



## Have You Committed to Authentic Diversity in Your School?

May 23, 2021 by Educator Barnes

Last week, I attended the Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians (CAPAL) Conference. The keynote speaker was Randi Foor Dalton, and her presentation “Decolonize Your Library” had principles that were applicable outside of the library space. Dalton, who is Haudenosaunee (hoe-dee-no-SHOW-nee) and a children’s librarian in Michigan, explained the importance of decolonization and the impact to Indigenous people, Black people, and non-Black people of color.

Although there were several great takeaways, the part that resonated with me most was when Dalton talked about having authentic diversity.

Putting up a poster of an Indigenous person or a Black person is not good enough. Dalton showed a collage of pictures that were supposed to represent Indigenous people. Then she challenged the audience to identify who they were. What tribe are they from? What items are in the picture that tell you who the people are? Dalton said, "Indigenous culture is not a monolith." This was followed by an explanation of pan-Indianism, a term I had not heard previously. This concept is merging Indigenous people into one big group and forgetting about what makes each Indigenous tribe unique. For example, all Indigenous people do not live on a reservation inside of a teepee with a dream catcher hanging up. Do you know which tribe dream catchers are associated with?

When listening to Dalton speak, I remembered a moment I had with a group of Nigerian students when I was an elementary school librarian. I had put books on display that were about Nigeria during Black History Month. They were so excited that I was intentional about having books on display for them. I also had books that featured Afro-Latinos because Black culture is also not a monolith.

Check your spaces. There has to be more than books and posters of people of color. Do those people represent actual groups in your school? Can you identify the culture the person represents? If you can't, then you probably don't have authentic diversity.

Authentic diversity should not happen only during heritage months. It is great to put books and resources out during those months, but those resources should already be integrated into your space. Does your classroom library have Indigenous or Black authors in every literary genre? That is one place to start.

At the end, Dalton was asked her opinion about land acknowledgments. It has become popular to acknowledge the people who lived on the land that was colonized by settlers. She wasn't against the action, but she challenged us to do more. Acknowledging the people who lived there without supporting Indigenous causes is simply lip service and may make people feel good but it doesn't make an impact.

Making an impact is important. If your integration of diversity is not impacting students, then it is probably not authentic. Trust and believe, students will call you out. Avoid the drama and be authentic about diversity in your classroom and your school.