IDENTIFYING AND PROMOTING
DIVERSITY AWARENESS IN YA FICTION

by

Christina P. Biart

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

December, 2015
ABSTRACT

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One concurrent trend in both library science and education is promoting diversity in literature. This review of literature attempts to define and clarify the meaning of diversity in the context of young adult (YA) fiction and how to promote diversity in a school library or classroom. The literature review highlights and describes areas of diversity in both literature content and various book formats. The research outlines how educators use diversity awareness to benefit learners and briefly explore ways in which promoting diversity aids in both reading and learning. This research paper includes a bibliography of available resources for promoting diversity awareness and locating advocates.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

One growing trend that is paralleled in both library science and education is the call for more diversity in literature. This is a response to changing population demographics and acknowledgement of gaps in current pedagogy. Within the context of secondary education, reading ties in heavily with grades and test scores, and is an essential skill needed for any subject.

*Diversity* is an ambiguous and encompassing term. In this review, *diversity* means both multicultural awareness and diversity in book formats beyond printed chapter books that can meet the needs of students with different learning styles. While librarians, teachers, parents, and other educators strive to promote quality reading material, a mismatch exists on what constitutes diversity in reading material. Compounded by this confusion and bias is the general unawareness of what diversity in YA literature can achieve and emphasize in both reading for enjoyment and aiding in learning. The general implication or use of *diversity* is often the inclusion of multicultural perspectives, but research in both education and library science reveals that diversity can also be implied beyond content to special interests and even the physical format of the book.

Purpose of the Study

This review of literature focuses on the impact of diversity promotion in young adult or YA fiction and its primary readers. The study was written and designed as a potential information source with school librarians and interested educators as the primary audience, as promoting reading has been an interest shared both by classroom teachers and librarians. Reading is an essential skill for those living in the United States and affects daily life. However,
teachers and librarians find that many youth, especially minorities like Hispanics and African-Americans, do not enjoy reading. Minorities and youth with special needs often struggle in school, partially due to lack of interest in available reading material. This lack of interest later translates to subpar literacy skills that bleed into other areas of life and weighs heavily on future success in adulthood. In this literature review, diversity is defined in relation to both the content and format of YA literature. Educational use of diverse resources is a means for promoting diversity awareness in students and teachers. The growing need for diversity in YA literature is described along with a discussion of how the need for diversity awareness might be met through the use of appropriate literature.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include availability of materials published and the researcher’s access to available material. Several print resources were found in local libraries in the Fort Leonard Wood area, but the majority of resources were found through online databases. Due to the nature of the study, author bias was accepted as a study norm and alternative views were explored for balance. The scope of the data collection includes journals, books, articles, and professional webzines mostly published after 2009. Content was limited to studies that featured information related to or included teenagers or young adults, and addressed education, alternative education, libraries, cultural responsiveness, and minority studies.

**Questions Guiding the Study**

The following research questions guided the research:

1. Why is diversity awareness needed?
2. How is diversity awareness supported by content and format?
3. How is diversity awareness supported in libraries and classrooms?
Definition of Terms

Audio books – books read aloud to the reader via digital or playable devices (i.e. Playaways)

Cultural responsiveness – acknowledging cultural differences and integrating awareness in educational and social practices

Educators – primarily school librarians but also include teachers, administration, parents, and other individuals that purposefully influence learning

Eurocentric – mostly implies Caucasian or white race of European origin

Fidgets – small devices or toys like stress balls and Tangle Jr. used for sensory stimulation and focus in special education

Graphic novels – a book format featuring cartoon drawings with longer narrative than those found in comic books (i.e. *American Born Chinese* by Gene Yang, *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore, *Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman)

LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) – blanket acronym for non-heterosexual individuals

Manga – a Japanese graphic novel often with translated text and pages that read from right to left

Manhwa – Korean graphic novel and counterpart to manga with images presented left to right

Otome games – mobile applications accessed through smartphone and tablets in which players can access or unlock new content through game play

Scanslations – digital scans of foreign comics in which the original text was removed and replaced with translations and shared online

Visual and Interactive novels – digital novels with additional content beyond written text such as sound and motion
YA – shortened version of “young adult” and concerns the body of work produced for people between the ages of 12 to 21 years of age; the research focuses primarily on YA fiction

**Research Design**

This study was a review of available literature and resources. The results of reviewing and filtering content of available and related literature were used to answer the questions proposed in this research paper. Several print resources were found within local libraries in the Fort Leonard Wood and Pulaski County area, but the majority of resources were located online. Search results were located through *ProQuest Central, Education Research Complete, Google,* and *Academic Search Elite.* Key terms used for study search included ‘diversity in literature,’ ‘multiracial trends in literature,’ ‘African-American readers,’ ‘Hispanic readers,’ ‘manga,’ ‘ELL resources,’ ‘YA readers,’ ‘teenager reading,’ ‘diversity,’ ‘educational gap,’ ‘gender reading,’ ‘youth reading preferences,’ ‘cultural responsiveness,’ and ‘marketing YA books.’
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One recurring trend in libraries is the call for diversity. However defining *diversity* proves to be complicated. Diversity remains a vague and flaccid concept most likely due to the word’s ubiquitous nature. For example, diversity is often defined as the state or condition of being different (Dictionary.com sec. 1; Merriam-Webster sec. 1). Yet educators are being called on to acknowledge and address what is meant by diversity and how it translates in the classroom, in libraries, and among readers (Howrey and Whelan-Kim 123-37).

Much of the research literature on diversity in library collections implies or directly states that the one group of the population that is likely to benefit most from diversity is young adults (Abrams par. 14-19; Galligher and Allington 2-8; Little 8; Strickland par. 1-42). This group includes preteens to early twenty year olds. Young adults are considered the hardest group to engage in reading and libraries (Hughes-Hassell and Agosto sec. 5). Increasing diversity in the young adult (YA) literature is a strategy for engaging young adult readers (Bucher 521; Brodie and Nichols 442; Carr et al., 148; Snowbell 43-5). Diversity and the awareness of diversity are vital in the United States’ society due to the changing demographics and multicultural perspective. Children from minority groups are projected to become over 50% of that population by 2020 (Colby and Orman, 13).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the United States will have a monumental shift in population. The minority races will become the majority by 2050 (Little 8; “The Census Bureau…” 198). This means that Hispanics, African-Americans, and other races cataloged as minorities will outnumber their Caucasian counterparts. The demographics also suggest that most future children born in the United States will be considered multiracial (Little 8). However,
library fiction collections do not fully support or coincide with the large minority of readers who are not Eurocentric (Galligher and Allington 2-8; Little 8).

The lack of diversity and diversity awareness is a current flaw in YA and youth reading choices (Abrams par. 14-19; Bucher 521, Strickland par. 1-42). Reading is a necessary skill for learning and successful life navigation (Smith 1-6), but not all reading resources are equal due to the lack of diversity. Teachers and librarians in the United States spend over a decade collectively honing reading skills to empower each student and instill lifelong learning skills (Strickland par. 14-21). Researchers suggest that educators of young adults be more actively discerning of the resources they promote to readers in homes, libraries, and the classroom (Brenna 514-21; Brodie and Nichols 442; Krause 238-41). Educators are called to delve deeper into text, investigate whether the main characters are accurately depicted, and consider what the fiction might be implying about a particular culture or group of people. First, areas where diversity awareness is needed in education or can be improved are identified. Then, ways to address diversity through both the content and format of YA resources are discussed. Finally, the review of research will explain how educators and librarians find and promote diverse resources in their own communities of influence.

**Cultural Responsiveness in Education**

The literature on diversity calls for educators to acknowledge youth reading choices and preferences. The idea that youth tend to be more attracted to characters that resemble themselves is a long held finding among many children’s librarians and aligns with social cognitive theory (Stern 331-46). Studies have further implied that people tend to befriend people similar to them even when more diversity of people is available (Groeger par. 1-12). This phenomenon is a further argument for diversity advocacy and for educators and librarians to provide students with
diverse resources. Teens themselves point out that library collections are not diverse enough and support only a portion of their demographic (Hughes-Hassell and Agosto 35-36, Hussain and Munshi 429-34). Students will likely have difficulty finding characters similar to themselves if books in public and school libraries continue to feature predominately Caucasian characters. Having literature collections that feature diverse characters allows for more youth to be drawn into the world of reading while gaining understanding and acknowledging different perspectives.

With the advances of the Internet and technology, students hold a different position from their parents and forefathers when it comes to diversity. The world of a child seems much bigger, with easy connections to resources and people across the world. Expecting youth to navigate a global community without understanding, accepting, and appreciating diversity promotes hubris and folly. Educators facilitate education with diversity awareness and use literary resources to guide youth before adulthood.

The available literature implies and supports the concept that diversity awareness is both multi-faceted and impacts communities. Many countries will have two to three distinct cultures within their borders. However, due to the global citizenship and various factors like improving employment conditions and seeking better living conditions, many schools around the world have seen an increase in the number of unique cultures and races represented in their student body. This influx has resulted in a corresponding educational movement called, “cultural responsiveness.” Statistically, the students who fair worse in schools in the United States, usually African-American and Latinos (Gallagher and Allington, 14-18), are also the same students who benefit from diversity awareness and advocacy. Cultural responsiveness in education attempts to shift “cultural and color blindness,” teaching to cultural proficiency.
A specific example of the need for culture responsiveness is among African-American males living in Missouri. Ferguson, Missouri, became headline news in August 2014 following the shooting of Michael Brown, a young, unarmed, African-American male. Afterwards, a cascade of reports and studies came about the Ferguson area, highlighting issues and discrepancies involving race. Among those studies was one from UCLA name the state of Missouri first in African-American male suspensions and reinforced the “school-to-prison pipeline” rhetoric (“Editorial: Another…” par 1-8). School policies are often blamed for discounting cultural differences and creating atmospheres that do not provide equal success for all. For example, school suspensions are reported to be unsuccessful in remedying behavior; students are not remorseful and will often repeat the same offense (Parker 2015). More in-depth studies reveal that educators fail African-American males by not acknowledging or accommodating for physical and learning differences of this specific group in comparison to their peers (Kenjufu 9-28, Williams par 1-5). Limited reading choices and lack of reading proficiency exacerbate an already difficult learning environment and hinders success (Flowers 58-62; Gallagher and Allington 3-24; Kenjufu 81-89; Smith 11-17). The case of African-American males and their performance in schools, taken holistically, supports the call to understand differences in race, class, and culture and move toward culture responsiveness.

Diversity can be multifaceted. Diversity awareness starts with acknowledging differences among youth and their personal interests and preferences. Several groups of people need more quality representation, appearance frequency, or both when portrayed through the lens of YA literature. Teenagers show abundant interest in cultures, religions, and lifestyles different from their own. Yet most young adults are hard pressed to recall a literary character of Asian descent created by a United States author (Rajgopal 199-200). This issue runs counter to the trending
interest in Asian culture, which is clearly seen in abundant fan “scanslations,” photo scans with translated texts, and subtitling of popular manga and television series (Lee 131-33). Interest in Asian cultures exists but the resources available to teens seem scarce, causing youth, particularly young women, to ignore copyright and trade laws to meet growing demand (Lee 131-43).

Hispanics in YA texts often feature cultural hybridity, in which characters must find balance between two cultures (Cook 25-30). This is an example of how YA texts promote diversity awareness. This same struggle is mirrored by many youth, whether they are Jewish, on the Autism spectrum, or transgender. Reading about characters similar to themselves aids in their self-identification into adulthood. This relatable idea can be carried on to other areas of diversity awareness.

**Diversity Via Content and Via Book Formats**

Promoting diversity in schools and libraries means seeking content featuring and including diverse characters and also embracing alternative book formats beyond traditional print text. Several benefits and reasons for promoting diversity in libraries and schools exist. Also, educators who are aware and active against bias and shortcomings in representations of diversity in literary content and reading format will be better equipped to promote diversity and its benefits.

One area that current YA fiction often falls short of is inclusion of diverse groups or characters. The frequency of characters that represent African-Americans and individuals with disabilities does not correlate with the general population; the average hero in YA fiction is stereotyped as a white, middle class male (Cart and Jenkins 115). Many multicultural groups struggle with finding quality representation in YA fictional characters. Native Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and LGBTQ teens often struggle with unrealistic representations and
stereotypes in fictional text. In addition the research on diversity implies that the issue with any stereotype is that it overly generalizes character traits and often represents more myth than fact (Lequerica-Calvo par. 1-15). For example, fictional writings of Native Americans are usually intended as flattering portrayals of a proud and interesting race of people. However, shoddy research and common overgeneralization has portrayed an unrealistic but accepted single version of a varied culture of people (Reese par. 1-11).

The general thread of consensus between all of these varied categories reveals the underlying importance of diversity awareness. Good resources “educate readers and advocate on behalf of youth by using literature to challenge readers to critique the ways in which physical environments, socio-economic status, and education impart one’s choices and outcomes” (Davis 128). Embracing diversity is not about pleasing everyone but allowing everyone to have an authentic voice. Librarians and teachers promote diversity awareness by providing good resources in many facets and forms (Langerman 132). While the following quote focuses primarily on students with disabilities, the sentiment within is one repeated by many writers advocating for more frequent and accurate portrayals of diverse groups in fiction:

In addition to representing the world and its contents, I believe that stories can change the world. By offering mirrors and windows to readers, stories build understandings of self and other critical to positive renderings of identity and community. As an educator, I think that the stories we offer to children in our homes and classrooms matter. As a researcher, I think there is important work yet to be done in cataloguing the messages children receive from contemporary texts portraying characters with different abilities, as well as noticing voices yet unheard on the textual landscape. As a writer, I know that my stories have
changed me—have changed how I think about the navigation of disabilities from a personal standpoint as I attempted to create characters from the inside out.

(Brenna 514-21)

Another key type of diversity in YA literature is diversity in format. Some educators can be guilty of ignoring or belittling alternative resources as not “real” books. Alternative books formats greatly supplement and encourage reading in young adults (Ellis 21; McTaggart 46). Educators are aware that students learn in a variety of different ways, such as utilizing multiple intelligences and learning styles. This knowledge is applied by providing diverse reading choices for students, as the following highlights reveal. For example, a student who has English as a Second Language (ESL) would likely benefit from having an audio recording to read along with printed text (Stone-Harris 2008). Reluctant readers, who include a significant percentage of 14-20 year olds, and students with specific challenges like ESL, respond positively to alternative book formats similar to those found in graphic novels (Snowbell 2005; Stone-Harris 2008). The literature also suggests that a majority of boys prefer short, visual text, such as demonstrated in graphic novels and comics (Bucher and Manning 44-45; Glencoe/McGraw Hill 2008; McGraw 2005). The available research literature confirms several ways alternative formats, such as audio, graphic novels, manga, visual novels, and picture books, are used to facilitate learning.

Audio books are traditionally an afterthought in libraries because of their higher costs and upkeep. However, sales and production of audiobooks have significantly increased in the past decade due to growing digital availability and an increasingly mobile population (Moyer 340-54). Audio books also remain a powerful tool for ESL students and struggling readers to listen and connect words and letter sounds with written text (Stone-Harris 23-4). A further example of the many applications of audio books is that some students with Attention Deficit and
Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) find that they are able to retain information better while listening to audio and performing simple tactile exercises or with the use of simple “fidgets” such as stress balls and theraputty (Rotz and Wright par. 1-6). It makes sense to encourage youth to read by making preferred formats, such as audio books and graphic novels, available in schools and libraries (Krause 238-41).

The available literature and current book sales suggest a growing acceptance of graphic novels and comics in libraries and schools. The lack of abundant text is no longer a valid excuse to exclude these genre in libraries, especially considering the growing percentage of visual learners (Snowbell 43-5) emerging in the classroom (see appendix 1). Librarians who do not include these formats ignore the way that most teens spend a vast majority of their time, reading short texts via social networking (Hughes and Agosto par. 3-12). As mentioned earlier, this genre of book suits a lot of male preferences (Mohr “Comparison” 81-104). Graphic novels and manga are also considered positive literary resources for students with autism (Rozema 60-8), and many librarians use graphic novels as a scaffold for reluctant readers (Ellis 21; Snowbell 43-5). Current media trends in cartoons and movie productions such as X-Men and The Avengers also motivate readers to seek more graphic novels. This has helped fostered general acceptance of the genre (Ellis 21).

One specific form of graphic novel that librarians and educators may want to make a note of is manga. Manga books are translated graphic novels, usually hailing from Japan. The Korean counterpart to manga is called manhwa. Manga appears to be sort of a conundrum in the library due to its right to left or “flipped” reading style and dubious beginnings (Brienza 101-17; McTaggart 46). Manga is exceedingly popular with young adults and often dismissed by educators and librarians (Brienza 101-17; Ruh 179-82), yet the manga industry experienced a
350% increase in sales from 2002-2007 (Brienza 111). Publishers like Viz and Yen Press have brought popular series like Pokémon, Naruto, and Black Butler to audiences in the United States. Books that retain their cultural integrity can be a bonus by introducing new readers to foreign concepts and ideals unfamiliar to them (Kuhr, Jeff, and Shele 1302-3). In this way they promote diversity acceptance and explore common social themes relevant to young adults. The “anime” drawing style has been influencing children’s cartoons for quite some time and is readily accepted by current youth as familiar. Avatar: The Last Airbender is a Nickelodeon Channel cartoon that promotes character diversity and is considered to be the first merging of American and anime artistic styles (O’Brien par. 6). Manga and its growing popularity have also grown with and been shaped by another learning tool: the visual novel.

Visual novels are relatively new products, created and accessed through personal computers and the Internet. A visual novel is typically an interactive fictional story with minimal gameplay where user choices affect story outcome. Role-playing games or RPGs, such as Final Fantasy and Ace Ventura, have several visual novels embedded in their gameplay. While a majority of current products focus on younger readers, several visual novels are produced and designed specifically with young adults in mind. The literature on technological trends suggests that students should be fairly familiar with interactive books and visual novels as they often mimic and mirror console video games. Users access visual novels through programs, websites, and apps. For example, popular otome stories, short stories and dating simulation games geared toward girls and young women, combine visual novels with interactive gameplay, can be accessed through smartphones ("The Leading Japanese Otome…" par. 1-4).

Diversity can also be introduced through the use of picture books. Picture books are rich in visual, cultural, and historical elements beyond their shorter text and can be an asset for visual,
ADHD, and ELL learners (Hamilton 123). Picture books are a traditional staple of lower elementary libraries and classrooms. However, picture books are often cast aside for more text-heavy resources needed to promote reading fluency and literacy. The reviewed literature claims that hurrying through this resource could be a missed opportunity as picture books invite imagination and depict unspoken inferences (Brodie and Nichols 442; Carr et al., 148; Hamilton 123). For example, a short text can segue into new unit discussions while analyzing illustrations of different facial expressions, postures, and clothing choices are beneficial for youth on the Autism spectrum and ELL learners (Snowball 43-5).

**Discover and Promote Diversity in the Library and Classroom**

Having defined diversity and the importance of integrating diversity into the library, and explored how educators use this awareness to discover and promote diversity in their own spheres of influence, this research paper addresses how to acquire and promote these resources. Educators, and in particular librarians, actively market and advocate diversity to their students (Pearle par. 6-7). They use several ways to find and implement fiction with diversity awareness: seeking assistance from publishers, entertainment companies, and group book discussions. These sources aid in the promotion of diversity resources.

One way to gain more diverse resources is to seek variety from publishers and advocate for diversity in YA and children’s fiction. The publishing world is changing, as it has become increasingly easier to gauge market trends and support new authors (Springen 21). Publishing innovative and diverse works by new writers is easier and more cost effective than previously. The ability of authors to self publish has allowed publishers to view an author’s success online before committing to a contract and expenses of producing a book. While large publishing companies do not see many books from minority authors, innovation comes from small presses
This process also translates to bringing more diverse resources to youth and YA libraries.

Educators also gain tools produced by the movie industry. Because of the heavy influence Hollywood has on youth, many scientific and social checklists exist featuring diversity in the entertainment industry, such as the Bechdel test, a popular checklist that measures a work’s gender bias. It has also recently been revealed that, at least in terms of movies, introducing elements of diversity and being diversity aware leads to commercial success. In terms of popularity, recent films passing the Bechdel test remain equal to or better than those that fail the test (McDonald par. 2-4). While mostly applied to motion pictures, it stands to reason that such checklists would work with YA literature to check for diversity awareness within the work’s content.

Book clubs and online forums for students serve as sources for advocating for diversity and diversity awareness. Having sound resources allows discussion of important social and life issues beyond the walls of the classroom (Davis 148-49). Open discussion allows for more connections and understanding of the text to be made. Group discussion and book clubs also work toward promoting and marketing diversity, as seen with the popular Oprah’s Book Club. The Oprah Book Club has often illustrated how reading promotes group discussion on important topics, including diversity (Fitzgerald 24-27, Taylor 37-42). A book club is also a solid example of the power of how group behaviors work in marketing books.

Marketing diversity awareness in the classroom and library is just as challenging as catering to the masses. Several techniques and strategies are available about book promotion for youth. Most techniques use psychological methods to achieve their goals. For example, studies have long indicated that one of the most powerful motivators is “group conformity” (Levitt and
Daubner 51-52). Group conformity propels individuals to correspond with group dynamics. The condition has even been labeled as a survival instinct and is accepted as a group norm (Newton 842-43). Tapping into this mentality, classroom and library displays feature positive peer and critic reviews.

Perhaps the biggest advocate for promoting diversity lies within local and school communities. It is often within schools that students’ abilities and love of reading are fostered. Something that diversity awareness can do for school communities is to help avoid “readercide.” The term “readercide” was introduced in 2009 and can be defined as the killing of the love of reading. Gallagher and Allington advocate for a change in educators’ perspectives:

I can’t think of a nobler cause than teachers who spend their lives dedicated to improving their students’ literacy. But isn’t it disconcerting to recognize that despite massive efforts, massive amounts of money spent, and massive attention to the decline of reading, we are still losing large numbers of young readers?

I have witnessed this pattern in too many schools, in too many states, to draw any conclusion other than a painful one: that the practices we, as educators, are employing to make students better readers are often killing them. Intentions are not the problem; our practices are the problem. As teachers of adolescents, we must take a hard look at what we are doing to potential readers. After thirteen years of schooling, many graduates are thankful they may never have to open another book again. A generation of readers is being lost, and it is time for teachers to consider how and why our practices may be contributing to this decline.
The current state of our education system and where the responsibility lies for its general success and failings is greatly varied across multiple studies and fields. However, educators and educating bodies agree that cultural responsiveness and diversity has impactful benefits (NEA 2006). Awareness of differences and similarities in young adults remains pressing and current in educational discourse. Cultural responsive strategies help educators to reach young adults within and outside of classrooms and libraries (Finkbeiner 11-14).

Summary
The research presented here champions the need for diversity and diversity awareness in YA literature. Due to changing demographics and the global workplace, youth living in the United States have inherited a much larger and more complicated world to navigate as an adult than their parents did. Research implies that diversity awareness or the lack of diversity has a strong influence on how students connect with reading.

Educators are urged to be proactive. To just include or represent minority groups and examples of diversity within YA and youth literature is not considered enough to promote diversity. It is recommended that educators such as librarians and teachers seek and embrace resources that represent accurate and non-stereotypical characters in YA and youth literature. Learners are also more successful when they have a variety of format choices to read. Resources that are diverse in context and format allow students to make more connections with real life experiences to learn and grow.

Advocating diversity is a growing and urgent need that falls on educators such as parents, librarians, and teachers. Community and publishers also play a significant role in supporting
diversity promotion. The available literature provides compelling evidence that seeking and supporting diversity, in both cultural and physical forms, benefits and empowers readers.
Diversity in literature, and particularly YA fiction, is important to pursue, promote, and expand upon. Diversity means changing bias and viewpoints and embracing alternative viewpoints. Educators play a significant part in identifying and promoting diverse resources. The content of the literature review answered the guiding questions about diversity in YA literature: why is diversity awareness needed, how is diversity awareness supported by content and format, and how is diversity awareness supported in libraries and classrooms?

**The Need for Diverse Literature**

Diversity awareness refers to the inclusion and promotion of different lifestyles and cultures. In diversity aware libraries and classrooms, a variety of cultures and self-identities are represented in literature collections and in the multiple formats for reading available. Young adults are able to identify and associate themselves with some of the protagonists on jacket covers and in the narratives they read. Our population demographic is changing, and the United States will no longer be considered Eurocentric by 2050. While mature readers can be more flexible, reluctant readers from diverse populations need self-connections to characters in books in order to see the value of reading.

Diversity awareness is flexible to a wide range of learning styles and needs. There is a body of research indicating that culturally responsive and diverse literature promotes reading in young adults, especially among minorities, and developing more readers translates to better grades for these students. Young adults who embrace diversity also benefit by becoming culturally aware and global citizens. Diversity awareness aids in both student identification and cultural awareness.
Diversity in Content and Format

The research indicates that diversity awareness in YA literature results in stories that include multicultural and special interest groups. Diversity also extends to book formats beyond the traditional bounded pages. A diversity aware library or classroom literature collection features books with protagonists of both genders and of various racial descent, and promotes diversity by embracing picture books and manga as teaching tools.

The research has shown that diversity in both content and format appeals to reluctant readers. Diverse book formats positively enhance learning for students with special needs such as ELL, Autism, and ADHD. Alternative formats also appeal to a variety of learning styles and multiple intelligences. Young adults are exposed and their lives enriched due to influences and ideas from resources that promote diversity awareness.

How to Promote and Advocate for Diversity Awareness

Educators within the school community are the primary force behind diversity promotion. Support from publishing industries and local community aid in creating a diverse collection for YA readers. Promotion of diversity in its various content and formats involves singular influence and large-scale cooperation. In order to promote and expand diversity, active participation and momentum needs to be generated by educators.

There are a variety of ways that educators and consumers of YA literature can promote diversity such as supporting publishers and writers that show diversity awareness. Another way to advocate for diversity is by hosting book clubs and promoting positive examples of YA books. Understanding how to market books and types of promotion strategies can be advantageous toward promoting diverse book selections.
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APPENDIX 1
SUGGESTED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND RESOURCES

http://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com/

This website features titles for elementary, middle, and high school students. Recipient of the American Indian Library Association’s Youth Literature awards are also included in this resource. The site is updated regularly and contains many book reviews and related articles involving Native American literature.


ANN’s comprehensive website features summaries and user ratings of several manga and anime published internationally. The website features many reviews, opinion/referral pieces, and cultural information that will interest Japanophiles or otaku. The website is updated frequently with new content every week.


This website features a collection of resources for all ages. The selections are often chosen for their representation of Asian-American culture and responsible representation in fiction literature.

This website was created in 2011 and regularly features titles of diversity rich YA literature. The site includes many booklists and reviews organized by interests. Readers can also find several resources and links about supporting and promoting the need for diversity in YA fiction.


Featuring a foreword by former YALSA president, Michael Carr, this resource features resources that echo current libraries. *Booklist* is a familiar resource for many librarians and this compilation volume even has a section with graphic novels.


This resource posts news and release information of upcoming otome games. The games list feature over 300 titles and includes story synopsis, purchase information, age ratings, and available platforms. The site is updated regularly and includes reviews, related links, and guides.


The author and Patricia Ruggiano Schmidt have authored several papers and textbooks on the topic of cultural responsive teaching. This recent publication features current information and techniques that educators can apply and use toward creating cultural responsive acceptance and understanding.

As the title suggests, this book features ideas and examples that can be used in several content areas. The book contains several lessons based on picture books to illustrate and expand in language arts, math, science, or social studies content. Most of the lessons tie in several learning styles and real-life connections.


Goodreads is a popular website for bibliophiles. The website features information, summaries, and reviews of many popular titles. Specific genres, characters, and interests can be located via user tags and booklists. Educators and students should be able to find several titles through this resource.


This resource is a user-generated list of 50 books for African-American teens. Some of the books on list include: “The Coldest Winter Ever” by Sister Souljah, “Dreams from My Father” by Barack Obama, and “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou.


<http://childrens100.nypl.org/YA2014/#/tag/diversity>.

The New York Public Library has been a long recognized resource and authority among many librarians. Their booklist often include several recommended titles popular nationwide. Books tagged “diversity” are frequently award winning and highly acclaimed titles in YA fiction.

“Serving Diverse Teens @ Your Library” YALSA: Young Adult Library Services Association. Web. 20 Oct. 2015.


This wiki was created by YALSA, a branch of the American Library Association, and includes bibliographies, reports, and resources. Topics go beyond ethnic groups and range from “Teens who are New Americans,” to “Homeless Teens.”