

COACHING INSIGHT

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INTERVIEW
with Sy Hearn

**USING A
DE&I LENS
TO PROMOTE
LITERACY
DEVELOPMENT**





“I think that the more we read and the more widely we read, the more diverse authors we read, the more we understand the world. And to me that’s a really powerful aspect of literature — that it can create empathy in us in a way that’s really safe where we’re not always able to go out in the world and meet people who are having wildly different experiences than we are ...”

— Kekla Magoon, author

USING A DE&I LENS TO PROMOTE LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Reading books is a powerful tool to teach children about diversity because it is a great way to celebrate children’s unique experiences, cultures, and identities. According to the **American Academy of Pediatrics (2020)** a baby’s brain can notice racial differences in the people around them as early as 3 months. By age 2, children absorb stereotypes about race and may express these with fear. By age 4, children can directly express bias regarding race by teasing. By age 8, children are aware of social norms and can express bias in more subtle forms, and, by age 12, many children become set in biased thoughts, actions, and decisions. Reading books to children that includes themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion, is a wonderful way to allow children to see themselves reflected in literature, learn about other cultures, see themselves through another person’s experience, recognize similarities and differences, become more considerate members of society and address injustice and discrimination as they grow and celebrate each other. Stories that integrate DE&I themes allow for children to learn compassion, kindness and empathy towards others and bring awareness of the importance of diversity. It also encourages children and educators to have open and honest conversations about the world around them.



We can support children’s learning by providing opportunities to help them develop an understanding of diversity. It is essential that we read books to promote the cultures we have within our community. All children, regardless of their age, should be able to see themselves as the superstar of their own stories; as there is not one type of child, there should not be one type of story. To encourage infant and toddlers to enjoy books, here are some tips to support literacy development:

- Follow children’s lead and read the books they choose.
- Allow the child to hold the book and turn the pages (don’t worry about reading the story, point to different pictures and label them for the child.)
- Use a variety of words to support language development and if possible, use the child’s home language.

Incorporating the **Read Aloud process** can be an effective tool to support literacy development for preschool-age children. This is a research-based approach that helps preschool children develop comprehension skills, expand their listening, and speaking vocabularies. Below outlines the three days of the Read Aloud process.

Day 1: Read Aloud

For younger learners:

Do not read every single word in the book, you can simplify the story or just talk about the pictures in the book. Use a variety of words to describe the pictures. Young children need to be exposed to adjectives (wet, slimy, and hot), action words (go, run, sleep, and devour), feeling words (happy, sad, mad, and surprised), and words about time (night, morning, later, and after).

For preschool-age learners:

The educator will introduce the plot, name of the book title, names of the author and illustrator, define vocabulary words and phrase comments about what the characters are doing, thinking and feeling. Educators will encourage children to comment on what the characters are doing, thinking, and feeling while participating in a picture walk throughout the book.



Day 2: Read Aloud

For younger learners:

Expand on what the child says or points to in the book. If the child points to a “boy” in the book or says the word boy, you can expand by saying “The boy is climbing the tree.” Adding on to the child’s words or actions supports language development.

For preschool-age learners:

The second reading should happen a couple of days after the first read-aloud. The educator will review the information of the book from Day 1. Then they can ask children to recall the title, author, who the characters are and the problem in the story.

Day 3: Read Aloud

For younger learners:

Let the child “read” the book in their own way. Allow the child to hold the book and turn the pages. Some children will flip some pages and be done, and others will want to look at the entire book. Let the child look at the book at their own pace.

For preschool-age learners:

The third Read Aloud should occur a few days after the second Read Aloud. This is an opportunity for children to retell the story in a variety of ways.



Creative Curriculum states that the Read Aloud process is most effective when the educator is aware of the children’s **interests, culture, family backgrounds and life experiences**. This will allow reading to be more meaningful to the children in your care. It’s important that you keep in mind these important characteristics when choosing a book to read:

- The topic is already or a likely interest of the children.
- It is the appropriate developmental level for the children. For young children the book should have rhymes and repetition and for preschool children the story should have suspense, plot twist, dialogue, and engaging characters.
- It relates to the children’s experiences.
- A familiar, or favorite author wrote it.
- The story and illustrations are familiar to the children’s families and cultures.
- The story illustrations depict family and cultural experiences.
- It is already or likely to become a favorite that children would like to hear over and over again.
- New information and ideas are presented through text and pictures.



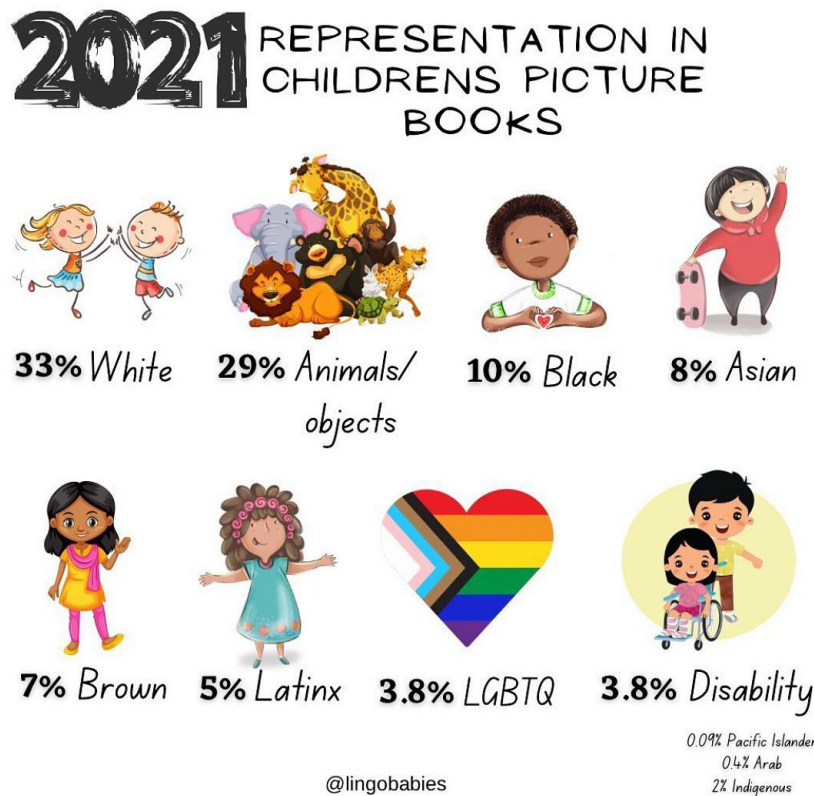
Questions to Ask Yourself When Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Learning Environment.

- Are the topics already or likely to be of interest to the children?
- Do the topics relate to children's experiences?
- What are children talking about while playing?
- What roles are they taking on in the Dramatic Play area?
- What questions are they asking their teacher or families?
- Are you highlighting books in your Library area that can further extend children's learning and inspire future investigation of things they are most interested in?
- Are the books a good match for the developmental levels of the children in your program?

Books To Support DE&I:

- For younger learners, you can include wordless books, or stories with repetitive text (ex. Brown Bear Brown Bear) and complex story books for older preschool children.
- Books that show a diverse representation of families and children without perpetuating stereotypes. Such diversity can be related to race, ethnicity, language ability, religions, family structure and more.
- Children should see themselves and their families in the books you read. Representation is critical for all families, including same sex parents, children being raised by grandparents, single parents, and multi-generational families living in a home together. Be sure to include books depicting children with varying physical, mental, and emotional abilities.
- Include books on careers that reflect people of different genders being successful in the various jobs and roles.
- Prioritize books that depict the music, food, and languages of the children in your care.

Cooperative Children Book Center 2021



2021 Statistics: the Cooperative Children's Book Center

INTERVIEW WITH SY HEARN, LEAD TEACHER DESIGNEE AT RESEDA HS

As educators, we need to recognize the value and importance of incorporating diverse books and literature into our daily routines with children. Reading is an excellent opportunity to teach children about the world and the people around them. It teaches compassion and can inspire and educate children's understanding of diversity. As we bring to the forefront of education the importance of creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive experiences into our environments, we must consistently reevaluate our approach and the books we expose to the children in our care. Sy Hearn, a Lead Teacher Designee at Reseda Head Start, shares with us his DE&I strategies to provide intentional literacy experiences for the children in his classroom.



How long have you been working at CCRC?

Since 2014.

How did you know you wanted to be a Head Start Lead Teacher?

As a former Head Start graduate, I discovered my passion for making a positive impact on children and their families and this passion has continued to grow and drive me to this day. Also, the Head Start program aligns with my beliefs in providing children from low-income families with the early education and support they need to succeed in school and in life. I believe in the power of early childhood education to set children on a path of success, and the Head Start program provides the resources and support to make that happen.

What does DE&I mean to you?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) means valuing the unique backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of each child and family in my classroom. It means creating a safe, inclusive, and nurturing environment where all children feel respected, valued, and seen. As a black man, children sometimes comment on my skin tone, saying things like "you have skin like my daddy" or "your skin is black." I use those moments as an opportunity to educate the children about what melanin is and how it gives our skin color. By providing this information, I give children a deeper understanding and clarity about skin color.

Another meaningful experience was when I had a young boy come to school dressed in a way that was not traditionally associated with their gender (in a dress). Despite this, they never once felt ostracized or discriminated against.

How do you promote DE&I in your classroom when it comes to literacy development ?

I believe in creating a diverse library to support DE&I in the classroom. My library has books with characters from various backgrounds, cultures and abilities and written in different languages. I use different methods to make sure all students feel included and valued. I also involve families by sharing e-books, doing reading activities together and inviting them to share their experiences.

How do you plan on what books you read to the children weekly?

I choose books for my classroom that fit the curriculum and what we're learning in class. I also pick books based on my students' interests, like animal books for a student who likes animals. I mix old and classic books to keep the students interested.

How does their culture or family experiences play a role in your planning?

I make sure to use language that is respectful of all cultures, and that avoids stereotypes or biases. I strive to build strong relationships with my students and their families, and I try to incorporate students' cultures and experiences into the curriculum, for example, by selecting books or activities that relate to their background.

How do you incorporate families into your classroom?

I understand the importance of maintaining an open and regular line of communication with families. I use various methods such as phone calls, learning genie, newsletters, and parent-teacher conferences to share updates on their child's progress, needs, and interests. I encourage families to volunteer by reading to the class, assisting with art projects, or sharing their cultural heritage. For example, I have arranged for the grandmother and mother of one of my students to visit the class and perform traditional Peruvian children's songs and folklore for the students. I also organized family events (firetruck, magic snow) to bring families together and

provide opportunities for them to get to know one another.



What tips could you give a new educator in the field who is struggling to support literacy development in their classroom?

By consistently reading to students every day, they will build a strong foundation in literacy. To support this, the classroom should be filled with books, posters, labels, and other print materials that expose students to a wide variety of written language. Incorporating technology tools such as interactive whiteboards, tablets, and educational apps can support reading and writing instruction. Also differentiate instruction to meet the diverse needs of students, such as providing multiple texts at varying reading levels.

Involving families in the classroom, such as having them share their cultural heritage, read to the class, or help with literacy activities, builds a stronger relationship between families and the classroom, and creates a more inclusive learning environment. Lastly, seek opportunities for professional development to help stay current with best practices in literacy instruction and to continue to improve teaching.



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The Hanen Center: Sharing Books with Toddlers the Hanen Way



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