

Guidance From a School Librarian

Sometimes, when engaging in antibias, antiracist (ABAR) work with students, we don't reflect on what this work looks like for specialists like our art, music, and physical education teachers. Karen Sekiguchi is a library media specialist at a preK–5 public school in Massachusetts. A former teacher of English learners both in Japan and in the United States, she has been interested in culturally responsive teaching since the beginning of her education career. She has trained school librarians in effective methods for working with English learners as well as in performing equity audits of school and classroom libraries. In her district, she has worked with colleagues to examine curriculum and materials through the lens of ABAR instructional practices.

As my understanding of systemic racism developed, I became frustrated by the lack of progress overall, and I wanted to do my best as an educator to not be part of the problem and to help move my district forward. Other educators in my building were on the same page, and they started a social justice learning group that I joined. Together, we have been working to develop our knowledge and support one another as we engage in ABAR instructional practices.

As a librarian, *School Library Journal* trainings have been very helpful, and as an educator, Learning for Justice materials and professional development have been very useful. I attend online conferences and in-person conferences by different organizations when I can.

Within my district and in my school, there are opportunities to collaborate. Currently, teachers across the district are collaborating on incorporating the Learning for Justice standards into new social studies lessons/units. I am writing a grant with the librarian at the other elementary school to get new picture books to support the new units of study. In my library work, the Massachusetts School Library Association (MSLA) supports ABAR instructional practices and has provided training and speakers at conferences. With MSLA support, I taught an equity audit class for Massachusetts school librarians with a colleague from another district.

As a White person, it has been necessary for me to seek out and listen to the voices of People of Color in order to understand their lived experiences. I have learned a lot by listening in spaces where I normally would not be (e.g., Greater Allen A.M.E. Cathedral's JusticeCon), and I would recommend that to others. I live and work in two primarily White communities, so these voices are not centered in the spaces where I spend most of my time (excluding my home, which is tri-cultural, Asian/White biracial).

I am proud that our school library collection has become more inclusive and reflective of many perspectives and that students, hopefully, will see themselves in the books we provide.

I have made a solid start in framing library lessons around ABAR instructional practices, and I continue to work on that. I am proud of the work our school's social justice group has done over the last few years, particularly our action plan (referenced earlier in Chapter 4), which we can hopefully continue to implement moving forward.

COVID-19 has set us back in terms of implementing our action plan, and I worry about getting back on track next year. Generally, I am frustrated by the slow pace of moving forward and bringing other colleagues on board. Also, we will have a new principal next year, and I don't know the level of support we will receive for our work. Support from the principal, who sends the messaging to parents and faculty, is critical. I hope that we will hire a person who supports ABAR instructional practices and has a deep commitment to this work.

I think that the library is a place where students see themselves in the books and displays and hopefully feel at ease to be themselves. As I learn more about the Learning for Justice domains (identity, diversity, justice and action), I continue to create new lessons that reflect what I am learning. I share books with students about difficult topics in history, and I talk openly about how the historical narrative is shaped by those with political/socioeconomic power to the exclusion of other voices. My goal is that our students will not say "I never learned about that in school."

I have learned from the #DisruptTexts group, Abolitionist Teaching Network, Learning for Justice trainers, and *School Library Journal* conferences. I seek out author webinars and other types of training whenever possible (PBS, First Book, authors, etc.) and learn from my professional learning network on Twitter, where I follow a wide variety of educators and social justice activists.

We are fortunate that our principal, district, and school committee generally support this work. Our community is making efforts to include parents and families in the conversation. Pushback sometimes occurs from parents when the messaging is not clear or when it is perceived that we are "moving too fast" for some people's comfort level. Recalibrating the message and keeping the lines of communication open have helped.

Our school's social justice group created a website (linked in Chapter 4). The educator pledge on the home page sums up our thinking and our goals for this work.