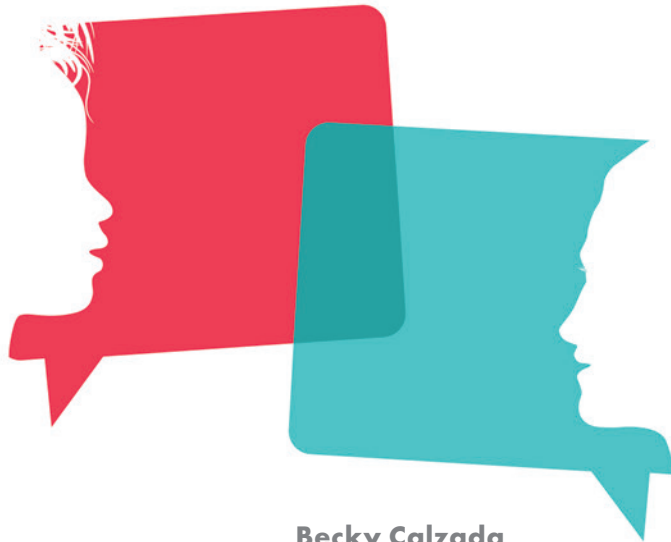


COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT ANSWERS FROM THE FIELD



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For this *Knowledge Quest* issue on collection development, we wanted to ask school librarians and school library supervisors across the country how each approached their collection work, how they prepared for challenges, and how they considered equity, diversity, and inclusion in their school library practice. We also asked each to share a special story on the impact their collection development work had on learners. We hope you glean invaluable insights from what each shared.

Background information about our respondents:

NICOLE H. CRUZ has been a school librarian for twenty-three years; she is the Sharyland ISD Lead Librarian where she serves two high school campuses, Sharyland High School and Sharyland Advanced Academic Academy in Mission, Texas.

JACOB GERDING is in his eighth year as a school librarian. He is currently working at Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School in Newburg, Maryland.

MAEGEN ROSE is in her eighth year as a school librarian. She is currently a middle school librarian at a PK to grade 12 independent school in Westchester County, New York.

SUZANNE SANNWALD is in her eighth year as the school librarian at West Hills High School in Santee, California, a small suburban city in San Diego's East County.

How do you approach collection development?

JACOB GERDING: I have always believed that the school library is the one place in the building that stands as a tribute to the voices and choices made by students and staff. I frequently provide students with interest inventories as well as formal surveys where they can explicitly tell me what sorts of titles, authors, and genres they would like to see in the school library. I am a firm believer that we improve literacy outcomes with our elementary school students when we provide them with a variety of materials they want to read. I also survey staff annually, as well as keep an active Microsoft Word document that they can add titles, authors, and topics to that will support their instruction. I keep a pad of paper right at my circulation desk so if a teacher or student asks about a title we do not have, I write it down so that it can be considered for purchase. Additionally, as I weed a section I pay careful attention to areas of need and make them part of my purchasing strategy. Once I know what the needs are, I use our district selection policy and ensure that each book has at least two positive reviews, is grade-level appropriate, and offers an unbiased examination of the issues. Stunning pictures and visually appealing covers are always a plus! A collection must be responsive to the needs and interests of the community that it serves, which is why I hope in the near future to create a student advisory committee that will help me to even more closely discern the needs of our students and have a more direct voice in purchasing decisions.

I keep a pad of paper right at my circulation desk so if a teacher or student asks about a title we do not have, I write it down so that it can be considered for purchase.

MAEGEN ROSE: I approach collection development very intentionally. In addition to purchasing books that support the curriculum, award-winning books, popular series, books by established authors, and accepting student and faculty requests, I carefully select books that reflect the rich diversity of our global community.

SUZANNE SANNWALD: While I have managed to increase my collection budget somewhat, and I have also secured some grants along the way, I have a fairly meager amount of money for collection development. As a result I am very strategic and purposeful with every purchase that I make. First of all, I prioritize requests from my community, always trying to honor those. At the same time, I look at gaps within the collection and try to proactively select high-quality materials that I believe are curricularly or personally relevant even though they are not yet being requested. My hope—and I have found this substantiated through experience—is that students will discover and connect with these items serendipitously even if they have not identified them specifically on their own. Finally, I am always thinking about the balance between digital and print resources, and I purposefully purchase print books to complement rather than duplicate what students will likely access online via the web and online databases.

NICOLE CRUZ: Collection development is multi-faceted. There are many strategies that school librarians employ. For me it is a process that starts with collection analysis. Most vendors provide free collection analysis services. School librarians are teachers; as teachers, they are very familiar with state curriculum guidelines and objectives for all content areas. If they are new to the field of librarianship, they can always find state essential curriculum guidelines at the agency website dedicated to providing educators with this information. School librarians can gain much from grade-level and department collaborations. School librarians attend these meetings to see specific areas of focus or weaknesses. This is another way school librarians can wisely invest school funds to complement instruction. As the lead librarian I encourage librarians to bookmark state-specific websites like the Texas Education Agency and TSLAC Texas State Library Archives Commission, host of the Texas State Library Standards, and AASL's *National School Library Standards*. I also send weekly update e-mails to all district librarians with focus-of-the-week strategies.

Another strategy is to survey stakeholders, including students, staff, and community members. Based

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on recommendations from stakeholders, school librarians can then locate reviewed, state-recommended reading lists that are age appropriate, award-winning literature, and highly reviewed books. If a book is recommended by a learner, school librarians can find favorable reviews to support purchasing the book. I provide links to forms and surveys on my library website or through Remind messages and Google Classrooms for learner recommendations.

Diversity is an important factor to consider when curating a collection. Also seeking books that will appeal to the student body—variety of cultures, backgrounds, ethnicity, and other markers like political viewpoints—is another. Each student and staff member should have choices to appeal to learners' values and sense of identity. Even more importantly it is critical to have viewpoints that differ from our specific insights.

How do you prepare yourself for challenges?

GERDING: This is clearly something that I am focusing on this year more than I have in the past. While I have not had any formal challenges, I do keep my district library team alerted

to any concerns that are expressed about a book or a database so that we can be proactive as a team in case an issue does arise. Of course, hearing a concern does not automatically equate to a challenge being filed, but it is a good time to make sure that the book or database being questioned was selected in accordance with the selection policy in place at the district level. At the same time it is important to state that I do not restrict the books that my students check out. At my very core I believe students have a right to read developmentally appropriate books about topics that interest them. If a parent has objections to the content in a book their child selects that is otherwise developmentally appropriate, it is a discussion that parents must have with their child. This is a discussion that I have had with parents a few times before, and they are generally very supportive and understanding. Parents are allowed to have views and opinions, but they should not be able to impose their views and opinions on everyone else's children.

ROSE: First, having a strong collection development policy is key. Second, being intentional in collection development is to be thoughtful about why books are added to the school library. It doesn't matter if the school librarian selected it, a student or faculty member requested it, or

if it was donated. Every book is thoroughly considered before being placed in the appropriate school library. My school is fortunate to have three spaces—a lower school library, a middle/upper school library, and a middle school learning commons—that house a decent size collection of titles. Knowing the collection well and ensuring that titles are housed in the most developmentally appropriate library is the best preparation.

SANNWALD: The idea of facing challenges makes me anxious, but I have been mentally preparing myself for this possibility so that I am equipped with words to use and actions to take should this happen. At a most basic level I am actively having conversations with students when I get a sense that they are suspiciously regarding specific books or the collection at large. For instance, this is the first year that I have noticed students inspecting the shelves, taking photos, and even telling me that they are “conducting an audit of the political bias of the collection.” In these instances I have directly asked them to share what it is that they’re looking for and to please let me know what they think about what they find. I have also encouraged students to let me know if there are any books that they want to read but do not see in our collection since I always love getting and filling student requests.

On another occasion a student commented that they were surprised that the library would have a particular manga series since they

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thought it would be considered too inappropriate. With that student I asked what they considered inappropriate about it for a couple of reasons. First, it’s always possible that I am not aware of specific content since it is impossible for me to read every single book in the collection. Second, while I may consider books as acceptable for the collection since there may be other students who want to read them, I like to get to know students individually so that I can tailor my recommendations for them based on their particular likes and dislikes. I also talked about intellectual freedom and the beauty of how school libraries allow students the opportunity to choose what they read or don’t read. I expressed my trust in the student and their own self-knowledge, how I hope they will always honor their intuition, and how I appreciate them talking to me about their concerns.

Beyond these day-to-day conversations, I have been reviewing board policies that are in place, reading advice online from other school library practitioners and intellectual freedom experts, and talking with colleagues so that we know from the start that we are part of a supportive community, that we are not alone.

What advice would you give school librarians regarding the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion in collection development?

CRUZ: Diversity and inclusion are fundamental to a library collection. The entire premise and reason why libraries exist to begin with is to level the playing field. Every patron deserves access to resources that speak to them, that reflect their feelings, virtues, ideas, culture, gender identity, and sense of worth. Books teach us empathy and compassion. It is the duty of a professionally trained school librarian to reach all students no matter their socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, religious, or gender identities. Every human has value. It is time to value all. We do this by making sure our collection has information for all. It is up to the learner to select their books, but that is not a matter of choice when a variety of books are not found in the collection. Diversity is important so that people who have different views can be informed and have a better understanding of the opposite point of view. When we don’t have a diverse collection, the status quo remains as do the stereo-

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types and misconceptions of ideas. In order to encourage understanding, acceptance, and tolerance it is critical to have a diverse collection representing all viewpoints. It does not necessarily mean that people will change their minds or viewpoints, but they may be better equipped to appreciate someone else's values. When our society as a whole is able to be open-minded and foster acceptance for those who differ from us, that makes our entire world a better place.

SANNWALD: As a school librarian, I try to both embrace and promote the professionalism that I offer to my community while modeling humility at the same time. When I aim to develop the collection for my school community with equity, diversity, and inclusion in mind, this means not only relying on the research that I do on my own independently, but constantly working to draw upon the expertise and experience of others. What does this look like in practice? It means observing and listening to others—I learn a lot by just getting to be in the background of learner conversations. It requires actively soliciting input from others, demonstrating curiosity about their interests and asking them questions, which they're usually excited to answer. And it means always realizing that I am necessarily limited by what I know and what I have experienced. As a result, I purposefully seek out what I am missing or overlooking out of my own ignorance. There is an

endless amount to learn and room to improve!

ROSE: Equity, diversity, and inclusion have to be central to collection development. It is our job to not just share a love of reading with our students, but to expose them to the most diverse and inclusive literature available.

Share a story of a book you added to your collection that had a meaningful impact on a student.

GERDING: One book I have added to my collection that has really impacted learners this year is *Doodleville* by Chad Sell. I ordered three copies of it, and I still have a hard time keeping the books on the shelves. Sometimes, I must hide them and put them out on a different day so that other learners have a chance to read it. Usually, learners in the same class will check the books out and read them together. I think the fact that it is a graphic novel with a focus on fantasy piques the interest of my learners, but I feel like there is another layer. The diverse characters in the book are truly dynamic, and learners feel a powerful connection to them

because they are so relatable. Sometimes a learner will identify a character and say that the character is "just like me." *Doodleville* truly appeals to a broad cross section of elementary learners just seeking a book with characters they can relate to either personally or as part of a larger community.

ROSE: I could share a few stories about how adding a particular book to the library had a meaningful impact on a student. However, what I've found more revealing and meaningful (especially during the pandemic) hasn't been so much about any specific title, but about the impact of learners feeling seen and heard when I've honored their book requests. Sometimes, I e-mail to thank them for the suggestion and let them know the title is now available in the library. If it's a book I know they wanted to read, I check it out to them and place it in their locker. It's been rewarding to have new and stronger relationships grow from this practice.

SANNWALD: One book that comes to my mind is *I Am J* by Cris Beam, especially since this is a story about a transgender teen and there have been so many recent challenges of books with LGBTQ+ content. The way that I discovered this book made an impact is also meaningful to me. I did not have a student tell me directly that it made a difference. Instead, I found out

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when I read the book myself and noticed marginalia, hand-drawn and -written evidence of a student's heartfelt reading experience (<bit.ly/iamj-marginalia>). It was a reminder to me that we may not always have students explicitly share which book has made a difference. We may not always know the true impact that our choices and actions are having.

CRUZ: One of the most impactful titles I recently read was *The 57 Bus* by Dashka Slater. This book impacted many students as we read it together to prepare for a Battle of the Books competition. *The 57 Bus* details a real hate crime that took place in Oakland, California. It also helps educate the audience about gender identity. One student who read the book, stated, "Mrs. Cruz, I never realized how ignorant I was about the subject of transgender, agender, bisexual, and nonbinary people. I am so grateful to have read this book. I can be a better person now that I have more of an understanding for people who are different from me. By reading the book, I'm not only less ignorant, but I can be more compassionate when I meet people like Sasha."



Becky Calzada (she/her/hers) is the library services coordinator for the Leander Independent School District in Leander, Texas.

She coauthored the 2021 Knowledge Quest blog post "Censorship in Texas: #FREedom Campaign Inception, Reflection, and Highlights" and the 2020 American Libraries article "Reset and Reconnect: Adapting and Advocating amid the Pandemic." She is a member of AASL and serves as a Director-at-Large on the AASL Board of Directors.



Nicole Cruz (she/her) is the lead librarian at Sharyland ISD in Mission, Texas. She was awarded the 2021 Upstart Library

Innovation Award. She's a member of the Texas Association of School Librarians (TASL) and is serving as a councilor (2019–2022) and as a member of the TASL Scholarship Committee Chair. Nicole is chair of the Texas Star Book Award Committee and is a member of the Texas Media Awards Committee. She's a member of the Texas Classroom Teachers Association and YALSA. She is a member of AASL and serves as an AASL Chapter Delegate. Her blog, *One for the Record Books*, is available at <www.smore.com/p483f>.



Jacob Gerding is the library media specialist at Dr. Thomas L. Higdon Elementary School in Newburg, Maryland. He

is a member of the Maryland Association of School Librarians (MASL) and is the MASL conference chair. He is a member of AASL.



Maegen Rose is the middle school librarian at Rye Country Day School in Westchester County, New York.

She is a member of ALA, ALSC, AASL, AASL Independent Schools Section (Chair, 2021–2022), Ethnic, and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table (EMIERT), Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Hudson Valley Library Association, Association of Independent School Librarians (AISL), and School Library Media Specialists of Southeast New York. She reviews books for *School Library Journal* and served on the 2019–2021 Coretta Scott King Book Awards Jury. Maegen is a member of *Library Journal's* 2021 class of Movers & Shakers and will chair the 2023 Children's Literature Legacy Committee.



Suzanne Sannwald (she/her) is the teacher-librarian at West Hills High School in Santee, California. She's also a

San Jose State University iSchool instructor for INFO 233 School Library Media Centers. She coauthored the "Intellectual Freedom" chapter in *Core Values in School Librarianship* (2021) and wrote the 2021 May/June Knowledge Quest article "Reading the Room: Sustaining Our Libraries by Identifying and Responding to the Need of Our Communities." She is the editor of *School Library Connection's* "Collaboration" web section and coauthored the *School Library Connection* column "Operation Collaboration." She is a member of AASL.