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ibrarians and educators are often chal- lenged to provide diverse books for school communities. There is a common frustration that books involving diversity are a rare and precious find for collection developers, especially titles that earn popular appeal and won’t simply sit on shelves gathering dust.

Popular campaigns such as “We Need Diverse Books” (http://weneeddiverse-books.org/) serve as a call to action to identify, purchase, and promote great books about contemporary, diverse characters. There is a growing awareness that diverse books and characters matter deeply to students. In order to serve all students well, schools and libraries must support authors and publishers who are creating diverse literature by purchasing and promoting quality titles.

Unfortunately, this is easier said than done. With thousands of titles published yearly for children and young adults and with limited resources in terms of time and funding, it is a challenge for educators in schools and libraries to know how to best develop multicultural collections. Certainly there are annual award lists and “best of” lists, but these only encompass the tip of the publishing iceberg. Students deserve variety, quantity, and quality in the materials and resources available to them. If we are doing our job right, all students should find themselves represented in enough quality titles to satiate their learning throughout their educational career. We need fiction and nonfiction, picture books and chapter books, hi-lo readers, and highly challenging texts. Most of all, we need books that authentically and realistically portray the diversity of all students, from both historical and contemporary perspectives.

It is not enough to have books about diverse cultures—the books need to be good, really good—knock-your-socks-off and change-your-worldview good.

For 25 years, Lincoln Public Schools has been meeting this challenge through an initiative known as MOSAIC. A dedicated group of librarians, educators, and community members systematically seeks out the newest and best titles by and about diverse cultures and people. The committee reads and rigorously reviews each title according to the quality of content and the perspective of cultural authenticity for an outline of the main categories addressed through the review process). Only titles that meet the committee criteria for excellence become part of the MOSAIC collection. These titles are then actively promoted to teachers, librarians, administrators, curriculum specialists, students, and families so that they can be purchased by individual school libraries; integrated into curriculum; and, most importantly, put into the hands of the students who need them, whether as a reflection and affirmation of their own lives or as a
### MOSAIC Review Key Categories

- Accuracy and authenticity
- Content and perspective
- Design and artwork
- Characterization and setting (fiction)
- Literary quality

means to better understand the lives and experiences of others.

When MOSAIC began in Lincoln Public Schools in 1991, it was a strategy for the district to meet Nebraska Department of Education Rule 16, legislation requiring all schools to provide current and unbiased information about African American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic cultures. The original display was a small event, drawing from previously published titles and the few newly published multicultural titles available at that time. The MOSAIC committee reached out to local cultural centers, which provided authentic artifacts and a commitment to help support the initiative with materials, resources, and community involvement. The culminating event was a month-long display at the district central office, where stakeholders could see the depth and breadth of multicultural resources available to them, with the goal that teachers and curriculum specialists would identify titles to be integrated into classroom instruction and made available to students through their libraries. After the event, the MOSAIC titles became part of the permanent, central professional collection for use by district educators.

Twenty-five years later, MOSAIC continues to impact our district by informing teachers, librarians, and curriculum designers about high-quality multicultural resources. The committee of literature-savvy teachers and librarians scours educational journals and reviews sources to identify newly published multicultural materials. Titles from both major publishing houses and small independent publishers are purchased to create the collection. Reviewers receive continual professional development in cultural proficiency and have developed detailed rubrics to guide their decision making as they...
analyze and evaluate resources. Many hours of research and consideration are involved in the review process to ensure that titles do not perpetuate stereotypes or misinformation. Often, reviewers call on the expertise of diverse colleagues and students to provide authentic perspective. The priority is always to identify titles that are accurate, authentic, and of high literary quality. Only titles that receive excellent reviews are promoted to the MOSAIC collection.

Although MOSAIC is no longer limited to a month-long display, a new display of the most current MOSAIC resources is launched each year. We display MOSAIC in September, with all of the featured titles, artifacts, and resources on display at the district central office. School board members, district staff, and the community are invited to attend. Once the initial celebration display is over, it is divided into several smaller, grade-level-specific displays that travel to schools across the district throughout the year. Schools host the smaller MOSAIC display for a month, allowing teachers, students, and families to experience the display, check out and read titles, and recommend titles for purchase by their school librarians. By the end of the school year, the multicultural books and materials will have been seen and experienced by teachers and students at 22 elementary schools and 16 secondary schools.

MORE IS NEEDED

In 2015, more than 280 titles were chosen to be a part of the MOSAIC display. All had been published within the last two years, and every title met the rigorous evaluation criteria of the MOSAIC committee. The selections included a healthy balance of fiction and nonfiction, a variety of reading levels from preschool to professional, and nearly every genre and format imaginable. We no longer limit the collection to the original four cultures defined by Rule 16. We have expanded it to include books and materials that attempt to eliminate stereotypes, racism, and bigotry of all kinds and in all cultures around the world.

In an age when there is a recognized shortage of diverse books, 280 titles seem like a wealth of options. However, when broken down by interest and reading level and further categorized by specific culture, we still find that we do not have enough quality resources to serve all of our children well. What Lincoln does have is a system in place for intentionally increasing the amount and quality of multicultural literature available in our schools. There is a district expectation that teachers and librarians continually expand their knowledge and awareness of multicultural literature and integrate it into instruction. Additionally, we strive to impact the publishing of quality resources that are a small but much-needed market in our libraries and classrooms. We provide publishing companies with our thoughtfully written reviews in the hope that we may
have a small yet significant voice in informing publishers that authentic, accurate, and quality multicultural literature does indeed have a market in our schools and is worth the investment.

**MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS**

As we look to the future, our intention is to ignite a renewed interest in and excitement about the MOSAIC display by reformatting it to be more interactive for our audience. In addition to our traditional showcase of books, our plan is to create a display that engages students through technology and hands-on experiences. We envision pairing QR codes with specific titles, leading students to video or audio clips that may pique interest or further their learning about the ideas and information presented in the book. We imagine a station where students can access popular music from around the world and another where they use virtual reality technology to walk down the streets and experience major world cities and historical sites. One station may challenge students to create art or music that is directly inspired by an individual book; another might challenge participants to write persuasively to challenge a particular sort of stereotype or bigotry. With the use of iPads, students can add their own family stories and cultural experiences to a digital collection that grows and develops as the display travels from school to school. Our definition of "multicultural" materials will grow to include digital resources, websites, apps, ebooks, and audiobooks. Because of the online nature, many of the resources will be available to students and teachers even after the MOSAIC display has moved from their school.

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remains the same: to identify the best multicultural materials for children and young adults and intentionally increase the amount of those resources available to students in libraries and classrooms. It is not an easy process, nor is it a haphazard one. The effort relies on smart, dedicated professionals who are willing to continually grow their understanding of diverse cultures and apply their expertise to hundreds of titles each year. It takes the commitment of district librarians to host and promote MOSAIC and to dedicate a portion of the budget to purchasing high-interest, high-quality multicultural titles identified by colleagues and students. District funding is earmarked for the purchase of diverse review titles, as well as compensation of MOSAIC committee members. It is an initiative that is critical to the district goals and goes far beyond the original mission of meeting the requirements of Rule 16. It has become necessary to meet the needs of the students of Lincoln Public Schools. The students live in a diverse world; they deserve an authentic, unbiased understanding of this world. They deserve to explore a variety of ideas, diverse perspectives, and challenged truths. Students deserve a chance to see themselves and their culture validated in the words and images of powerful stories.

For these reasons, Lincoln Public Schools dedicates time and resources to ensuring that the MOSAIC display continues to identify and promote the best new multicultural resources each year. Teachers and curriculum specialists do not have the time, expertise, or funding to seek out, purchase, and critically evaluate new diverse resources. However, these limitations do not serve as a barrier to providing critical resources to our students—MOSAIC makes it easy for teachers, librarians, and curriculum specialists to identify the best multicultural materials. MOSAIC makes it possible for them to incorporate new titles into their collections and instructional design with confidence in the quality and authenticity of the resources. In Lincoln Public Schools, we know that all of our students benefit from rich histories and varied viewpoints. Finding and integrating multicultural resources that both affirm and expand student understanding of their world is important work, and our students deserve a systematic process that gives educators the tools they need to effectively cultivate a diverse, inclusive, and astute world view.

RESOURCES


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