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BCLA Virtual Conference Report

I attended my first virtual library conference (my first library conference as Library Director), and despite it taking place all online, I learned a lot and really enjoyed myself. I won't go into every single session I attended, but instead will focus on some that really stuck with me.

Critical Literacy Kits with Indigenous Children's Literature at the University of British Columbia discussed a great idea put together by several UBC librarians in response to the problematic material found in their children's collection. The materials contained, among other problems, antiquated ideas, racism, cultural appropriation, and the retelling of Indigenous stories without permission from Indigenous people, often framing these stories incorrectly as fairy tales and using tropes such as "the vanishing Indian" to do so. They discussed adding special barcodes to books with the above issues so that anyone taking out these books could be told in advance about anything they should know about, and putting especially problematic books behind the desk, available by request only. Instead of removing these stories from the collection, the UBC librarians decided to make them a tool of learning, and created Critical Literacy Kits. Each kit contains 15-20 problematic books, along with learning materials and activity guides for educators to use in presenting and discussing these books. This allows them to keep these books available, thus not white washing history or ignoring the progression of representation over the years.

Transgender Inclusion at Burnaby Public Library: An EDI Roadmap discussed making libraries a safe space for trans patrons, especially involving identification and privacy. Some trans people have IDs that still contain their dead names (the names they were assigned at birth which many trans people no longer go by). Use of dead names can be very triggering to trans people, and it is generally considered in poor taste to use them to refer to trans people. In this case, the Burnaby Public Library would include "preferred name" in the patron's library card information (something we do at our library as well). Asking for a patron's preferred name is something that can be incorporated into all new library card registrants without needing to point out or assume a patron's trans identity. They discussed removing dead names from the patron's account, though doing so would require having a note on the account that the person's name does not match their ID. They also hung up both pride and trans flags in their library, placed trans inclusive signs on all their washrooms, and created a Transgender Inclusion Working Group to address these and other ways of making the library more inviting for trans people.

Finally, I attended several Summer Reading Club presentations, as the 2021 SRC will be starting soon. I learned about the new SRC website, upcoming additions and freebies for the children, and what I think is most important, the importance of representation in the SRC materials. The presenters made a good point about representation in collections, not just representation of the people who use the library, but people who don't use the library. It is important to show people who are not just in the community, but to introduce patrons to races, cultures and identities they might have never thought about. This can mean conducting a serious review of the library collection to see where it is lacking. This is good to keep in mind as we prepare our SRC resources for the children this summer.