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## YALS ON THE WEB

Want more YALS? Members and subscribers can access the latest and back issues of YALS digitally on the YALSA blog at http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/yals/, as well as browse supplemental YALS articles and resources.
FROM THE EDITOR

Crystle Martin

In 2015, YALSA embarked on the strategic planning process. The new organization plan (adopted by the YALSA board in spring 2016) centers on three priority areas that YALSA will focus on over the next three years. Those priority areas are Advocacy, Funder and Partner Development, and Leading the Transformation for Teen Library Services. Over the next year, each YALS issue will focus on one of these priority areas. The current issue will focus on Cultural Competency, which is part of the Leading the Transformation for Teen Library Services.

This issue includes two articles by librarians about their experiences abroad. Amanda Bressler, a Youth Services Librarian at the Newton Free Library in Massachusetts, writes about her experience living in another country for ten months and how that influenced her view of cultural competency. Jessica Lind is a pre-K through grade twelve librarian at the St. Petersburg campus of the Anglo-American School of Moscow and St. Petersburg. She describes developing cultural competency through her position.

Understanding cultural competency means really digging into the definition and the implementation. Elsa Ouvrard-Prettol, Library and Media Instructor at Natomas Charter School in Sacramento, California, provides a strong foundation for exploring cultural competency through existing research. CiKeithia Pugh, an associate with the consulting firm Equity Matters, and Erin Okuno, Executive Director of the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition, push beyond the term cultural competency and explain how focusing on culturally engaging services is essential in a teens-first approach. And Julie Stivers, a librarian at Mount Vernon School in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, highlights the importance of building relationships with teens as part of cultural competency.

There are two YALSA Highlights in this issue. The first examines the results of the recent member survey. The article is written by two members of the YALSA Research Committee, Mary Catherine Miller, a Ph.D. candidate studying literature for children and young adults at Ohio State University, and Robin Moeller, Assistant Professor of Library Science at Appalachian State University, and offers suggestions to

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sarah Hill

In the fall issue, I discussed how YALSA’s Organizational Plan (http://www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/strategicplan) will be driving change within YALSA, and the first question that YALSA’s board is focusing on right now is “what realignment within our organization needs to happen in order to create new opportunities for members to meet the needs of teens?” The plan will be implemented in phases, and a natural first step is to revisit the structure of the organization in order to make sure we’re built for success.

Internally, the board is working on restructuring itself and the Executive Committee in order to refocus the leadership so that we can successfully address the three goal areas in the organizational plan. For example, the board is expanding the focus of the traditional Governance Nominating Committee into more of a board Development Committee that would not just recruit individuals but train and support them throughout their time on the board. This change should begin in February 2017.

Beyond the board, we are also working on reenvisioning the traditional committee structure to create new opportunities for members that are opt-in, virtual, and short term. The board evaluated all 50+ committees back in June 2016, and changes to committees are taking place in phases, beginning with the fall 2016 piloting of juries in a new format—jury members are serving three-month terms and volunteering via a short form instead of the formal committee appointment process and one-year term of appointment. Beginning in February 2017, another phase will be piloting three selection committees in a new, virtual format and leveraging The Hub to showcase their work. These committees are Amazing Audiobooks, Popular Paperbacks, and Quick Picks for Young Adults. The board is looking forward to evaluating the results of the jury trial and monitoring the rollout of the three selection committees as fully virtual, and then using what we learn as a springboard to implement more exciting ways for members to opt in to short-term, virtual volunteer opportunities in YALSA.

YALSA staff is reorganizing because of the Organizational Plan, too. A new part-time position has been created to

(continued on page 11)
YALSA’s organizational plan provides a road map for the association. There are no step-by-step specifics in this road map. That’s why the YALSA board, staff, and members need to work together to plan for and design the next steps. We’ve begun that process in the continuing education (CE) realm next steps:

Rethink and restructure the virtual mentoring program. YALSA’s current mentoring program requires mentors and protégés to apply for the program, and if selected, participate in a 12-month co-learning experience. While this framework does help those new to the field to build relationships with librarians who have worked in teen services for a number of years, we’ve learned that members would prefer more flexible and short-term opportunities to work together. This is why the virtual mentoring program will be discontinued at the end of the current cycle (summer 2017) and will be restructured and relaunched sometime in fall 2017.

Discontinue the badge program. When YALSA launched the Badges for Lifelong Learning program, the association saw this as an excellent way to assist teen services staff in gaining the competencies required to achieve professional success. However, the program never caught on. In our recent member survey, when we asked about online learning and certification preferences, only five percent of respondents said they preferred badges. We will be reviewing alternatives as part of the updated competencies launch in 2017. (The badges website will no longer be available as of March 1, 2017.)

Rethink e-courses and institutes. YALSA’s current model for e-courses is to sponsor three, four-to-six week courses a year (in the fall, spring, and summer). We’ve discovered that these longer, fairly intensive virtual learning opportunities are not appealing to our members. We’ve also learned that full-day institutes, offered by a library system, state association, or state library agency, do interest the membership. While YALSA will discontinue the current focus on a regular cycle of e-courses, in spring 2017, the association will continue to develop other rich learning opportunities in either an e-course or an institute format, and offer them upon request, to interested organizations and/or members.

YALSA is deeply committed to providing high-quality continuing education opportunities for its members and others serving teens. The changes outlined herein will help us use our fiscal and human capacity wisely while better meeting CE needs. We will also be better able to provide new opportunities, including professional learning in the areas of cultural competence, leadership, and advocacy which will align directly with the association’s new organizational plan.

Stay tuned over the next several months to learn what’s new in YALSA’s CE portfolio. If you have any questions about these changes, feel free to get in touch with me, Linda W. Braun, CE Consultant, at lbraun@leonline.com.

Linda Braun is the YALSA Continuing Education Consultant and a past president of the association.
YALSA regularly surveys its members to both learn about their needs and interests and to help in the association’s data-driven decision-making processes. Last year’s survey helped to inform the development of YALSA’s new organizational plan, which included a revision to its mission and vision statements. This year’s survey focused on making connections to and moving forward with that plan. As described in the August 24, 2016, YALSA e-news, “The Board will use [the survey results] to 1) measure progress toward the goals laid out in the new organizational plan, and 2) design leadership, advocacy, and continuing education opportunities that meet member needs.” Keeping in mind these aims, this article groups member responses among topics of cultural competency, connected learning, and leadership and advocacy. As one aim of the survey looks to designing continuing education opportunities, this article also examines responses related to continuing education and provides suggestions for future research.

The majority of the 554 YALSA members who completed the survey (70.07 percent) reported working for a public library. Of the remaining 29.3 percent, 19.7 percent of respondents reported working in a school library, 7.81 percent in an “other” location (with specific responses including retired librarians, university faculty, and graduate students), 1.49 percent in an academic library, 0.56 percent in a combined public/school library, and 0.37 percent in a community college library. A majority (53.16 percent) of these libraries serve communities identified as suburban, followed by 35.69 percent serving urban communities and 26.39 percent serving rural communities. A majority of the librarians who responded to the survey either have final purchasing authority for their teen departments (53.72 percent) or make recommendations for teen purchases (46.84 percent). Supervisory capacity among respondents was split with 49.63 percent of respondents having supervisory duties over other employees and 47.21 percent having no supervisory capacity.

Many survey questions related to the implementation of “The Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action” (the Futures Report). Of the 544 that responded, 63.60 percent considered themselves “very familiar” or “somewhat familiar” with the Futures Report. Members reported having worked toward implementing many recommendations of the Futures Report; 54.04 percent have worked toward “reaching out to teens out in the community who are not regular library users,” and 52.76 percent have worked toward “building my own cultural competence skills.” YALSA has positioned cultural competency at the forefront of its transition as a way to ensure the young adult library services community reaches all teens in our communities, no matter their cultural identification.

Cultural Competency
Created in 2014, as a response to the Futures Report, the Cultural Competence Task Force defines cultural competence as “the recognition that each of us is shaped by our culture, and an appreciation of diverse cultural backgrounds through our interactions with others. It is the welcoming and
HIGHLIGHT

integration of diverse ethnicities, sexualities, cultures, incomes, and education levels into the services we provide, with an ultimate goal of enhancing the lives of our patrons and our own professional growth.”

In her 2014 article for Young Adult Library Services, Kim Dare states that an appreciation for diverse cultures backgrounds “should be evident in our programming choices, our awareness of specific needs within the communities that we serve, and our efforts to connect with teens inside and outside the walls of the library.” When asked about their implementation of the Futures Report recommendations, 52.76 percent of respondents reported working on “building my own cultural competence skills” and also reported working on other recommendations that relate to cultural competency including “discovering community needs and seeking out community partners to engage with to support those needs” (47.98 percent) and “embedding youth voice into designing, planning, delivering, and evaluating programs and services” (45.96 percent). Keeping in mind that respondents to this survey are overwhelmingly white (86.86 percent) and female (92.59 percent), efforts to increase cultural competency should both seek to represent the communities in which librarians serve while also welcoming and incorporating diverse perspectives outside members’ own lived experiences (including perspectives of youth and community that might not be regular library users).

Connected Learning

With the revision of YALSA’s mission and vision statements comes a focus on providing services teens need to engage in connected learning opportunities. Connected learning is described as a framework for learning that exists at the intersection of the teens’ own personal interest, their peer influence, and their academic drive. Crystle Martin and Mimi Ito (co-authors of “Connected Learning, Librarians, and Connecting Youth Interest”) also describe how the connected learning framework utilizes technology to make learning centered on production, of “shared purpose,” and “openly networked.” As Martin noted, “It [connected learning] is about bringing together peer and community support for interest- and passion-driven learning, and translating and linking that learning to academic success and eventually to career success.”

When asked in the survey, “When you think about ‘connected learning’ what comes to mind?” 3.31 percent of respondents selected “Not sure” as their response. Only 1.10 percent of participants selected “Learning that happens outside of the classroom,” and 7.72 percent answered “Learning that is hands-on where students experiment and create.” Responses more aligned with the definition provided by Martin and Ito included: “Learning that encompasses three spheres: academics, a learner’s own interests, and inspiring mentors and peers” (13.42 percent), and “Learning through technology and digital tools” (14.15 percent). The majority of respondents (59.01 percent) selected “All of the above” in answer to the question, and 1 percent selected “None of the above.” These findings suggest that just over half of the YALSA member respondents understand the various elements that comprise connected learning.

The notion of implementing connected learning into teen services was approached elsewhere in the survey. When asked “What recommendations of YALSA’s Futures Report have you worked toward implementing?” 33.64 percent of respondents indicated that they were already working toward “incorporating a connected learning approach to library activities.” Similarly, when asked “What knowledge or skills related to implementing the vision for teen services outlined in the Futures Report would you like to learn from someone else?” 34.56 percent of respondents indicated that they would like to learn about “incorporating a connected learning approach to library activities.” Of the fourteen choices for continuing education topics, connected learning was the fourth most-often selected choice. These results suggest that YALSA members have identified a need for learning opportunities about implementing connected learning into teen services. The data also suggest that there is a portion of the membership that has already begun implementation and may be able to help developing those learning opportunities for fellow members.

Leadership and Advocacy

Within the organizational plan, the YALSA Board identified leadership as being a strong component in leading the transformation of teen services. Portions of the survey asked questions that helped define the variety of leadership possibilities YALSA members may take advantage of both within the organization and in their own local library communities. When asked “What type of leadership development opportunities in YALSA have you participated in?” 58.64 percent responded that they had “read a YALSA article or blog post on a leadership topic”; 33.09 percent “listened to a YALSA webinar on a leadership topic”; 32.35 percent “attended a YALSA conference session or workshop on a leadership topic”; and 29.23 percent indicated that “I have not participated in any of these.” Additionally, 25.92 percent had “served as a committee, jury, task force, or advisory board chair”; 8.64 percent had participated in a “mentoring program”; 4.04 percent had “served on the board of directors”; 1.84 percent...
participated in the “Emerging Leader program”; and 0.55 percent had been a part of the “board fellow program.” Less than 4 percent (3.13 percent) indicated that they had participated in “Other.” A closer examination of the responses representing “Other” revealed this to include participants who have presented information on behalf of YALSA, have written for YALSA-related publications, and those who have served on YALSA committees.

The survey also asked participants about the leadership role they would be willing to play in teaching knowledge and skills in a continuing education context. In response to the question “What knowledge or skills relating to implementing the vision for teen services outlined in the Futures Report could you help someone else learn?” 91 percent of survey participants indicated that they could help someone else learn a new content or skills. The survey results related to leadership suggest that a great deal of new knowledge and skills could be taught to members by other YALSA members and that the potential for new or additional leadership opportunities may be welcome by members.

The organizational plan also focuses on issues of advocacy, specifically, in part, on the nature of which YALSA members are advocating for teen services. The question, “What types of library advocacy activities have you engaged in within the past year?” reflects this focus. The majority of survey participants (80.70 percent) indicated that they “sought out information on current trends in youth development, libraries, or education” and 60.66 percent “spoke up about teen issues in formal and informal settings.” Fewer than half (45.96 percent) of participants “implemented positive change in teen services by working with administration and coworkers”; 45.40 percent “identified specific goals for a teen program or service and developed a plan to reach them”; and 40.99 percent “collected and used information about the community to inform planning for programs and services.” Those advocacy activities in which members engaged in less often included “built programs and services that regularly provide opportunities for teens to be heard” (38.05 percent); “collected data on library programs and services to aid in envisioning future teen services” (36.58 percent); “worked with coworkers, administration, and stakeholders to overcome barriers to teen services” (33.09 percent); “set annual goals for the overall teen services program that directly support the library’s mission, strategic plan, etc.” (29.23 percent); instructional support and reader’s advisory, applying for grants, and using social media for political advocacy.

Continuing Education
One goal of the 2016 Member Survey was to gather information for the purpose of designing continuing education opportunities that supported member needs. By asking members what they particularly desired to learn, and their preferred learning methods, the survey provides valuable data for future YALSA endeavors. YALSA members were asked what they would like to learn about in the following topics: implementing the vision for teen services, leadership, cultural competency, and advocacy. Respondents were encouraged to “select all that apply” when considering their responses. One survey question asked respondents “What is your preferred method of online learning?” and 41.36 percent selected “live webinar,” 35.11 percent selected “short recorded sessions,” 12.87 percent selected “multi-week e-class,” 5.33 percent selected “digital badges,” and 5.33 percent selected “Other.” Specific “Other” responses included learning via online text-based articles, recorded and archived webinars, self-paced online courses, continuing education video instruction, particularly live and recorded webinars, focusing on concrete and practical implementation of connected learning.

Based on the responses provided, YALSA could benefit from increased web-based video instruction, particularly live and recorded webinars, focusing on concrete and practical implementation of connected learning.
and podcasts. Based on these results, access to live and recorded webinars via the YALSA e-Learning Library, or YeLL! (www.ala.org/yalsamemonly/webinar/webinars), is preferred by many respondents.

When asked about their desires to learn knowledge and skills related to the vision for teen services outlined in the Futures Report, the top choices were “how to connect with teens within the community and outside of the library building” (43.3 percent), “incorporating coaches and mentors into teen library activities” (36.76 percent), and “building cultural competence skills” (36.58 percent). Overall, members expressed a high level of interest in learning about a variety of topics related to the Futures Report.

For readers particularly interested in improving their cultural competency skills, the Cultural Competence Task Force provides links for two wikis: “Serving Diverse Teens @ Your Library” (http://bit.ly/yalsa_srvng-diverse) and a newer “Cultural Competence” wiki (http://bit.ly/yalsa_ccwiki) to organize “articles, training links, research, and other resources that will allow you to incorporate cultural competencies more fully into your library practices.” There is also a recorded webinar by Amita Lonial titled, “Cultural Competence in the Library” available in the YALSA e-Learning Library (YeLL!).

CONCLUSION

The data gathered in the 2016 YALSA Member Survey provide a wealth of information about the experiences of YALSA members, including their implementation of YALSA initiatives and interests for future endeavors. Based on the responses provided, YALSA could benefit from increased web-based video instruction, particularly live and recorded webinars, focusing on concrete and practical implementation of connected learning. Members showed interest in local advocacy, expressed a capability to teach skills to other members, and reported effort in working on cultural competency in their communities. The 2016 Survey also provides demographic information for YALSA members that can aid in future cultural competency initiatives, as members seek to provide services to the diverse communities in which they live.

World Domination by Culture: How the Civilization Game Series Can Help You Think About Fostering Cultural Competence and Critical Reflection in Your Library

Find out how games like Civilization can foster cultural competence in teens.

Amanda Ochsner

As a result of drawing masses of tourists to its national parks and museums, America is just a few turns away from dominating the world with a cultural victory.

That sentence doesn’t describe a personal belief that Yosemite National Park is somehow implicated in a massive global conspiracy. It actually describes the state of my current game of Civilization VI, the newest instantiation of one of my favorite game series, Civilization.

If you are not familiar with the Civilization series, here’s a rapid overview. Considered a turn-based strategy series, Civilization players take on the role of a leader of a great civilization in world history. The leaders and civilizations vary in the different games in the series, but the overall goal is the same—to “build an empire to stand the test of time.” Beginning in ancient times prior to the birth of Christ, players lead their civilization through the ages by founding cities, researching technologies, building and maintaining militaries, and establishing diplomatic relationships (or not-so-diplomatic feuds) with other civilizations. Unlike many other games that are based primarily on war mechanics, in Civilization brute force and superior military technologies is just one way of triggering the game’s victory condition. Players can also achieve victory against other civilizations by winning the space race with superior technological knowledge, spreading their religion to the majority of the world’s major city centers, or enamoring the world’s tourists with its cultural wonders.

In the game described earlier, my goal was to achieve cultural victory with the American civilization. As the American leader, I chose to invest resources in building national parks, museums, theaters, and other culture-generating amenities that draw tourists from my own cities and the cities of other civilizations. A player can win the game with a cultural victory when their civilization brings more international tourists to their cities than any other civilization has domestic tourists in their own cities.

Games like the Civilization series offer relatively unique opportunities for players to explore concepts like culture as part of a broader global ecosystem and as part of complex systems, for instance. They make visible how increased influence in one area—in the case of my game, an influx of global visitors to American museums and parks—has an impact on a broader global system. As America developed a cultural monopoly, people stopped visiting other parts of the world, and their cultures slowly became less and less visible. In the meantime, America became richer and held an increasingly greater influence on the people from other civilizations in the world.

Civilization offers a simplified model for critically examining how culture works in the context of a globalized world. As a player of the game, it can be fun and gratifying to “win” by erasing the cultures of other players. In contrast, outside of the game I value living in a world with great cultural diversity. By engaging with the game’s model of culture, players are afforded the opportunity to reflect on how increasing dominance by one group of people can affect the cultural visibility of other people and cultures. The Civilization
TRENDING

series offers a refreshingly different perspective on the meaning and power of culture. We so often highlight exploring cultures as an opportunity to celebrate—and promote—greater diversity. We celebrate our own cultures and traditions but also want to foster in our students a love of learning about the cultures practiced by other students, communities, and countries. This is absolutely a worthwhile goal, and one I believe deeply in. The ability in Civilization for one civilization to dominate the world by spreading the influence of its own culture pervasively across the planet is a reminder that culture, while worthy of celebrating, is also an important component of worldwide phenomena like imperialism and colonialism.

By engaging with the game’s model of culture, players are afforded the opportunity to reflect on how increasing dominance by one group of people can affect the cultural visibility of other people and cultures.

As an educator, I see valuable opportunities for us to use games like Civilization to prompt students to not just learn about their own and other cultures for the sake of celebrating them but to also develop a critical awareness of the ways in which culture plays into structures of power and influence in our modern world. Does culture always have inherent value? In what ways does it have value, and to whom? Is the spreading of culture always good? Is it still good if it comes at the expense of diminishing and silencing the cultural traditions of other people and communities? It is my hope that playing games like Civilization has the potential to foster students to be culturally competent and critically minded and provide opportunities to answer these important questions.

Rarely do games have profound and meaningful impacts on students in isolation. Just as research has shown that games are unlikely to incite players to violence on their own, so too are we unlikely to realize the potential benefits of games to foster increased cultural competencies without additional supports and resources. The context of gameplay always matters.

So if just playing a game like Civilization might not be enough to change students’ cultural attitudes and perspectives on their own, what role might librarians and other library practitioners play in supporting greater cultural competency? Here are a few ideas:

1. Seek out Media That Support Cultural Competence and Critical Reflection
If you have the resources to have games like Civilization VI in your library, I would encourage you to think about how carefully chosen games can be a valuable part of your library’s program offerings. Hosting play sessions of games that support not just learning about cultures but also thinking critically about the interactions among cultures could add value to your existing efforts to support cultural competency.

There are many other games that have equal potential for supporting cultural competence. Just a few examples worth considering include: Never Alone, The Banner Saga, and the Dreamfall series.

2. Create Opportunities for Discussion
Like books, games are often able to provide great opportunities for a good discussion. Look for ways to support library staff- or student-led conversations about how game content and game mechanics provide various models and simulations about how culture works in our society. These can be organized as formal library programming, but it can also be as simple as a conversation with a student who comes in frequently to play a game at the library. Because games are often highly engaging, they have incredible potential for promoting in-depth discussions about the parallels between the fictional representations in the game and our own contemporary conditions.

3. Introduce Students to Complementary Media
Games are powerful generators of interest. Because they are so engaging, students often foster new interests—such as in exploring new historical periods, countries, or cultures. Library staff have access to, and affinities for, many different kinds of books, films, and other media, and are often in a unique position to help patrons and students go deeper with an emerging interest. If you notice that a particular game is popular among students who attend your library, familiarize yourself with it and brainstorm how you can
suggest related books and films that may foster greater cultural competence. Games are often portrayed unflatteringly as a largely passive medium with little to offer players outside of the immediate play experience. As a researcher of games and game players, however, I have found that fictional game worlds are often an effective catalyst for inviting players to critically examine the cultures and communities in which they live. My challenge for readers is to consider how you could utilize video games in your library’s programming to foster opportunities for youth to increase their cultural competence and engage in critical reflection about their world.

Amanda Ochsner researches how well-designed and thoughtfully implemented experiences with games and digital media influence youths’ learning pathways. Her work aims to identify opportunities to increase equity and opportunity for groups traditionally underrepresented in technology fields and industries.

FROM THE PRESIDENT
(continued from page 3)

focus on literacies projects—book and media awards, Teen Read Week, summer learning, etc. This position is being funded through the interest YALSA earns from the Morris Endowment and the Margaret Edwards Trust. Current staff are also in the process of refocusing their work to more fully support the new plan.

To keep up with what’s happening around the organizational restructuring, check out the posts that board members periodically put up in the Governance section of the YALSA blog: http://yalsa.al.org/blog/.

You can also stay up-to-date about what’s happening within YALSA by checking out the Current Projects page on the website (http://www.ala.org/yalsa/issues-current-projects), and don’t forget to read the weekly YALSA eNews that comes to your e-mail!

In later phases, once the restructuring is complete, implementation will focus around priorities like cultural competence. In October, a call went out via the YALSA eNews in which we asked for volunteers who are interested in helping with several key priority areas in the Organizational Plan. If supporting work around topics like cultural competence, leadership, advocacy, and more interest you, we would value your ideas and expertise! Please take a moment to complete the brief form: http://www.emailmeform.com/builder/form/uZ5cn14czr8QvPedoBk. As we get ready to ramp up work in these areas, we’ll get in touch to let you know about opportunities that you can take advantage of to shape and contribute to this work.

This YALS issue focuses on YALSA’s desire to embed a cultural competency mindset throughout the organization, in guidelines and other foundational documents, as well as developing a program of training and assessment for cultural competency to support members as they work with diverse teen populations. Recently our Teen Read Week celebration featured a multilingual “Read for the fun of it” theme because twenty-two percent of our nation’s youth speak a language other than English at home. Cultural competency training is an essential need of library staff, and YALSA wants to develop a “train the trainer” curriculum that would create a nationwide group of cultural competency facilitators.

Cultural competency isn’t new to YALSA—Chair Kim Dare and members of the 2014–2015 YALSA Cultural Competence Taskforce created a wiki page (see http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Cultural_Competence) packed with definitions, articles, training, and resources for library staff and teens. And YALSA also updates a wiki page called Serving Diverse Teens @ Your Library (see http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/Serving_Diverse_Teens_%40_Your_Library) that offers resources to help us serve the many and varied diverse groups of teens including teens in military families and teens who are disabled. But, as CiKeithia Pugh and Erin Okuno note in their column, “Breaking Down Cultural Competency,” libraries need to be more than just competent—we need to be culturally enhancing our libraries and our communities. Read on to find out how!
The Critical Piece: Building Relationships with Teens of Color and Native Youth

Creating inclusive library spaces and programs.

When presented with the idea for this article—connecting with teens of color—it was impossible to not have competing thoughts. First came an immediate, positive reaction to the topic, as it informs all aspects of my library practice. But, then, two concerns. One, who am I to speak on this topic? And, two, teens of color are not a homogeneous group—what can I say that is mindful of individual differences, yet broadly applicable?

Who Am I to Speak on This Topic?
Who is any white librarian to speak on it? The unfortunate current reality of our profession is that we are overwhelmingly white, middle-class women. I am a white librarian, and my student population is typically 80 percent teens of color, primarily African American and Latinx. I am not unique. My situation is not unique. While we work to do better at diversifying our profession, we also must work now to make issues of equity central to our professional growth. It is the most important piece of my library practice. I clearly cannot speak on connecting to teens of color as a member of a marginalized racial group, but I can speak on connecting as a white librarian. One who knows she does not have all the answers, but learns more from her teens every day.

What Can I Say That Is Mindful of Individual Differences, yet Broadly Applicable?
As librarians working with teens, it is imperative for us to know and learn about teens of color and native youth as individuals. The media, and even many social institutions, treat teens of color and native teens as if they are all the same, as if they all belong to ONE group. We never can. Our work must be tailored to the interests and needs of the teens that our own libraries serve. That being said, there are some general principles of engagement that apply to working with youth of color and native youth that are critical—and that can form the basis of building meaningful relationships.

What Does Building Relationships with Teens of Color Mean to Me?
Building relationships means many things—from developing my own understanding of cultural competency, creating inclusive library spaces, and focusing on reflective literature to pushing back against “color-blindness,” protecting against the White Savior Complex, and building a diverse professional learning network (PLN).

Developing My Understanding of Cultural Competency
The first step in building authentic relationships with teens is recognizing that I constantly have to do better on my own cultural competence journey: “the ability to recognize the significance of culture in one’s own life and in the lives of others . . . and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work, and institutions” (Overall 2009, 189–90). Meaningful knowledge of diverse cultures is not possible without relationships with members from diverse communities, including teens. We know that cultural competence leads to a more responsive library practice, improved services, and an increase in library use (Overall 2009). It leads to something even more valuable—meaningful and
authentic relationships with the teens in our libraries. How do we become more culturally competent librarians?

• Learn about and understand the racial and ethnic identity development of youth of color and native youth.

• Develop greater awareness and appreciation of other cultures.

• Approach teens and their families with an asset-driven perspective, not a deficit model. Believe—know—that teens of color come from families and communities that have funds of knowledge to be appreciated and valued.

• Recognize and combat the structural inequalities that exist across institutions in the United States—including in libraries. Know the history of US inequality (hint: it probably was not taught to you in school).

• For school librarians, recognize the normative position of power and whiteness within the curriculum, particularly in English and history classrooms, and work to dismantle that one-sided narrative.

Those of us lucky to already have built meaningful relationships know all the above to be true. The research backs this up—culturally responsive pedagogy increases trust, engagement, and achievement with underserved youth (Gay 2000; Mestre 2009).

Creating an Inclusive Library

It is much harder to relate to teens in our libraries if the spaces themselves are not welcoming. We know youth of color can feel like outsiders in library spaces (Kumasi 2012). Creating an inclusive library requires constant reflection and attention. Luckily you have potential consultants visiting every day—your teens.

I operate under the framework that there are four crucial tenets to building an inclusive library:

• Cultivating a culturally responsive library program;

• Creating and using diverse, reflective collections;

• Identifying and removing barriers to use and participation; and,

• Using/having an expanded definition of the library as a safe space.

How do we know if we’re succeeding? Library usage, program attendance, and circulation should always be improving among our teens, including among our teens of color. If not, we must investigate why. Have our teens—our expert consultants—evaluate the library program. Quantitative measures are important, but anecdotal feedback is equally powerful. We must pay attention to what our teens of color are saying. My happiest moments in my library have been hearing:

• “Finally, I’m home.”

• “Your library is my happy place.”

• “Here, I can breathe.”

If you’re only hearing this sort of feedback from white teens in your libraries, please heed that as a wake-up call.

Understanding That Language Matters

It is critical that we intentionally think about the language we use and make sure we are speaking in a way that communicates inclusiveness, instead of making teens of color feel like outsiders. Are we using loaded words or words with coded meanings, like thug, ghetto, or illegal? If so, we must stop. Also, there is no part of language that matters more than teens’ names. I know this seems obvious, but we must know our teens’ names, remember them, and pronounce them correctly. When we mess up (and I have), we must admit our mistake, learn from it, and do better. Actually, that goes for everything in this article: We must admit our mistakes. Learn. Do Better.

Flooding My Library—and My Life—with Reflective Literature and Counter-stories That Challenge the Dominant Narrative

It’s never enough to simply have a strong, diverse collection that reflects the realities and lived experiences of our teens. That is only a starting point. We have to use our collections—with intention and pleasure— in programming, booktalks, displays, readers’ advisory, and as classroom texts. We also need to curate digital resources that reflect our teens. And, we have to read and love reflective literature ourselves.

How does this help us build relationships with our teens of color? If our interest in the literacy of our teens is solely based on test scores or reading levels, we’re failing them. If our interest in the literacy of our teens is solely based on test scores or reading levels, we’re failing them. Teens of color are saying, My happiest moments in my library have been hearing:

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If our interest in the literacy of our teens is solely based on test scores or reading levels, we’re failing them.
I talk about reflective literature a lot—at my school, in my district, on the Middle School Monday blog—but I always have two worries. One, that having a diverse collection will be seen as the goal—the end point. Two, that once we know about the importance of collecting reflectively and intentionally, we’ll think “we’ve got that skill covered” and become complacent. No, on both points. I am constantly disappointed in my own collection and frustrated by its gaps whether they are due to my own failings, lack of funding, or holes in publishing. Malindo Lo said, “Diversity is not praiseworthy; it is reality” (Lo 2015). And, it is never enough.

**Learning Crucial Definitions**

Do I use these definitions in daily conversations with my teens? No. Without understanding the context of these truths, however, I don’t see how we can truly understand our teens of color and support them in their own development and daily lives.

*Racism*—A systemic, institutionalized reality. A helpful equation: racism = prejudice + power. [In other words, reverse racism does not compute.]

*White privilege*—Advantages, assets, and immunities that white people experience in the United States, whether or not they are consciously aware.

*Microaggressions*—Continual indignities that communicate racial slights toward people of color. Warning: sometimes, these are cloaked in seemingly kind words. [Your English is so good! You speak so well!]

*Implicit biases*—Those biases in judgment and behavior of which we are not even consciously aware.

**Engaging in Discussions with My Teens about Race, Equity, and Privilege**

This can—should—happen as both informal conversation and formally as part of class lessons or library programing. As librarians we are perfectly situated to have these discussions as YA literature offers an accessible way to open up these dialogues with our teens. Teens of color recognize and experience the impact of bias and prejudice in their communities and schools. By not talking about these issues, we are erasing part of our teens’ existence.

**Pushing Back against the Notion of Color-Blindness**

I shudder when adults who work with youth say that they don’t “see race.” How, then, do they even truly see the child or teen in front of them? This professed naivete is false, and dangerous. Of course we see race! Of course society sees race! To profess otherwise—in light of the obvious and race-based structural inequities that exist in many aspects of our society—is insulting to our teens. Also, how can we celebrate what we cannot see? In addition to the social-emotional benefits to being truly seen, research shows that for youth of color, positive racial identities lead to academic success (Hanley and Nobli, 2009).

**Recognizing My Own Implicit Bias**

In addition to the toxic consequences of implicit bias, such as low expectations, disproportionate discipline referrals, and resegregation, implicit bias will keep us from developing meaningful relationships with our teens of color. We have to get uncomfortable as we work on this and be willing to sit in that discomfort. A good starting point is Harvard’s *Project Implicit.*

**Being on the Right Side of Contemporary Civil Rights Issues**

If we proclaim #AllLivesMatter—as I’ve seen some educators do—in response to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, we are not on the right side. At the very least, it indicates a basic misunderstanding of the institutional racism that pervades the United States. Have we educated ourselves on the school to prison pipeline? The Dakota Access Pipeline? Immigration justice? We can’t be afraid to embrace the social justice nature of our profession. Our libraries are not neutral—they never have been. Today, they need to be brave spaces for youth to discuss issues of race, police brutality, social justice, and protest.

**Building a Diverse PLN**

Our professional learning networks (PLNs) should mirror the teens we serve in terms of racial and ethnic diversity. Take advantage of virtual networks—for me, that means Twitter. I learn from José Vilson, Debbie Reese, David Kirkland, Ernest Morrell, Edith Campbell, Rafranz Davis, Jenn Baker, Daniel José Older, Eva Vega, Christopher Emdin, Malinda Lo, Alfred Tatum, Meg Medina, Zetta Elliott, Christopher Emdin, and many more educators, authors, and activists who advocate with and for native youth and teens of color.

**Being Genuinely Interested in Teens of Color and Native Teens**

This seems like such a no-brainer, right? But, do we dive deep? Do we want to know about our teens? Do we bring what they value INTO the library, not just in terms of resources, but for programming or classroom instruction? This, of course, means that we have to be open and not make assumptions—instead, getting to know our teens as individuals. What do they like to do outside of school? What are their dreams? Fears? Favorite memes? Christopher Emdin, author of *White Folks Who Teach in the Hood* (2016), reminds us: “It’s such a basic concept to meet youth where they are. Problem is, when you don’t value where they
are, it is damn near impossible.” Yes. A thousand times, yes.

**Warding Off the White Savior Complex**

I’m not saving my teens. As Emdin so clearly explains, if we think we are saving our teens, that wrongly—and dangerously—implies that they are broken (Emdin 2016). They are not broken. We’re not even empowering our teens. [They do that themselves! We can help by providing space, tools, and signal-boosts.] It helps me to look at the librarian-teen relationship as one NOT built on one-way helping, but grounded in learning and discovering together and from each other. In other words, I work *with* my teens, not for them. In “If You Think You’re Giving Students of Color a Voice, Get Over Yourself,” Jamila Lyiscott reminds us that we are never, never giving our teens a voice. They already have voices! To place ourselves in this position of supposed benevolence is damaging to our teens. Instead, she asks if we “have the courage to do the internal work of critical honesty around” our attitudes toward our teens? Is there space in our libraries “for the realities, perspectives, and identities” of our teens of color (Lyiscott 2016)?

**Loving Our Teens**


In 1955, in Caroline County, Virginia, amidst segregation and prejudice, injustice and cruelty, two teenagers fell in love. Richard and Mildred Loving were at the heart of a landmark Supreme Court case that legalized marriage between the races.

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Breaking Down Cultural Competency

A cornerstone of public libraries is serving the local community, including underserved and marginalized groups. The demographics of our neighborhoods are rapidly changing, and library staff serving youth needs to evolve to serve increasingly diverse youth. In our city, Seattle, currently 54 percent of the students in Seattle Public Schools—a proxy for the demographics of our city—are students of color. Let’s face it, times have changed and so have communities. Taking into account these shifts, how do library staff serving youth build meaningful relationships that reflect best practices and centers the voices of youth of color?

We see it all the time. Well-intentioned staff try to do the work of bridging the gap between libraries and communities. It often plays out in the the types of programs listed below, especially when it comes to cultural competency and community engagement:

• Heroes and Holidays: Creative displays to celebrate a particular heritage month and celebrate heroes from the past—Is it February yet? That is the only time we see anything about Black History in library displays. We should be celebrating these contributions all year long.

• Outreach 101: Multilingual fliers—Why aren’t communities of color showing up at library sponsored programs? Numerous hours were spent translating the fliers to advertise an upcoming program in the top languages in the city, yet communities of color still don’t attend. Note the “blame the victim” strategy: “I did my part, I translated my flier, they should have come.”

• Annual staff gatherings include an invitation to “dress in traditional clothing and bring a dish from your heritage”—Can we move past the potlucks and awareness stage and actually get to know each other?

• A series of trainings where we compile exhaustive lists of stereotypes for a particular racial group—Great for talking about communities without really listening to communities.

This is not to say examples such as the ones above have no place in our libraries. They are a start, but we need to go deeper. We need to move beyond cultural competence, which is an easy way out because it prioritizes knowledge over practice. To move beyond that, library staff should create as many opportunities as possible to learn about communities of color on a deeper and ongoing level. This means moving from the superficial to building authentic and trusting relationships.

One way to do that and build meaningful relationships with community is to replace cultural competence with culturally enriching practices. It is no longer enough to be culturally competent. We believe cultural competency allows us to talk about differences without changing. It is an easy way for dominant library culture to uphold practices promoting superficial awareness and knowledge of diverse audiences. It gives us the chance to say, “We’re okay—we put up the heritage displays during Asian American and Latino History month,” or “We hosted a bilingual storytime,” but not dig into issues such as who attended
the event. Was it families who speak the language at home or middle-class moms who want to expose their children to a second language?

We need to strive for better. We need to create spaces and programs where youth and families of color have an active role in planning and providing feedback to libraries that inform the design of culturally relevant and enriching experiences.

**Why Culturally Competent Is Blah**

There are many definitions of cultural competency. Some of these definitions are elaborate and use technical jargon. For the purposes of this article, we'll use an everyday, pedestrian, bare bones, snarky interpretation of the term:

Culturally competent means we do the bare minimum: celebrate holidays and heroes, put up red lanterns on Lunar New Year, celebrate diversity with multicultural potlucks at the library, order a bánh mì but pronounce it “ban me,” use Google-translated documents to prove we made an attempt at translating documents, post hiring notices in ethnic media but fail to have people of color on the hiring panel.

This definition highlights some of the attempts people make to prove they are providing a culturally competent environment. Too often libraries stop at these surface-level attempts of community engagement or program development. They miss the point of creating truly great programs enhances and allow people of color to grow, feel grounded and included, and be valued by the community.

As an example, a friend who works in an urban library system shared a story about a co-worker who received a lot of praise for creating a new program to honor Pride month. Last year her library system marched in the Pride parade for the first time. They held open houses and special programs focused on art and books showcasing LGQBT families. For their capstone event they hosted a special storytime with a drag queen. Many of these efforts demonstrate an awareness of diversity and an attempt at having LGQBT families feel included. But the efforts stopped there and didn’t move to being truly culturally enriching.

If the program organizers used a racial equity lens, they would have realized that simply focusing on LGQBT families fell short of their racial equity commitments. Instead, they could have focused on LGQBT families of color to target their efforts even more. LGQBT families of color are often more marginalized than white LGQBT families. A racial equity lens focuses on the structural. What are current policies and practices for how programs are developed? How were intended audiences engaged? Were one-size-fits-all strategies to develop and implement the program used?

Focusing their efforts into Pride month stops short of realizing LGQBT families don’t stop being LGQBT once Pride month is over. A more enriching experience would be creating welcoming environments and ensuring regular programming that allows for diversity to shine through all year. Finally, the drag queen storytime—come on! Can we move past perpetuating stereotypes? We don’t have anything against drag queens, seriously we don’t, but having a drag queen storytime be the finale of Pride month doesn’t create an enriching environment where children feel like they have a normal cultural experience.

A culturally enhancing focus would have been to highlight books and programs on LGQBT experiences and make them readily available all year long. Having LGQBT staff of color working within the program, creating relationships with the LGQBT families of color, and listening to what type of programming they want to see, and embracing that, would better serve this library community.

Closing opportunity gaps and helping youth feel connected to their communities means we have to be open to new ideas, and we get those new ideas by creating environments where everyone is included and brings their best selves.

**Do It—Be Culturally Enriching**

We can do so much better than just be competent. We can do better...
than hang red lanterns and celebrate the heroes and holidays—we need to create spaces where people can be their best selves. Closing opportunity gaps and helping youth feel connected to their communities means we have to be open to new ideas, and we get those new ideas by creating environments where everyone is included and brings their best selves. Culturally enriching programs look like this:

 Invite youth of color and partner with them to create an experience where they see themselves as a valued partner. This means opening your doors and sharing leadership and resources to allow youth of color to create a culture that embraces and honors their heritage, language, families, and allows relationships to flourish.

 Center your work in communities of color and allow youth of color to set the agenda. This may mean what you originally envisioned for the program is set aside and instead you allow the youth of color to direct and choose what is meaningful for them. For example, you may think they want a video game club, but they instead may choose to host a chess or poetry club. You may be surprised by what the youth actually want to do.

 Move beyond stereotypes and surface-level comments. We need to disrupt and shift the dominant narrative to ask what does it really mean to serve all in our community libraries. This means stepping back, slowing down, and asking critical questions about the culture of a library. Is the culture welcoming for communities of color?

 **What Are You Going to Do?**

 Moving your work from culturally competent to culturally enriching doesn’t happen overnight. It takes intentional, long-term relationship building and a willingness to try new things. Enhancing our ability to see culture as an asset and something to value and share in will allow more people to participate in the library and create a more inclusive environment for all.

 For the past decade CiKeithia Pugh has worked with families and community to design and implement early learning programs in libraries and other learning institutions. Pugh is an Associate with the consulting firm Equity Matters. When not thinking about babies and books, she can be found in her favorite dancing class. Erin Okuno is Executive Director at the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition, a coalition working to improve education for students and families of color. Growing up, Okuno spent hours wandering the stacks of academic and community libraries. They are part of the team that blogs about race, equity, culture, and community engagement at Fakequity.com (fake equity). A portion of this article was originally shared in Fakequity’s blog.
Moving to a new place creates opportunities to develop new perspectives.

I imagine you have arrived in a new country. You’ve never been there before, you don’t speak the language, and you are only somewhat familiar with the culture that you have suddenly been thrust into. You are 5,000 miles away from your family and friends. You don’t have a permanent place to live, and all your belongings are in one suitcase. You don’t have a job, and, based on your status, you couldn’t get one even if you wanted to. You don’t even have a working cell phone.

This was me in the summer of 2015, having joined my husband on his study abroad program in Jerusalem with our seven-month-old daughter and a couple of suitcases in tow. We weren’t relocating permanently. We were due back in the United States ten months later, but the school provided no student housing and only nominal support in getting resettled for the year. For the first couple of months of our time in Jerusalem, I had a small taste of the uncertainty and disorientation that comes with making a new life—albeit temporarily—in a strange place.

To make the trip, I had taken a leave of absence from my job as a youth outreach librarian in Boston, and before we left I was more worried about my career than about moving to a new country. Would people question my commitment to my job? After ten months of not working, would I really be able to come back and just pick up where I left off? How would a year off look on my resume? Should I even mention it on my resume or just pretend it never happened? So you can imagine my surprise when my almost year abroad, spent as a stay-at-home mom, became one of the most transformative experiences of my career. It was a crash course in empathy, openness, and appreciation of other cultures.

Associate Professor of Information Resources and Library Science at the University of Arizona Patricia Montiel-Overall provides a wonderful definition of cultural competence that you can find on the YALSA wiki’s cultural competence page. She suggests that there are three components to cultural competence: self-awareness, education, and interaction. My experience abroad was a living manifestation of her definition of interaction: “Interaction concerns understanding and respecting cultural backgrounds other than one’s own through engaging with individuals from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic strata.” Many of us get to do this on our own turf, engaging with diverse populations in the familiar setting of our work. Living abroad put me on the other side of the interaction; I was the newcomer, the stranger, and nearly every interaction I had for ten months could be considered “engaging with individuals from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic strata.”

As a youth librarian in a large city, I had worked for years with immigrant families, doing what I could to make them feel welcome in the library. I organized bilingual programs, conducted library tours with translators, provided books in other languages, and repeatedly asked, to no avail, that library information be offered in languages other than English. However, until I was in a similar position to these families, until I was the stranger in a strange place, I never really appreciated...
the importance of being seen, served, and understood. Even in my best efforts, I took so much for granted. I had sympathized with these newcomers, but I wasn’t truly able to empathize until I found myself in a similar situation abroad.

I had underestimated the crippling anxiety caused by even the simplest tasks—taking a bus, grocery shopping, making a doctor’s appointment—in an unfamiliar place where you don’t speak the language. Every foray out of the house was full of unknowns. Would I be able to communicate with people? What if I get lost, go to the wrong neighborhood, or end up on the scene of a terrorist attack (a totally legitimate fear for where we were living)? How am I supposed to buy food when I can’t read the labels? These aren’t the average challenges you encounter as a tourist, the kind of adversity you get a thrill from and then go home in a couple weeks. Your day-to-day tasks depend on getting up the nerve to leave the house and face uncertainty every morning, and when you have family members depending on you, the anxiety and the urgency is amplified. Had my library patrons felt this way? Had I done what I could to minimize their doubts in walking through the doors? It’s something I think about constantly now that I am back at work.

There were times that my anxiety was justified. Perhaps the most surprising came on a trip to a public library, the one place I thought I could count on as a cultural touchpoint, the one place I was sure to feel at home. I had even found an English language youth library in walking distance of my apartment that was full of everything from board books to YA, all in English. With rare confidence I strode up to the desk, baby in my arms and my passport in hand, and I requested a library card. The man behind the desk asked me two questions in very broken English: How long would I be living there? Did I have an Israeli bank account? Based on my answers—less than a year and no—he would not be able to issue a library card to me. I needed to be a resident for at least a year, and I also would need to leave a check from an Israeli bank with them as collateral in case I did not return the books. In my frustration, I wept right there in the library. I vowed that I never wanted anyone to feel that way when I returned to my job in the public library in the United States.

Despite my anxieties, not every interaction was negative—quite the opposite actually. More often than not, I was rewarded for overcoming my self-doubt and embracing the unknown. I took a Hebrew class in which I made friends from all over the world and got to share in their traditions. I practiced my Hebrew by having the most basic conversations with the old women in my neighborhood who were quick to compliment and encourage me. I became a pro at using my limited Hebrew to shop for groceries in the noisy, crowded open market. I shared more delicious and festive meals with friends and neighbors than I can possibly count. I might have missed many of these moments if it weren’t for the kindness of others and their willingness to help and welcome a newcomer. Who in our communities is waiting for us to extend a hand, an invitation, a sign that we see them and want to include them?

In the Torah, or the Old Testament, there is a passage that translates as “oppress not the stranger, for you were a stranger in Egypt” (Exodus 22:21). There’s plenty of interpretations on this passage, but for me it speaks to the fact that we have all been or will be “the stranger” at some point in our lives. To me, this passage is especially important when working with teens. The only other time I have felt as awkward, anxious, and out of place as I did for those ten months in Israel was in my everyday life as a teenager. And we have all been there. As a teen, even in familiar settings, the world has a way of making you feel like a stranger, like you don’t quite fit. If you work with immigrant teens—or even more so if you don’t see them in your library but know they are out there somewhere—consider the general

Whether you move halfway around the world, go on a vacation to a new place, or simply invite the newcomers in your community into your library, you will, I hope, come away with greater empathy and a greater sense of your own place in the world through the interactions you have and the experience you gain.
awkwardness of the teen years and then add the extra layer of cultural and linguistic uncertainty that I have described here. These are the teens who need the extra encouragement just to make it through the library’s doors, and cultural competence among library staff is the baseline for reaching out to these young strangers and making them part of the community.

Through all my experiences abroad, I have learned that cultural competence isn’t simply something you study; it is something you live. It’s less a matter of knowledge than a willingness to open yourself up to new experiences, ideas, and people. Whether you move halfway around the world, go on a vacation to a new place, or simply invite the newcomers in your community into your library, you will, I hope, come away with greater empathy and a greater sense of your own place in the world through the interactions you have and the experience you gain.

You, your library, and those you serve will be the better for it.

**Things to Know about Your Jewish Patrons and Staff**

The entirety of Jewish culture and observance is way too much to cover here and depends upon which movement of Judaism a person identifies with. If your community includes observant Jews (and it probably does, even if you haven’t seen them in the library yet), here are some things to be aware of in order to serve them better.

**Shabbat and Holidays**

From sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday is Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest. There is a whole list of things that observant Jews cannot do on Shabbat, including working, driving or riding in cars, carrying items in their pockets, using cell phones, or spending money. Some will spend Friday evening and a few hours or all day at synagogue on Saturdays.

Jewish holidays are based on the Jewish calendar, so the date changes each year. The holidays that are widely regarded as most important and celebrated even by less-observant Jews are Rosh Hashana (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (the day of atonement) in the fall and Passover in the spring, all of which are one or two days of work restriction, similar to Shabbat. There are many more Jewish holidays. Heb-cal.com is a great resource for holiday dates and can be downloaded to your online calendar.

Please keep in mind these religious observances when considering staff schedules, library hours, and programming.

**Kosher Food**

If you are having a library program with food, it’s important to be aware of dietary restrictions, including Kosher food for your Jewish patrons. Kashrut, as it is called in Hebrew, is a set of dietary laws that at their strictest are very complicated. The most important things to know are that Kashrut prohibits eating or touching pork, shellfish, and any seafood that does not have fins and scales. Those who keep Kosher also do not mix dairy and meat of any kind, excluding fish which does not count as meat. Food must be prepared in dishes that have been specially treated to be Kosher.

The easiest way to be sure your programs are Kosher-friendly is to buy prepared food from the grocery store with a small symbol on the package called a hechsher (pronounced HECK-shur). Look for a small “K,” a U with a circle around it, or a few other symbols. Keep the food in the package until you give it to your Jewish patrons.

As with any community, the best way to be sure you are serving Jewish patrons well and respecting your Jewish staff is to open up a dialogue with them about their needs.

Amanda Bressler is the Supervisor of Youth Services at the Newton Free Library (MA). You can find posts from her time abroad on Twitter at #alibrarianabroad.
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I currently work as a Pre-Kinder
tergarten to Grade 12 librarian
at an international school in St.
Petersburg, Russia. In this position, I
regularly interact with patrons from a
wide range of cultural backgrounds,
serving students, parents, and staff who
represent nearly forty different coun-
tries. Like librarians around the world,
cultural competence is an ability that
I actively develop in order to improve
the service that I provide to these
patrons. My work in an international
setting provides one example of the
need for this ability and highlights the
unique nature of each community.

For this article I have chosen the
National Education Association’s
explanation of cultural competence
as “having an awareness of one’s own
cultural identity and views about
difference, and the ability to learn
and build on the varying cultural and
community norms of students and
their families,” a definition utilized
by YALSA’s Cultural Competence
Taskforce. Though written for use in
American education, this concept can
be extended beyond the classroom and
national contexts in order to integrate
cultural competence into all library
work, regardless of the community.

Developing Cultural Competency
To begin this process, librarians who
want to build their knowledge and
implement cultural competence skills
should recognize their own cultural
background. Personally, I am a white,
33-year-old, American woman who
left North America for the first time
when I flew to Russia five years ago.
I am a native English speaker with a
basic knowledge of Spanish left over
from high school and survival Rus-
sian language skills. All of my formal
education was completed through
institutions in the United States, and
the vast majority of my professional
development and service are through
participation in YALSA.

Next, librarians must have a solid
understanding of the community
they serve. Despite enrolling fewer
than two hundred students across all
fourteen grade levels, our student
body represents more than thirty-five
nationalities. These students are the
primary users of our library’s collec-
tion and resources. While I have been
fortunate enough to travel to many
European countries since I moved
here, and I try to educate myself about
global issues, I am regularly faced with
serving a population that includes
citizens of countries of which I know
very little. As a librarian who engages
with these students almost daily in our
small community, it is critical that I
obtain knowledge about my students
as both individuals and members of
their respective nationalities. It is too
risky to rely on stereotypes or superfi-
cial knowledge, as that would severely
hurt the service I provide my patrons.
To serve my community as a whole,
I strive to recognize my limitations
while also gaining a deeper under-
standing of each student.

In order to increase this understand-
ing, I build relationships with the
students in our school in a variety of
ways. Elementary and middle school
students have weekly classes in the
library, which provide regular oppor-
tunities for me to have conversations
about their interests and backgrounds.
In these classes, I highlight materials in
the collection and teach research skills
that support classroom learning. In contrast, the majority of my relationships with 9th through 12th graders are developed outside of formal library lessons. I coach speech and debate, teach a drama elective, and produce the annual theater performance. These activities create opportunities to learn about my students’ lives and get to know them as individuals. I use this knowledge to introduce how the library may be of interest and relevance to them. I also consider this information as I make changes to the library in order to provide better service.

Despite the universal applicability of cultural competence, librarians working in international schools face at least one unique relevant consideration: our students are Third Culture Kids.

Connecting with Third Culture Kids
Every student who enters the library at my school is a Third Culture Kid (TCK). In their book *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up among Worlds*, David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken (2009) explain that TCKs are those who spend portions of their childhood living in a culture that differs from that of their parents’ culture, typically defined by the passport(s) that they hold. These students are “growing up in a neither/nor world...neither fully in their parents’ culture (or cultures) nor fully in the world of the other culture (or cultures) in which they were raised” (p. 4). Each student’s story of how they ended up in our school is different. I worked with students in the past who, like their parents, held American passports and were native English speakers, but these students had never lived in the United States for longer than a two-month summer vacation. I teach high school students who have recently moved to Russia from China, Korea, and Finland, embarking on their families’ first international postings. There are countless scenarios. Even some of the siblings that I work with have different stories due to their current ages and when their family began living outside of their passport country. One student explained to me how his experience as a TCK was made very clear after living outside of his passport country for only eighteen months. At our school, he finds that he is viewed as a representative of Korea, where he was born and spent the majority of his life, so it surprised him to see the opposite during a trip back to his hometown. He shared that his friends began calling him “Russia” instead of either his Korean or Western name and expected him to be an expert in all things Russian, including the language. He is living between these two worlds, building a set of experiences that is unique, developed from his life in Korea, Russia, and anywhere else he lives in the future.

The label of TCK may also apply to students whose passports do not differ from their country of residence. The experience of being in an international school community changes the cultural experience of all students. We can describe the Russian students at my school as Third Culture Kids when we consider that their education and social experiences differ greatly from students enrolled in other schools in the local community.

Though often difficult to address through library services, this concept offers an opportunity to celebrate each patron as an individual with a unique set of experiences and needs. Sometimes the differences are easy to see, as in the contrast between a new student who has never lived outside her passport country versus a student who has been in our school for three years after previously attending international schools in four other countries. Other times they are more subtle: a fellow American versus a student born and raised in Russia who has spent so many years in international schools that his accent has flattened completely. We must remember, though, that even if individuals are from the same cultural background, their experiences and objectives are unique to them. Cultural competence begins with a bigger picture and then drills down, getting to know specific needs as often as possible.

Cultural competence begins with a bigger picture and then drills down, getting to know specific needs as often as possible.

Building a Collection with Cultural Competency in Mind
In developing collections, librarians must have extensive knowledge of the cultural differences of the communities we serve and how to respectfully share content that could conflict with traditional values. In *Third Culture Kids*, Pollock and Van Reken discuss the trade-off between the benefit of TCKs having an expanded worldview and the challenge of confused loyalties when new experiences are in contrast to traditional cultural values. From a library collection perspective, when students are exposed to materials that challenge traditional values they are given the opportunity to explore
alternate points of view, but there may still be difficulty in fully letting go of ideas that have been part of their lives from an early age. For example, our collection includes materials related to GLBT issues, while our community includes individuals from countries that are not traditionally supportive of GLBT equality. Knowing that there may be conflicts does not stop me from including materials in my collection that are related to these issues nor does it stop me from displaying these materials or discussing them with students. The important factor for me to consider in making these decisions is that each student is bringing a unique perspective to the library and its collection. For some students, seeing materials of this nature may even be shocking and their initial reaction is not necessarily the one that they should be held to in the long run. Students may also use these materials to support their own points of view. Last year, after hearing a classmate make a comment that relied heavily on traditional gender norms, one of our high school girls expressed her dissatisfaction with this comment, then walked to the shelves, returning with a copy of the graphic novel *Tomboy* by Liz Prince. She was easily able to access support for her opinion in our collection and knew how to find it in a format that she thought the student would be willing to read. Diverse collections open lines of communication and provide the opportunity for different viewpoints to be shared and considered. Our community grows and benefits from the variety of points of view that are represented.

Dedicating time to fully understanding cultural competence and what it means within each library’s community will benefit our patrons. I understand that many librarians are not currently in a position to serve an international school community, but the basic concepts truly are universal. It does not matter who makes up a community, but rather your efforts as a librarian to know your patrons and work to meet their needs.

Jessica Lind is an American librarian in Russia. She works as a Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 12 librarian at the St. Petersburg campus of the Anglo-American School of Moscow and St. Petersburg. She can be found on Twitter @sadrobot.

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**Guidelines for Authors**

*Young Adult Library Services* is the official publication of the Young Adult Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association. *Young Adult Library Services* is a vehicle for continuing education of librarians working with young adults (ages twelve through eighteen) that showcases current research and practice relating to teen services and spotlights significant activities and programs of the division.

For submission and author guidelines, please visit http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/yals/submissions/.

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What is Cultural Competence?
Openness, respect, curiosity, awareness, desire, evaluation, strategies, flexibility—all of these are characteristics that culturally competent people have, researchers say. Cultural competence “is a highly developed ability to understand and respect cultural differences and to address issues of disparity among diverse populations competently,” as described by Patricia Overall in her article “Cultural Competence: A Conceptual Framework for Library and Information Science Professionals.” Cultural competence encompasses both an intrinsic personal desire to know others and a behavioral change to make it happen.

It is built by reflecting, working, and developing cultural awareness toward many facets of culture, including, but not limited to, ethnicity/race, sexuality, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, disability, language, and literacy. Being able to confront and accept one’s cultural background and set of prejudices will allow one to be able to understand, relate, and respond to others better.

Why is Cultural Competence Important for Library Staff?
Even though we like to think that libraries are the epitome of democracy and equality, they are still the product of their social and political environment, which is set up by those in power. This has sustained and reaffirmed inequities of power. We can learn from Solange Lopes-Murphy and Christopher Murphy’s study, “The Influence of Cross-Cultural Experiences and Location on Teachers’ Perceptions of Cultural Competence,” that “teachers must understand their students and their cultures, develop relationships and connect with their students, and provide them with the educational experiences they need.” Developing cultural competence is an imperative to reach these goals.

Current library administrations, whether at the local level in each library all the way to the national level with LIS programs and the ALA, need to make cultural competence a cornerstone of their staff’s training, and look at their policies so that they become more inclusive. According to the most current data (ALA Diversity Count vs. U.S. Census), library staff currently does not accurately reflect the ethnic diversity of the American population. How can libraries be a real agent of change unless LIS programs recruit and retain diverse students, and library administrations hire them? Only then will they have an active part in changing libraries to become more inclusive. While recruitment efforts have been made, retaining diverse students remains a problem. Lately, studies have been trying to understand the roots of this problem in order to remedy them, and to that effect, culturally responsive pedagogy seems to be undergoing a revival.

How is Cultural Competence Developed?
Overall’s cultural competence framework includes a scale, starting from cultural incapacity, to cultural blindness and lack of cultural competence, moving on to some or limited cultural competence, cultural competence, all the way to cultural proficiency. Thus, cultural competence is a set of skills acquired during a multistep process:
1. Developing a heightened awareness of one’s own culture and values, and how they drive one’s behaviors. In the library world, realizing that the Dewey Decimal Classification System is extremely Western-centric can be our first step toward cultural competence. Just look at the 200 class, which gives so much room to Christianity and so little to other religions. So, let’s first study our collections critically. A homogenous collection preserves a dominant culture’s perspective that very few nondominant individuals have made worthwhile contributions in their discipline. This reinforces certain patrons’ feelings of cultural dominance, all the while creating a culturally passive-aggressive message to underrepresented patrons. This is easily remedied by developing collections that have works about, and by, diverse professionals.

However, this is not the panacea, as Kim Dare mentioned in her 2015 YALS article “Adventures in Cultural Competence”: “It is easy to see ourselves as culturally competent if we are buying books that reflect wide teen experiences. But true cultural competence goes way beyond the books that make up a library’s collection. Cultural competence ... is also an appreciation of diverse cultural backgrounds through our interactions with others.”

2. A renewed focus on our communities. Ask questions to (1) understand the beliefs and values of those around us and (2) develop multiple ideas for resolving issues and conflicts. How can we create diverse collections, services, and programs that will match the cultural backgrounds and needs of our patrons, if not through our own curiosity and awareness?

3. Focus on creating the foundations for a long-term, positive relationship. Step one is undoubtedly building trust, i.e., creating a safe space for any under-represented individual in our community. Step two is to identify and alter environmental factors so that our community members can become active library patrons. Environmental factors can include such things as:
- language (e.g., signage in languages other than English that are most spoken in the area)
- access to transportation to and from the library (e.g., bookmobiles)
- access to information (e.g., providing WiFi hotspots for checkout)
- the accessibility of our libraries (e.g., signage in Braille, ramps, etc.)
- the behavior of our library staff (e.g., welcoming and respectful staff)

Our libraries also need to focus on cultural humility training in professional development. Lopes-Murphy and Murphy make sure to stress how essential this training is in particularly homogeneous communities, and statistics do tell us that library staff definitely is a homogeneous group. For some time, cultural competence has been based on a step-by-step framework toward proficiency. Cultural competence is ultimately limited in scope, since “competence” is just a set of skills acquired once and for all, and that one applies to any situation. Researchers have now moved on to the concept of cultural humility. Cultural humility is a lifelong endeavor, as cultures change as often as the individuals within them change. It is tied to partic-

Library staff currently does not accurately reflect the ethnic diversity of the American population.

Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility

Our process of developing cultural competence can only be successful if we are open-minded and our institutions are willing to carry this process into their policies (Overall). Our administrations must include leadership will ensure that culturally humble librarians, positive collections, and inclusive services are the norm, not just the goals, in our libraries.

Elsa Ouvrard-Prettol is the Library and Media Instructor at Natomas Charter School in Sacramento, California, a member of the YALSA Research Committee, and a representative for Section 2 of the California School Library Association.
The YALSA Update

Teen Tech Week 2017: Be the Source of Change

“Be the Source of Change” this Teen Tech Week, March 5-11, 2017. This year’s theme encourages teens to take advantage of all the great digital resources offered through the library to make a positive change in their life and community.

Sign up for a free account on the official Teen Tech Week website to download the themed digital poster, bookmark, and logo. On the site, library staff can also access planning and promotional resources, as well as exchange ideas with fellow colleagues.

Learn more at www.ala.org/teentechweek.

Apply by Feb. 1st to Serve on a Strategic Committee, Advisory Board or Taskforce

Want to update your skills, get leadership opportunities, or be a part of moving YALSA forward while networking with your other colleagues? Serve on one of YALSA’s strategic committees, advisory boards or taskforces!

President-Elect Sandra Hughes-Hassell will appoint members for 2017-2018. Groups include:
- AASL/ALSC/YALSA Interdivisional Committee on School/Public Library Cooperation
- District Days Taskforce (6 months, starting April 1)
- Division and Membership Promotion Committee
- Financial Advancement Committee
- JRLYA Advisory Board
- Midwinter Marketing & Local Arrangements Taskforce (6 months, starting July 1)
- Organization and Bylaws Committee
- Research Committee
- Summer Learning Committee
- Teen Read Week Committee
- Teens’ Top Ten Committee
- The Hub Advisory Board
- YALS/YALSAblog Editorial Advisory Board

What to Know Before You Volunteer

Before you volunteer to serve on a committee, advisory board, or taskforce, you’ll want to learn about the tasks and responsibilities of each group. Check out the Committee FAQ at www.ala.org/yalsa/committee-faq.

On the YALSA website, you’ll also find information about each of the group’s functions, size, and more. Start your research at www.ala.org/yalsa/workingwithyalsa/yalsacommunity.

Lastly, be sure to read through YALSA’s Handbook, especially the sections that list responsibilities for committee members. It’s online at www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalshandbook.

Complete the Volunteer Form

To be considered for any committee, advisory board or taskforce, you need to fill out a volunteer form. It is available online (go to www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalshandbook and choose “Committee Volunteer Form”). When you fill out a form, please be sure to include the name of the groups on which you’d most like to serve. If you don’t indicate a few that you’re particularly interested in, it is very difficult for the president-elect to find the best fit for you. Forms are only kept on file for one year, so it’s important that you fill one out each year that you would like to serve on a committee, advisory board or taskforce.

Timeline

Applications will be accepted through Feb. 1st, and once submitted you should receive an automated email confirmation from YALSA. Appointments will be made by the President-Elect in February and March 2017. Please do not expect to hear from Sandra Hughes-Hassell before March. For updates on the appointments process, check the YALSAblog (yalsa.ala.org/blog/). If appointed, your term begins July 1, 2017, with the exception of the District Days Taskforce, which begins work April 1, 2017.

The Fine Print

All of YALSA’s strategic committees are virtual appointments, meaning you do not need to attend the Annual Conference or Midwinter Meeting to serve on a committee. Committee and advisory board appointments are one-year terms, while taskforce appointments are 6 month terms. Some groups are very popular and may receive dozens of volunteer forms for just two or three available spots. Your membership in YALSA must be current in order for you to be eligible to serve on a committee, advisory board, or taskforce.

Questions? Please contact Sandra Hughes-Hassell, YALSA’s President-Elect, at smhughes@email.unc.edu or YALSA’s Membership Coordinator, Letitia Smith, at lsmith@ala.org.

Other Volunteer Opportunities

In April 2016, YALSA introduced its new three-year organizational plan, along with its new mission and implementation plan. As part of the new plan, YALSA is expanding the menu of volunteer opportunities for members by adding in short term, virtual and opt-in opportunities for members to participate in the work of YALSA. Besides year-long committee appointments that begin in either Feb. 1 or July 1, YALSA will offer other
opportunities year-round as they arise. These will be posted in the weekly YALSA eNews, so if these types of opportunities interest you, be sure to read the eNews.

To learn about other ways to build your professional skills and/or get more involved in YALSA, please visit www.ala.org/yalsa/getinvolved/getinvolved.

Submit a Program or Paper Proposal for YALSA’s 2017 YA Services Symposium

The call for programs and paper proposals for the 2017 symposium, which will take place November 3–5 in Louisville, KY at the Hyatt Regency Louisville are now open. The theme of the symposium is: Libraries: Helping All Teens Build a Better Future.

Programs at the symposium will cover the entire spectrum of topics related to providing services for and with young adults. YALSA is seeking proposals that highlight best or emerging practices for libraries of all sizes and capacities in the following categories:

- Programs and services (including planning, implementing and evaluation)
- Collections and content curation
- Digital and Print Literacies
- Youth Participation
- Partnering/Collaborations
- Equity and inclusion
- Outreach

Learn more and submit a program proposal or paper proposal by February 1, 2017 at www.ala.org/yalsa/yasymposium.

2016 Teens’ Top Ten Announced

Teens all over the world voted for their favorite titles for the Teens’ Top Ten August 15 through Teen Read Week™ (October 9–15, 2016). Altogether, over 28,000 votes were cast for the 26 nominees.

The official 2016 Teens’ Top Ten titles are as follows:

2. All the Bright Places by Jennifer Niven. Random House/Alfred A. Knopf. 9780385755887.

9. When by Victoria Laurie. Disney/Hyperion. 9781484700082.

For more information about the Teens’ Top Ten, visit www.ala.org/yalsa/teenstopnten.

2017 YALSA Book Awards and Lists

By the time you receive this issue, the winners of the Youth Media Awards will have already been announced at the Youth Media Awards at ALA’s Midwinter Meeting in Atlanta, GA. Be sure to check out the winners of all ALA’s book awards, including YALSA’s Alex, Edwards, Morris, Nonfiction, Odyssey, and Printz Awards. Additionally, you can also check out YALSA’s 2017 Selected Book Lists: Amazing Audio- books for Young Adults, Best Fiction for Young Adults, Great Graphic Novels for Teens, Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults, and Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers at tinyurl.com/yalsabookawards-lists.

In late February, be sure to visit www.ala.org/yalsa/best to find downloadable tools to promote winners at your library, part of YALSA’s new Best of the Best! You’ll be able to download customizable bookmarks featuring the winners of the 2017 Alex, Edwards, Morris, Nonfiction, Odyssey, and Printz Awards. We’ll also offer press releases, which you can customize and send to local publications to let teens know that award winners are available at your library. You can also download logos to use on your website or in marketing materials in your library, spine labels to apply to titles that appear in the Best of the Best, and other tools to promote the awards, as well as the Amazing Audio-books for Young Adults, Best Fiction for Young Adults, Great Graphic Novels for Teens, Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults, and Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers.
Teen Services 101
A Practical Guide for Busy Library Staff

Need to amp up teen services, but you’re short on time or not sure where to start? Teen Services 101 provides useful information that will help staff put together a basic teen services program with minimal time and hassle. You’ll also find practical tips and instructions on how to build core teen services into the overall library program. Whether you’re a new teen services librarian, or staff in a one person library, this how-to guide on teen services can help you effectively serve teen patrons.

*Price: $40 | Item Number: 978-0-8389-8803-9

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Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

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YALSA Publication Sale!

Excellence in Library Services to Young Adults | Orig. $24 | Now $12.50
This guide highlights 25 of the best programs across the country, providing ideas for replicating and adapting them in school and public libraries. Organized for easy browsing, each chapter encourages you to think about the range of possible programs.

Practical Programming: The Best of YA-YAAC | Orig. $40 | Now $30
Young adult enthusiasts around the world coalesce at YALSA’s discussion list, YA-YAAC to chat about cool craft ideas, share teen programming successes, and solicit suggestions for challenges. YALSA’s newest title provides librarians and library workers with a wealth of tried and true programming ideas for teens.

The Complete Summer Reading Manual: From Planning to Evaluation | Orig. $40 | Now $20
Summer reading programs are a mainstay of public library services; whether you’re embarking on your first or you think you could plan one in your sleep, you’re sure to find helpful advice, sources, idea and programs descriptions in this manual.

Teen Read Week and Teen Tech Week: Tips and Resources for YALSA’s Initiatives | Orig. $35 | Now $17.50
This manual will offer guidance to librarians planning their annual events, with advice on best practices, collection development, outreach and marketing, program ideas and more.

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