**Culturally Responsive Library Walk Reflection**

**ODU 680**

**Amanda Shepperd**

**July 17, 2019**

To be able to empathize with our patrons as librarians, we must understand their culture, their background, and where they come from as a person. This gives us the ability to connect with them on a personal level and this connection helps our patrons feel that the library is a safe place. It is not always possible to know every single detail of their past or their culture but when we strive to make a connection with our kids through any knowledge of their culture, it helps them develop a sense of trust in us. As Barclay (2015) states in her article, “Librarians are peddlers of empathy.” We understand that when we put a book in a child’s hands, “it can be at once an act of revolution, a strike against ignorance, a catalyst for change, a necessary escape, a life-saving event, a clarion call, a moment of peace, or simply a riveting read.” Therefore, it is so important that our libraries contain diverse materials that can broaden our understanding of another’s journey through life and to encourage us as people to be more empathetic of one another.

Those diverse materials can also be empowering when people see themselves in the books they are reading. As a white, English speaking woman, I have always felt the library was very useful and met my literacy needs. I’ve checked out many novels over the years and never gave it another thought about the relevance of the materials to everyone that was using the library alongside me. I never thought about a language barrier for someone that does not speak English. As an Early Childhood Special Education teacher, I chose books based on the theme or the concept I was trying to teach and did not pay attention to the skin color of the characters or the need for my students to see people that look like them in the books we were reading.

I went to the public library in my hometown to complete my library walk, I walked through looking at the space and spent time looking at the materials. I observed people coming into the library for various reasons. As I walked around, I tend to gravitate to the children’s book section because I can get great ideas for my library. A mom to one of my rising fourth graders was browsing the children’s books. I explained that I was working on a project and I asked her if she used the library often. She is a regular patron and she loves using the library but mainly for books for her children to keep them reading especially over the summer. My heart was so happy to hear this! I asked if she was happy with the library or if there was anything she would change. Her immediate response was that there were very few children’s books that contained African American characters or were written by African American authors. She mentioned she had spoken with the librarian and the staff about it and the collection was getting better. I validated her concerns and talked about how important it is for not only children but for adults as well to have access to books that contain characters that they can relate to. We live in a very diverse community and looking back on all the times I have spent in the library, people from many cultures regularly use the space for various reasons.

As a librarian, I felt that the library was a very open environment. It seemed inviting for kids in the juvenile section and had fun displays located throughout. With a growing number of Hispanic people in our area, I did not see any materials, displays, or signage that contained another language besides English. Of the employees, there is one African American male that is a library assistant. The others are white males and females. I am unaware if any of them are able to speak another language. If I were the librarian in this space, I would make sure that our materials were reflective of the demographics that make up our community. I would creatively display the diverse materials to promote them for those of that culture but also so that others will want to read them as well. It would be important for signage to be in Spanish as well so that we can meet the needs of the Hispanic patrons as well. Not only signage and materials, but there should be diverse programs held in the library to meet their needs as well. Helping myself and the other employees in the library become more culturally aware will help us all to be more empathetic to our patrons.