
Everyday Decisions

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RUSA, as defined by its vision, “is an influential and authoritative organization, essential to the work of anyone engaged in the practices of connecting people to resources, information services, and collections.”¹ Since our vision was adopted in 2015 our world and that of libraries has definitively changed. We are fighting fake news, administering Narcan to overdosed patrons, and partnering with social services. This summer RUSA adopted a statement of equity, diversity, and inclusion.² Libraries can no longer choose not to see the inequities that broader structural systems perpetuate.

Often I hear, “What can I do? I’m just a librarian. I’m not the manager, the director, or a supervisor.” But there are other things you can do to lead from where you are through everyday decisions. Decisions made with awareness will help each of us become more savvy allies and advocates. We need to do this work so libraries can remain a trusted space. Here are a few ways you can get started.

OUR COLLECTIONS

Representation matters and what we collect matters. When we collect diverse books by diverse authors, in all genres, our readers get to see themselves in the books they read. This refrain was echoed at Literary Tastes by author Thi Bui when she said “my family story is very common and I’ve been waiting my whole life to hear it.”³ She decided to fill that gap with her award-winning *The Best We Could Do*, detailing her life as an immigrant from Vietnam. But how are we finding and filling the gaps in our collection? As we know, collection development is a deliberate act that can both limit and expand a reader’s horizon. And our purchasing can influence publishing. Where we spend our library dollars matters. There are a multitude of sites where one can learn more about purchasing diversely, and there are many places we can look for help in expanding our understanding of diversity, such as the nonprofit We Need Diverse Books (<https://diversebooks.org/>), which gives out awards for diversity in children’s publishing. For more suggestions, check out the recommended reading list of diverse award winners from ALA.⁴

OUR POLICIES

The words we use matter. Look at your policies: Are they written in a way that is gender neutral? Are they written in plain language and avoid library jargon?⁵ Many of our

policies benefit those with insider knowledge and privilege. The path to inclusivity can be started by adopting these practices in our writing and even in our speech. Personally, I've had to learn how to drop idiomatic phrases from my teaching and to think globally when I use metaphors.

If you are in a position to lobby on bigger issues, think about library fines. Our own Ed Garcia, former director-at-large of RUSA, ALA executive board member, and director of the Cranston Public Library, was able to remove late fees for teen and children's materials. He told a local news reporter that "the library noticed that fines had become a barrier for some families from using the library. Many don't return to the library because of an inability to pay fines or for fear of accumulating them. Penalizing young people for late books makes libraries feel unwelcoming."⁶

OUR STAFF

At the ACRL 2017 conference, I was impressed with Vernā Myers' talk on diversity and inclusion. At that time, I was on research leave investigating how to implement cultural and intercultural competency training beyond a one-time training course. I particularly like Myers' book *Moving Diversity Forward: How to Go from Well-Meaning to Well-Doing* as an introductory read for both personal awareness and how to get others thinking about how diversity and inclusion is so much more than hiring a diverse staff. As she says, "Diversity is being asked to the party, but Inclusion is being asked to dance."⁷

So how do we get away from diversity being a tick box in the hiring phase? As we all know, librarianship is disproportionately filled with white women with a middle-class background. I read an interesting Twitter thread discussing how the privilege of being able to afford graduate school is an inequity in and of itself. It was an awakening for me, and I've been working on this for a while! We will always be learning. If you've never explored how privilege affects you,

broaden who you follow on social media, as self-awareness is the first step. And remember that being uncomfortable is part of the process. I also recommend the article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack."⁸

CONCLUSION

These are just a handful of ways to do better.

What we do matters. How we do it matters. You don't have to be the manager to effect change. You can do it with everyday decisions.

References

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4. "Recommended Reading: Celebrating Diversity," American Library Association LibGuides, last modified March 28, 2018, <https://libguides.ala.org/c.php?g=488238&p=3530814>.
5. To learn more about using plain language, see the Plain Language homepage, <https://www.plainlanguage.gov/>.
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7. Vernā Myers, *Moving Diversity Forward: How to Go from Well-Meaning to Well-Doing* (Chicago: American Bar Association, 2012), 13.
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