Michigan students—approved by the State Board of Education in August 2020, the Michigan Department of Education focuses on both the development of technical literacy skills (the how) as well as on diversity in literature (the why). Children engage more deeply with literature when they can see themselves and learn about others through texts. When children engage more deeply, the power of words motivates them to read more. More reading builds greater fluency, greater vocabulary, greater background knowledge, and greater comprehension, all of which children then take to their next reading.

Educators are literature advocates who know words and books matter. Michigan is a diverse state – in a diverse country. Our young people are diverse, and they deserve to be prepared for a diverse world. The diversity of Michigan’s students compels educators to use diverse authors with diverse voices. Words matter—voices, too.

There is value and power in teaching diverse literature, and we must open that power to all our children so they can navigate the world in which they will live. To do any less is a disservice to our children, who need to learn broadly about the literature and history of their country and broader world.

This guidance document is a celebration of literature and is aimed at helping educators create learning environments and experiences that deliver high-quality literacy instruction to all students, including those from different ethnicities, different religions, who speak different languages, and have different abilities.

We’re proud of supporting the full range of our diverse 1.4 million-plus students in Michigan public schools and helping them navigate their increasingly diverse world. This document is a contribution to that effort.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael F. Rice". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael F. Rice, Ph.D.

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Diverse Classroom Libraries

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Introduction

When learners are motivated and engaged in literacy activities, they are more likely to learn and experience positive outcomes and achievement.¹ Diverse classroom libraries that allow students to learn more deeply about themselves and others through diverse characters, views, and authors provide learners with a more complete view of the world. Reading becomes a way for learners to make connections, solve problems, empathize with others, embrace mistakes, find joy, and value diverse people and cultures.

Engaging students in literacy learning means being clear about why reading matters and how it can be life changing.

– Michigan Department of Education,
[Equity in Literacy Guidance](#)

In partnership with schools and districts toward equitable literacy achievement for all learners, the Michigan Department of Education offers this guidance document to educators, administrators, and partner organizations. This guidance provides access to research, tools, and strategies to develop diverse classroom libraries and diverse reading materials that enhance identity development, motivation, and engagement for all learners. This document is organized into three parts, each posed as an inquiry to support a lifelong learning process. Each part includes questions and insights intended to guide equitable and engaging learning for all Michigan students.

- I. Why** are diverse classroom libraries important?
- II. What** should be included in diverse classroom libraries?
- III. How** can educators engage students in lifelong literacy learning through diverse classroom libraries?

Beyond resources and tools, this document also provides opportunities for self-reflection designed to guide thinking about the complexity of diversity in reading materials and the impact on literacy learning.

Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of a larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.

– Rudine Sims Bishop (1990a, p. 1)

¹ See Guthrie et al. (2013).

I. WHY ARE DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES IMPORTANT?

Fostering motivation and engagement for all learners is essential for ongoing efforts to improve literacy achievement. This is possible when students engage with educational materials that positively reflect learners' identities and lived experiences. By providing access to diverse reading materials, educators have the opportunity to impact learning by developing reading skills, a sense of identity, intellectualism, criticality, and joy among learners in their classrooms.

We know that books matter; so, too, do the representation and diversity of thought reflected in the content of books.

– Dr. Gholdy Muhammad (2020, p. 138)

To promote inclusive, engaging, motivating, and affirming experiences to support a lifelong love of reading for all learning, several other factors are equally important for educators to consider:

- Encouraging student perspectives
- Fostering inclusive partnerships with families, caregivers, and community members
- Having a strong understanding of self

PROVIDING ACCESS TO DIVERSE READING MATERIALS

Why is it important for my students to have access to diverse reading materials that are authentic, engaging, motivating, and affirming?

The stories learners read have the power to impact their motivation to engage in literacy activities and to find purpose and significance in reading throughout their lives.² For this reason, diverse classroom libraries are essential.

Diverse classroom libraries include:

- Storylines that counter stereotypes and honor strengths and **funds of knowledge**, which are collections of knowledge-based cultural practices that are a part of families' inner culture, work experience, or daily routine.
- Access to content that reflects people's authentic histories and experiences, which aids learners in examining their own lives and the structures that shape the world.
- Opportunities to see their identities mirrored in text, which increases a sense of self and belonging. Mirrored identities also provide learners with opportunities to imagine themselves in future careers and settings.
- Opportunities to reflect on how their lived experiences can be like others' and yet can also be unique in a global society.

Research is clear that many classroom libraries and curriculum reading materials often lack this diversity in identity representation, authentic experiences, and various perspectives.³ Instead of providing a **single story** about who people are and can be, ideal classroom libraries include multiple mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, an analogy first created by **Rudine Sims Bishop**.⁴ *Mirrors* are about learners seeing themselves in reading materials while *windows* are about accurate depictions of

² See Muhammad (2020); Allyn & Morrell (2022).

³ See Muhammad (2020); Tatum (2009).

⁴ See Bishop (1990b).



others' experiences in the world. As learners gain an understanding of themselves and the world, this knowledge acts as *sliding glass doors* that “open” to provide access to choices, opportunities, and desired outcomes.

LEARNING IMPACT

How is learning impacted when students are engaged with diverse reading materials?

Lifelong readers learn and experience joy through reading.⁵ To develop sufficient literacy skills to be a lifelong reader, practicing reading is necessary. Diverse reading materials have been shown to engage and motivate learners as they learn about themselves and others. Motivation brings practice, practice brings greater success in reading, and greater success generates motivation to read more. When learners are motivated and engaged in a variety of diverse reading materials, they can achieve the following outcomes:⁶

- **Reading Skills:** Learners develop proficiency in [word recognition and language comprehension](#) to understand what they read.
- **Identity Development:** Learners develop a deep understanding of themselves, including strengths, histories, experiences, and desires for the future.
- **Intellectualism:** Learners gain knowledge through reading across content areas.
- **Criticality:** Learners engage in critical thinking by questioning the world, their reading, and the interaction of the two to determine how they will contribute to their immediate and larger society.
- **Joy:** Learners appreciate what reading and learning can do for the mind and soul.

A diverse classroom library that features motivating and engaging reading material has the potential to nurture these competencies, assisting learners to reach full literacy development.⁷

**Let me tell you the story of your name.
Then you decide if it fits.**

– Juana Martinez-Neal (2018, p. 3)

Questions to consider when reflecting on the why of a diverse classroom library:

- Does the reading material contain current and correct information that celebrates and affirms instead of stigmatizing differences?
- How does the reading material advance my learners' literacy skills and cultivate critical thinking?
- Do learners experience joy through beautiful and truthful images⁸ while reading selections from my classroom library?

⁵ See Muhammad (2021).

⁶ See Muhammad (2020).

⁷ See Muhammad (2020).

⁸ See Morrell (2002).

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Why is it important to include student perspectives when building diverse classroom libraries?

While the nuances of youth culture can be unfamiliar to many adults, educators have a powerful resource at hand: learners know what matters most to them.⁹ Knowing what is interesting and motivating to learners helps deepen educators' understanding, which in turn helps identify appropriate reading materials. This information, coupled with learners' input on the design and organization of the diverse classroom library, can help ensure diverse classroom libraries are respectful of learners and promote a climate of caring for oneself, others, and the reading materials. By involving learners in the development of diverse classroom libraries, they have greater potential to gain access to information and ideas that are important to them and promote agency over their learning.

Questions to consider while reflecting on student perspectives:

- How do my students feel this reading material advances their understanding of identity?
- Does the reading material connect with my learners and their interests?
- How does this reading material support my learners' understanding of other people and cultures?

INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES, CAREGIVERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Why is it important to partner with families, caregivers, and community members when building diverse classroom libraries?

Developing trusting partnerships with and learning from families, caregivers, and community members will enhance the diversity of classroom libraries. Families can share what matters to them, such as topics that resonate with their children and promote connections, which will support educators in choosing reading materials that accurately reflect their experiences and be less likely to rely on stereotypes or single stories.

Questions to consider while reflecting on partnerships with families, caregivers, and community members:

- Does my classroom library contain reading materials that reflect a variety of mirrors that represent my students' families, caregivers, and community?
- Are learners and families positively reflected in the reading material, including their cultures, identities, interests, experiences, desires, and future selves?
- Have I eliminated reading materials that perpetuate stereotypes?

⁹ See Muhammad (2020).

UNDERSTANDING OF SELF

Why is it important for me to know about myself, and how does that influence my selection of reading material for my diverse classroom library?

Knowing oneself as a reader, learner, and individual helps an educator as they work to build a diverse classroom library. Analyzing one's own experiences and how they influence ideas about learning, perspectives about others, and even preferences in reading material, storylines, and genres provide educators an opportunity for reflection in this process.¹⁰

Questions to consider while engaging in self-reflection:

- What are my identities, beliefs, and experiences?
- How does my background influence how I experience the world and interpret the experiences of others?
- Are my experiences and personal preferences limiting the reading materials in my diverse classroom library?



¹⁰ See Milner (2007).

II. WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES?

Building a diverse classroom library is an organic, evolving, and ongoing process that requires many perspectives to ensure reading materials reflect student interests, identities, and goals. To support this evolution, the following guidance provides tools and resources to guide educators when evaluating current materials, selecting new materials, and organizing classroom libraries.

**When the cloud moves on and the sun
reclaims her rays, a gust of wind propels
me forward.**

– Angeline Boulley (2021, p. 7)

It is essential to regularly [partner with families and caregivers](#) in the development of a diverse classroom library. To fully understand the complexity and intersectionality of learners and their families, educators will want to move beyond merely representing learners and families in the reading materials to also adding complex cultural elements and daily lived experiences.¹¹

By engaging in meaningful, two-way communication that focuses on listening to student and family voices and encourages learners and their families to articulate their personal stories, educators will gain valuable insights about how they might be reflected or incorporated into the reading materials, and how they can be shared among the classroom or broader community.¹² A great way for educators to truly get to know learners is to work diligently to ensure that their lives are reflected in the reading materials—which includes understanding their assets and lived experiences. The appreciation and respect for diverse cultural experiences and histories reflected through literacy can also support community advocacy as learners gain the knowledge and expertise to strengthen their communities.¹³

EVALUATING CURRENT MATERIALS FOR DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

How can evaluating current reading material identify gaps for diversity?

As a diverse classroom library grows and develops, ideas about diversity and equity may begin to shift. Evaluating existing materials is a good place to start building a diverse collection that supports student literacy skills, identities, intellectualism, criticality, and joy while reading. Utilizing **various evaluation tools** available, along with resources for selecting new materials provided in the next section, educators can curate diverse reading materials for classroom libraries and identify gaps that may exist. Appendix A and B provide many web-based options that provide **criteria for evaluating and selecting diverse classroom library materials** (see Appendix A), as well as **resources that support mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors in diverse classroom libraries for learners of all ages** (see Appendix B). Both of these appendixes are helpful for evaluating current materials and selecting new materials for diverse classroom libraries.

Questions to consider while evaluating current materials for diverse classroom libraries:

- Are learners and families positively reflected (mirror books) in the reading material, including their cultures, identities, interests, experiences, desires, and future selves?
- Does my diverse classroom library contain reading materials that reflect a variety of “windows,” and “sliding glass doors”?
- How do students, families, caregivers, and community members contribute to the evaluation of my diverse classroom library?

¹¹ See Kelly & Djonko-Moore (2021).

¹² See Sharma & Christ (2017).

¹³ See Keehne et al. (2018).

SELECTING NEW MATERIALS FOR DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

What are some tips for selecting new diverse reading materials for a classroom library?

A good place to start identifying diverse reading material is Michigan Department of Education's [*Celebrating Authors of Color and Their Works of Literature*](#).

School librarians, media specialists, and local tribal librarians are important partners in selecting books to build or enhance diverse classroom libraries. Moreover, they can help strengthen book selection policies and can proactively address processes for evaluating age-appropriate book choices.

Questions to consider while selecting new materials for diverse classroom libraries:

- What criteria do I use to select new reading materials that support a diverse classroom library?
- What are my district's policies for addressing challenges to a particular book in a classroom library?
- How have I included students, families, caregivers, and community members in selecting new materials for a diverse classroom library?

ORGANIZING DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES

How many books are necessary for a diverse classroom library?

In addition to including student, family, and caregiver perspectives, and evaluating and selecting books for a diverse classroom library, it is important to provide ample options for learners to access reading materials that support skill development, identity, intellectualism, criticality, and joy on a regular basis. According to the International Reading Association, a good starting point when building a diverse classroom library is seven books per student. Growing each classroom library by about 25 titles each year provides additional mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors to enhance opportunities for additional learning and connecting to the world for the current year's students. As with any library collection, continued evaluation of existing books, removing books that are no longer in optimal condition, books that find their way to a new home, and curating new books will be a continual process. The optimal number of books will depend on the number and age of the students in the class and needs to include enough space, organizational materials, and methods for use.

How can educators organize diverse reading materials in diverse classroom libraries to enhance belonging, motivation, and engagement?

Creating a safe and inclusive classroom community is relational but also spatial. A classroom that is learner-centered provides students with a sense of physical safety, ownership, and belonging.

Where and how diverse classroom libraries are displayed and organized influences accessibility and use. To ensure that all learners can engage with diverse reading materials, consider having them collaborate in organizing and maintaining the library.¹⁴ Sharing this responsibility with learners positively impacts relationships while entrusting learners to be involved in the library's organization and upkeep. Learners will be more motivated and engaged to use the library if they have a sense of ownership.

¹⁴ See Thomas (2019).

While collaborating with learners to organize the library, consider the following suggestions:

- **Catalog reading materials by genre and theme instead of by reading level.** Organizing reading materials by levels can perpetuate deficit thinking about learners' abilities and negatively impact competence, motivation, and identity.
- **Organize reading materials to provide greater access and exposure to new genres, ideas, and realities.** Be strategic about which reading materials are highlighted and how they are displayed. Collaborate with and encourage learners to create their own book genre labels.
- **Collaborate with content area teams or the media specialist** to identify and select diverse types of reading materials (graphic novels, poems, and so forth) and genres (fantasy, realistic fiction, adventure, and the like) associated with specific content or interests.
- Consider ways to organize the reading materials that highlight and emphasize the authors' names so that learners become familiar with diverse authors' stories and perspectives with which they may identify—or simply enjoy.
- Create comfortable reading spaces in the classroom that support collaboration and foster dialogue. Encourage learners to participate in creating and designing those spaces.
- Consider collaborating with students to use an app to keep track of reading materials. With many apps, users can scan the barcode and add tags and keywords based on topic, interest, learner identities, and time of year. The BookBuddy app is popular, and there are multiple apps at the Educational App Store that could assist with the organization of a diverse classroom library.

I am so hip even my errors are correct.

– Nikki Giovanni (1993, p. 5)

Questions to consider while organizing materials for diverse classroom libraries:

- How is my diverse classroom library organized?
- Do students show enthusiasm for visiting the diverse classroom library?
- What strategies might I use to include students in taking ownership of their diverse classroom library?



III. HOW CAN EDUCATORS ENGAGE STUDENTS IN LIFELONG LITERACY LEARNING THROUGH DIVERSE CLASSROOM LIBRARIES?

Designing learning around diverse texts takes time and dedication, and with intentionality, educators can ultimately make learning more engaging by creating purpose and connection to learners' authentic experiences. Building and encouraging meaningful, trusting, and supportive relationships can open doors to learning opportunities that otherwise would not present themselves, as learners use diverse reading materials to collaborate with others. Additionally, equitable learning opportunities within inclusive classroom environments help learners see literacy as a vehicle for making a local or global impact. And finally, instructional strategies that promote engagement, belonging, and equity critical to support lifelong literacy learning for all students.

BUILDING AND ENCOURAGING MEANINGFUL, TRUSTING, AND SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

How can educators build and encourage meaningful, trusting, and supportive relationships with and among learners?

- Above all, model, promote, and engage in [caring relationships](#) to build the foundation of an equitable, community-based classroom.¹⁵ Caring relationships are possible when teachers establish learning partnerships with students that include affirmation, validation, rapport, hope, and an alliance to foster positive exchanges.¹⁶

The trust built between teachers and learners and among learners sets the stage for effective and motivating classroom engagement and literacy learning. A communal classroom includes meaningful and valuable interactions and collaboration between peers, school, and community.¹⁷ Building a classroom community teaches learners to collaborate and enhances literacy outcomes.

Relationships—between adults and learners, and among learners—should be reciprocal and collaborative to best understand the nuanced and contextualized complexities of authenticity and lived experiences in relation to literacy learning. It is key for educators to incorporate knowledge and skills into literacy content that [connects to learners'](#) families, cultural practices, identities, goals, experiences, and interests.

Practices to identify authentic reading purposes and connect to learners' lives include:

- Incorporating time for learners to identify and share their purposes for reading;
- Using questions, reflection, and personal response opportunities to activate learners' prior knowledge or experiences; and
- Providing opportunities for learners to make connections between what they're reading and what they know, do, identify with, or experience outside of school.¹⁸



We liked to be known as the clever girls. When we decorated our hands with henna for holidays and weddings, we drew calculus and chemical formulae instead of flowers and butterflies.

– Malala Yousafzai (2013, p. 135)



¹⁵ See Hammond (2014); Ladson-Billings (2009); Gay (2010); Milner (2010); and Duncan-Andrade (2009).

¹⁶ See Hammond (2014); and Milner et al. (2019).

¹⁷ See Guthrie et al. (2013); and Sailors & Kaambankadzanja (2017).

¹⁸ See Jensen (2021).

- Create a **culture of inquiry** where learners frequently ask one another questions about who they are, their interests, and what they are learning from diverse reading materials. As part of both instructional planning for—and social engagement in—literacy activities, frequently use and encourage learners to use critical questions that incorporate aspects of their identities, lives, and histories to enhance collaboration.

Questions to consider for building and encouraging meaningful, trusting, and supportive relationships:

- What evidence is there that my students believe they belong and their perspectives matter?
- How do I define, demonstrate, and communicate an asset focus and inclusivity in my classroom?
- What examples of meaningful, trusting, and supportive relationships do I see among learners in my classroom?

CREATING INCLUSIVE, ENGAGING, AND MOTIVATING CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS

How can educators create inclusive, engaging, and motivating classroom environments that are safe, communal, and support genuine literacy learning?

To ensure that all learners experience joy while reading, educators must create an optimal learning environment where learners feel they belong, know their voices are honored, and have equitable access to learning opportunities. A learner’s sense of belonging and psychological safety in the classroom impacts motivation and engagement.¹⁹

“God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time.”

– James Baldwin (1962/1991, Introductory section)

For learners to be motivated and engaged in literacy activities, classroom teachers need to create dialectic, collaborative, and positive social environments for learning where diverse materials are tools for enhancing critical thinking, bringing joy, and shaping learners’ lives.²⁰ By incorporating activities, routines, and strategies like those outlined below, educators can create engaging and inclusive classroom environments for all learners.

- **Encourage learner-centered, asset-based literacy activities** to build relationships and support literacy learning. This might include interviewing learners to learn from and about them, providing ways for learners to regularly share their experiences, opinions, interests, and ideas, providing learners with a choice in how they engage, and encouraging learners to create and collaborate in ways that feel right for them.
- **Establish practices that promote the learner’s voice** and provide leadership opportunities for all in literacy learning. Encourage learners to ask questions and provide feedback about the classroom and literacy instruction without negative consequences. An educator can use learners’ feedback as data to inform changes in practices.
- **Incorporate strategies that encourage learners to play an active role** in their literacy learning by asking questions, making connections, and learning from their mistakes.
- **Collaborate with learners** to establish classroom norms together.

¹⁹ See Wanless (2016).

²⁰ See Ivey & Johnston, (2013); and Muhammad (2020).

Questions to consider when creating an inclusive, engaging, and motivating classroom environment:

- What do learner-centered and asset-based activities look like in my class?
- How are learners provided opportunities to relate content to their own lives and experiences?
- What opportunities do learners have to discuss and make meaning about literacy content with peers?

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES THAT PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT, BELONGING, AND EQUITY FOR ALL LEARNERS

What instructional strategies support learners' engagement using diverse reading materials?

Using diverse reading materials within instruction is key to engaging learners to ensure they see themselves reflected in learning experiences. There are several instructional strategies educators can use with diverse texts that help accomplish academic goals as well as build a community of learners in classrooms. Implementing instructional strategies that promote engagement, belonging, and equity for all learners, like those highlighted below, are powerful tools to support lifelong literacy learning.

- Foster independent practice through choice and access. A learner-centered classroom maximizes learner strengths, providing choices and access to opportunities that help them engage in joyful reading and reach their literacy learning goals. To do so, it is important to know the learner's reading preferences and behaviors.

Learners will need support and instruction to choose and engage with the materials to meet various instructional goals. Supporting learners as they develop knowledge on how to choose books for different purposes sets them up for success as they grow as readers and thinkers.

- Employ intentional questioning strategies. Creating a culture of inquiry in the classroom is a way to support learner engagement, autonomy, and agency by encouraging unsolicited questions and comments. Educators can listen closely and respectfully to learners and affirm their contributions. Educators should facilitate and encourage collaboration to explore the responses to learners' questions. Turning responses over to the entire class to consider is one variation from a typical teacher-centered response. Questions should be clear to learners, and educators should use a variety of strategies, such as rephrasing or redirecting. Instructional strategies that develop learners' questioning abilities include Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA), inquiry charts, Question-Answer Relationship (QAR), reciprocal teaching, and anticipation guides. [Strategies that center questioning](#) in problem-solving include semantic feature analysis and concept sorts. Teacher questioning strategies and considerations include planning their questions to ensure higher- and lower-level questions, as well as open and closed questions, are included in instruction.
- Deliver explicit and systematic instruction. There is a great deal of research on the importance of direct instruction.²¹ Learners need direct instruction that includes the gradual release of responsibility from the teacher to the student to be able to successfully build independent skills. Sufficient direct instruction, along with feedback for learners as they test out new learning, results in clarity of content, processes, purpose, and ultimately encourages greater engagement as learners grow confidence and make meaning from instruction.



²¹ See Elbaum, B. et al. (2000); Marchella-Martella et al. (2004); and Swanson (2001).

Practices to promote explicit and systematic instruction include:

- Establishing consistent norms and routines
- Stating clear goals and objectives in learner-friendly language
- Integrating multimodal strategies and texts (oral, written)
- Teaching unfamiliar vocabulary
- Explaining
- Modeling
- Providing guided and independent practice
- Giving corrective and constructive feedback
- Offering multiple opportunities for learner response
- Employing formative assessment

My eyes crinkle into crescent moons and sparkle like the stars. Gold flecks dance and twirl while the stories whirl in their oolong pools, carrying tales of the past and hope for the future.

– Joanna Ho (2021, p. 24)

Elementary School Example

In Ms. Smith’s 3rd grade classroom, students engage in units around themes related to their community. In one unit, *We Are All Different and the Same*, Ms. Smith conducts daily interactive read-alouds with books from her diverse classroom library. Before the read-aloud, Ms. Smith provides direct instruction on a concept or skill that the read-aloud will support, such as compound words or an author’s choice of words. These read-alouds are chosen by students to reflect their different cultures, backgrounds, and identities. Ms. Smith ensures all students are represented in this instructional practice. During the read-aloud, Ms. Smith stops at purposeful places in the text to ask questions about the text, and the concept or skill she was using that particular text to teach, and to have students interact with each other.

Following each read-aloud, students participate in literacy centers where they rotate through a variety of activities. These include small groups using [Collaborative Strategic Reading](#) (CSR) for material related to that day’s read-aloud and the concept or skill taught via direct instruction; writing about reading, in which students choose to complete one of a list of writing activities related to that day’s read-aloud and the unit overall; employing peer collaboration—groups of students share their writing in progress, get ideas for improvement, and work together to develop a product that considers how they are all different from each other, but also the same (these students will present their product to the class at the end of the unit with a Q&A following each presentation); and individual and group conversations with Ms. Smith to discuss their reading and writing successes, challenges, ideas, and questions emerging through their center work.

Ms. Smith ties her read-aloud, direct instruction, and literacy center work to other subjects, events, and activities throughout the day, week, and unit to show students that their literacy learning is not isolated from their lives in other contexts.

What instructional strategies support learners' sense of belonging using diverse reading materials?

- Encourage critical thinking and civic engagement. One goal of literacy is to create opportunities for learners to engage in criticality, where they engage in critical thinking by questioning the world and determining how they will interact with and contribute to their immediate and larger society. Learners can use literacy activities to explore and discuss historical and current realities that enhance their mirrors and windows to the world. Furthermore, effective literacy practices can support learners in participating in civic engagement by finding solutions to issues or problems affecting them or their communities. These practices provide authentic learning experiences that promote engagement because they have the potential to add purpose to their lives.²²

The children jumped with joy. A song! A song!

– Isaac Millman (2000)

Practices to promote critical thinking and civic engagement include:

- Creating questions to connect literacy learning to their own lives as well as other cultures and communities and enhance perspective-taking.
- Creating safe spaces and problem-based activities for learners to facilitate their difficult conversations and ethical dilemmas related to what they are reading and supporting critical thinking and problem-solving for issues that influence their schools and communities.

Secondary School Example

At a secondary school in Michigan, approximately 24% of learners are first-generation immigrants to the United States. Ms. Jones wants her learners to have access to diverse materials that feature children who have had similar experiences. Some of her learners have also voiced interest in understanding more about immigration policies, such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Ms. Jones also knows that some of her learners enjoy playing soccer or creating videos but are not always interested in pleasure reading.

Ms. Jones can create authentic learning experiences that incorporate novels (like [Other Words for Home](#)) about the immigration experience to support healthy identity development. Learners might also make connections to their own lives through book characters' experiences and interests (like the theme of soccer in the novel [Outcasts United](#)). Learners in her classroom have a choice to read and research policy documents about the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website, collaborate to write letters to their local or state politicians or read poetry and short stories about immigration experiences. Learners may use knowledge from what they read to interview community members about issues related to immigration. Learners could also make videos documenting what they learn and use them to inform others. Similarly, a group of learners created a short documentary interviewing people in their community and sharing their immigration experiences as an act of civic engagement.²³

²² See Crouch & Cambourne (2020).

²³ See Latino Youth Collective (2013).

What instructional strategies support learners' sense of belonging using diverse reading materials?

- Give affirmations and feedback. Educators can create a safe community that provides relevant praise related to effort and performance and specific feedback about literacy goals and expectations. Educators will want to set norms on affirmations and feedback, model these behaviors, and offer shared understanding. In turn, learners can [provide each other with constructive feedback](#) to enhance literacy skills and goals. With explicit instruction, learners give each other specific suggestions regarding strengths and ways to improve that maintain psychological safety and belonging. Furthermore, learners need feedback throughout the time they work on a task, not just at the end. Regular, meaningful feedback is key to learners' ability to use mistakes as learning opportunities and foster notions of belonging and ownership for learning.
- Promote collaboration and interaction. Peer collaboration and small-group instruction can assist learners in meeting literacy goals by creating avenues for deeper understanding while developing social skills and peer relationships. Pairs or groups of learners can be matched by academic skills, interests, problems to be solved, and so forth, and should include clear expectations. Adults and learners need to create the norms and ground rules for collaboration together so expectations are transparent and learners take ownership of the collaborative process.

Practices to promote collaboration in literacy learning include:

- Developing rapport through icebreakers and team-building activities
- Using sentence stems or [Socratic questions](#) as a regular strategy
- Engaging in role-play activities or problem-based learning
- Rotating group member roles and responsibilities, encouraging learners to negotiate their roles and responsibilities to complete shared literacy tasks
- Providing instruction on effective ways for learners and educators to give affirmations, feedback, and support (see sections below, possible link)
- Conducting interactive [read-alouds](#) and incorporating collaborative response or processing strategies around diverse reading material that allows learners to see themselves and others represented, develop empathy, and understanding of different cultures and identities
- Developing lessons that incorporate opportunities for learners to interact with texts differently, as well as immerse them in various text types
- Promoting mistakes as part of the collaborative learning process to create a culture of learning. When learners can “test out” various ways of tackling challenging texts and associated tasks without fear of failure, engagement is more likely.²⁴

What instructional strategies support equity for all learners using diverse reading materials?

- Identify authentic purposes and connect to learners' lived experiences. Authentic and learner-centered literacy learning experiences include using diverse reading materials that connect to learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences and lead to fairness and equity for all. To meet learning goals, materials, and activities should be designed to engage learners in purposeful reading connected to real-world experiences and knowledge construction.

Educators should be mindful that what is authentic for learners in one context is not always authentic in another. Student experiences are complex, and it is important to encourage their feedback on authenticity and to let them take the lead in making connections.

²⁴ See Crouch & Cambourne (2020).

- Vary teaching and learning roles. Classroom roles should be fluid and reciprocal as educators and learners engage and collaborate during literacy learning activities and while using the diverse classroom library. Several strategies allow learners to take on the expert role, such as reciprocal teaching. Educators might view themselves as the learner and facilitator of learning and also see students as the holders of knowledge. When learners are positioned as experts, fairness, and access are enhanced, and they are more invested in the task because they have enhanced purpose.²⁵

Questions to consider when developing and implementing instructional strategies that support a diverse classroom library:

- How do I recognize learners' knowledge gained from reading and provide feedback?
- In what ways are learners able to share their perspectives and make decisions?
- Which instructional strategies ensure all learners have equitable access to diverse reading materials in my class?

As Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop has taught us, it is important that students see themselves (mirrors) and others (windows) portrayed accurately in their reading. By involving learners in diverse classroom libraries, they have greater potential to gain access to information and ideas that are important to them and promote agency over their learning connections. It is essential to evaluate current materials in a classroom library before choosing new ones. Considering reading skills, identity development, intellectualism, criticality, and joy can help determine learning impact. Lastly, regularly talking with learners and their families about the classroom library and reviewing and evaluating the reading materials ensures that the classroom library reflects learners' evolving identities, interests, and goals.



“Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird, that cannot fly.

– Langston Hughes (2001, p. 52)

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²⁵ See Crouch & Cambourne (2020).

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Appendix A

Criteria for Selecting Diverse Classroom Library Materials

- [Assessing Children’s Literature](#) provides a checklist for assessing the story, the characters, themes, settings, illustrations, and other considerations in children’s literature.
- [Guide to Selecting Multicultural Literature](#) is intended to encourage the broader use of multicultural literature by offering guidelines for selecting texts. This guide provides selection guidelines and recommends ways for educators to become self-reliant in evaluating texts.
- [Text Analysis Toolkit](#) aims to support educators in the process of selecting and analyzing texts based on complexity and cultural relevance. This toolkit includes resources focused on choosing texts that reflect the identities of educators and the students they serve and analyzing texts with multiple lenses and for various contexts.

Appendix B

Resources That Support Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors in a Diverse Classroom Library for Learners of All Ages

- [Afghan Refugee Resources](#) is a U.S. Department of Education website providing free, online illustrated stories and children’s workbooks in Pashto and Dari for the purpose of responding to the immediate and transition learning needs of children aged 5-9 emigrating from Afghanistan. **Kindergarten (K)–Grade 3**
- [America Indians in Children’s Literature](#) is a website providing critical analysis of Indigenous peoples in children’s and young adult books. The website provides a variety of resources including an annual book list, a photo gallery of native writers and illustrators, a timeline of what children and families will come across in some children’s books, tips for developing instructional materials, and resources about government- and Christian-run boarding and residential schools for Native students. **Birth–Young Adult**
- [Beautiful Blackbird Children’s Book Festival](#) celebrates Black illustrators and children’s book authors. The webpage provides a book list and an educator’s toolkit with classroom resources and lesson plans. **Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K)–Grade 3**
- [Black WorldSchoolers](#) specializes in books, games, and puzzles for children and young adults to highlight the positive contributions of Black people. **Birth–Young Adult**
- [Brown Bookshelf](#) is an advocacy organization designed to push awareness of Black voices writing for young readers and showcasing books written and illustrated by African Americans. During Black History Month, this website profiles children’s and young adult authors and illustrators for the best new and unnoticed works by African Americans. **Birth–Young Adult**
- [Colorín Colorado: Bilingual Books](#) is a national multimedia project of WETA, offering bilingual, research-based information, activities, and advice for educators and families of English language learners. **Pre-K–Grade 12**
- [The Coretta Scott King Book Awards](#) are for outstanding African American authors and illustrators who demonstrate an appreciation for African American culture and universal human values. This webpage offers lists of books awarded the Coretta Scott King Award, discussion guides for those books, and links to educational resources. **Pre-K–Young Adult**

- [Diverse Book Finder](#) is a website that provides a comprehensive collection of BIPOC children’s picture books, including an interlibrary loan collection, a searchable database of cataloged and analyzed trade picture books published since 2002. The website provides data on which BIPOC characters are depicted in the books, what messages these stories send to the reader, and live data charts that examine the disparities in representation. There is also a Collection Analysis Tool that generates a key report of a picture book collection in terms of who is represented on and how the stories are being told. **Birth–Grade 3**
- [Diverse Classroom Libraries for K–6 Students](#) is the Reading Rockets’ webpage, which is a National Public Library Initiative, which shares book lists, guides, research, and other resources to support topics of race, class, disability, and religion. **K–Grade 6**
- [Language Lizard](#) provides dual-language books and resources in English and 50+ languages. The company offers a PENpal audio recorder pen that allows readers to hear content in 40 languages with their bilingual books. **Birth–Grade 6**
- [Latinxs in Kid Lit](#) provides book lists, book reviews, book talks, and teaching ideas focused on Latinx people in children’s and young adults’ literature. **Birth–Young Adult**
- [Lee & Low Books](#) offers diverse, bilingual (Spanish/English) books for young readers, focusing on African/African American; Asian/Asian American; Latino; Middle Eastern; Muslim; and Native American stories. **Pre-K – Grade 3.**
- [MIself in Books](#) provides an annual list of diverse books for Michigan learners that were selected by a committee of certified school librarians who are members of MASL. **Pre-K– Grade 12**
- [New York Public Library’s Vibrant Voices](#) is a website from the New York Public Library that provides booklists of new books from authors of color for adults, teens, and children. **Pre-K–Adult**
- [Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators](#) is a professional organization for authors and illustrators of children’s and young adult books that provides a booklist for building a more diverse library as well as monthly themed recommended reading lists. **Birth–Young Adult**
- [Unite for Literacy](#) provides home and classroom library materials, an app, and a book desert map to learn about community access to books. The Unite Books app provides e-books narrated in over 50 languages that families can read to or with their children. Each book is narrated both in English and Spanish. This organization’s goal is to build home libraries that support families in developing daily reading habits and encourage language and literacy development. **Pre-K–Grade 3**
- [We Need Diverse Books](#) is a grassroots advocacy organization that provides several programs and resources, including awards and competitions; booklists; grants and mentorships; links for parents, educators, librarians, publishing professionals, writers and illustrators, and booksellers; and links to diverse book subscription boxes and banned books. **Birth–Adult**

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