

Beyond Restrictions: Mirrors, Windows, & Sliding Glass Doors as Inclusive Literature Tools

Raines, K., & Pella, R.

California State University - Sacramento

In educational settings, standards that incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) help schools create environments where all students feel welcome and valued. However, the second Trump administration has framed DEI philosophies not only as unnecessary but harmful and has threatened to revoke federal funding from public schools that incorporate this curriculum. Due to growing fears, even in districts without DEI restrictions, teachers are becoming more reluctant to address these topics as they are increasingly perceived as political. Bishop's metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors provides educators with a framework to ensure children have access to a balanced collection of literature. Mirrors refer to books that allow children to see themselves and their experiences reflected. Windows are books that enable children to learn about the experiences of people from different backgrounds, fostering an understanding of their perspectives. Sliding glass doors invite children to enter new environments and engage with different perspectives in transformative ways. Bishop's framework supports the development of critical literacy skills by encouraging readers to make connections between texts and their own lived experiences. Teachers can use resource-based mentorship to select inclusive materials and mitigate DEI restrictions, budget cuts, and the lack of supportive services for teachers. These materials include a comprehensive rubric created by applying the well-known mirrors, windows, and sliding glass door metaphors. The application of this evaluation tool is concise and pragmatic, with opportunities to refine text choices and align with existing curriculum. Bishop's framework supports widely accepted educational objectives, including critical thinking and active student participation, and allows educators to maintain inclusive approaches, regardless of these challenges. This paper demonstrates how a timeless pedagogical concept remains both relevant and practical in today's context.

Keywords: Mirrors, windows, sliding glass doors, diverse children's literature, critical literacy instruction, DEI restrictions in education, resource-based mentorship

Introduction

The second Trump administration has significantly rewritten educational policy and created punitive measures related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) curricula in school settings. In January 2025, the Department of Education issued letters warning that schools continuing with such activities could lose federal funding. Losing federal funds for elementary schools would significantly impact educational budgets across the United States (Mervosh & Goldstein, 2025). These new restrictions have reduced the scope of DEI subject matter in multiple academic settings, with many state governments eroding it even further by drafting restrictive curriculum mandates. In pedagogical settings, standards incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion help establish environments where all students can participate and feel a sense of belonging. Diversity tactics encourage equitable treatment and create spaces that value all members of the school community.

Literature Review

Even in schools without explicit DEI guidelines, primary grade teachers are becoming more reluctant to address topics that might include "political and social issues" (Pomerantz, 2025, p. 2). Teachers' hesitation can limit the effectiveness of critical literacy instruction. (Johnson et al., 2024). Critical literacy helps students analyze texts by relating reading to their own experiences (Freire, 1983; Johnson et al., 2024). Freire (1983) argued that literacy should be a meaningful process of interpretation rather than mere skill acquisition. Current pressures to modify curriculum combined with increased scrutiny of diverse texts may lead teachers to avoid literature that incorporates diverse voices and experiences (Johnson et al., 2024; Lowery, 2023). This practice limits students' intellectual development and contradicts established research linking literature to personal experience (Bishop, 1990). Bishop's metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors provides a practical system that remains relevant despite political opposition to diversity initiatives. The

framework's steadfast value becomes especially apparent as teachers face new restrictions on diversity initiatives (Botelho, 2021; Enriquez, 2021).

Bishop's (1990) mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors concept is an easy-to-implement, practical device to ensure that all children are reflected in the books they read. This framework allows teachers to integrate multi-perspective practices into curricular objectives (Enriquez, 2021; Pomerantz, 2025). The simplicity of using Bishop's tool becomes essential, given the expected removal of funding to prevent DEI course content and the recent removal of federal Covid-19 aid. The end of pandemic financial assistance is also forcing educational institutions across the United States to eliminate positions and reduce professional development budgets by an estimated \$600 million (Congressional Progressive Caucus Center [CPCC], 2025). These reductions include significant cuts to educator development programs that provide supportive services to teachers nationwide (CPCC, 2025). Such constraints create a critical gap as teachers need guidance to navigate new restrictions while maintaining classroom best practices (Walker, 2025). With traditional support structures becoming increasingly scarce, alternative approaches that embed expertise within accessible resources become essential. This strategy is particularly valuable in addressing political and budget restrictions on inclusive practices and the simultaneous loss of traditional mentoring support. The present paper proposes that Bishop's mirror, windows, and doors framework, paired with implementation tools, can serve as both a theoretical foundation and a form of resource-based mentorship for teachers selecting inclusive literature.

Program: Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

In 2018, the International Literacy Association (ILA) provided a free guide in 16 languages, "Advocating for Children's Right to Read," addressing the fundamental reading rights of children globally (Ishizuka, 2024). Given increasing bans on books and the DEI practices in U.S. schools, ILA was compelled to update this manual in 2024 to emphasize that children have the right to read "texts that mirror their experiences and languages, provide windows into the lives of others, and open doors into our diverse world" (Ishizuka, 2024, para. 1). The metaphors of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors are at the heart of Bishop's work on the importance of diverse children's literature (Botelho, 2021). Decades after its inception, this framework continues to powerfully influence teaching practices, inspiring inclusive approaches even in the most challenging educational environments. Bishop's metaphors call for teachers to be mindful of "who is represented, underrepresented, misrepresented, and invisible" in their classrooms (Botelho, 2021, p. 120).

Bishop's (1990) used the metaphor of mirrors to describe children's books that reflect the readers' own experiences and cultural backgrounds. When children can see themselves accurately represented in books, it reassures them of their significance in the world, which is especially important for marginalized readers who have been ignored or negatively stereotyped in texts (Botelho, 2021; Tschida et al., 2014). Although educational research shows that students engage more successfully in a curriculum where the materials provide mirrors, most texts commonly used in classroom instruction continue to reflect white, middle-class perspectives and values (Lowery, 2023; Tschida et al., 2014). Enriquez (2021) cautions that some mirror texts provide only a surface-level representation outside of the dominant cultural perspective. In an era of growing restrictions on inclusive education, mirrors become more urgent tools for ensuring diverse students see themselves valued and represented (Pomerantz, 2025). Bishop's (1990) mirror metaphor highlights the importance of literature that authentically represents all readers, allowing every child to find validation when they see themselves reflected in books.

Readers who see only mirrors develop "an exaggerated sense of their importance and value in the world" that can limit their understanding of others (Bishop, 1990, p. 2). Window texts offer a necessary counterbalance, inviting children to view worlds beyond their immediate reality and fostering curiosity about different ways of life (Tschida et al., 2014). Unlike mirrors, which validate readers' identities, windows challenge children to step outside their comfort zones and consider new perspectives (Tschida et al., 2014). In elementary classrooms, window literature serves the important functions of building global awareness and helping young readers understand diverse communities (Enriquez, 2021; Liang et al., 2024). When successfully implemented, window texts help children develop empathy, allowing them to see familiar situations through different eyes and recognize both differences and commonalities (Jiménez, 2021; Lowery, 2023). Botelho (2021) argues that window texts should provide complex portrayals of other cultures and be plentiful in classrooms to avoid oversimplified or stereotypical representations. Bishop's window metaphor reminds teachers that diverse literature is essential for developing thoughtful and empathetic readers (Botelho, 2021).

Unlike windows that maintain separation between readers and books, sliding glass doors remove these barriers, allowing readers to move beyond passive observation into active interaction with the experiences represented in the texts (Johnson et al., 2017). Bishop (1990) argues that for a book to become a sliding glass door, "readers have only to walk through in imagination," enter and participate in the worlds authors have constructed (p. 103). This imaginative participation transforms readers by deepening their connection to texts and nurturing empathy for others' perspectives

and lived realities (Enriquez, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017). Beyond personal transformation, sliding glass door experiences enhance readers' critical thinking abilities and their understanding of diverse communities (Liang et al., 2024). When successfully implemented, these immersive literary encounters extend beyond the classroom, connecting literary representations with real-world experiences (Jiménez, 2021). In today's educational climate, where inclusive literature faces growing constraints, texts that function as doors offer crucial opportunities for developing students who can thoughtfully engage in our diverse society (Jiménez, 2021; Liang et al., 2024). The transformative potential of sliding glass doors lies in their ability to move readers beyond surface exposure to different cultures and identities toward a critical understanding of the worlds they experience through diverse texts (Botelho, 2021).

Resource-Based Mentorship

Although Bishop's (1990) conceptual model offers a powerful strategy for selecting diverse literature, many educators face challenges when implementing it, especially due to current federal policies and budget cuts. Providing accessible instructional materials can assist teachers with selecting culturally authentic literature, providing a type of easy support. Rather than requiring direct in-person interactions, mentorship can be facilitated through well-crafted resources that offer guidance and help address many obstacles teachers may encounter (Johnson & Ridley, 2018). When access to traditional mentorship is not available, carefully formatted forms of indirect support can fulfill many of its core purposes, offering examples of strong practice, guiding learning, and promoting growth in professional contexts (Johnson & Ridley, 2018). Embedded mentorship can fill gaps for teachers in schools with reduced support services.

Tangible resources can play a central role in helping teachers implement Bishop's framework, offering the kind of embedded support that might otherwise come from experienced mentors. Unlike conventional teacher development carried out through in-person interactions, tools including rubrics, booklists, and instructional guides provide several benefits beyond accessibility (Bigger Books, n.d). Specifically, the attached rubric (see Table 1, Table 2) can be used to evaluate the representation of different types of diversity in picture books across five dimensions of diversity and representation.

Teachers are encouraged to consider how the book functions as mirrors (reflecting readers' identities), windows (providing views into other experiences), and doors (inviting readers to enter new worlds). When thoughtfully created, instructional materials can share reliable, classroom-tested practices with teachers who may not have access to traditional mentorship opportunities (Johnson & Ridley, 2018). This resource-based support has become especially important in districts where budget cuts or shifting policies have reduced access to professional development (Walker, 2025).

By turning well-researched strategies into practical classroom tools, these resources can support educators in selecting texts that genuinely reflect community diversity and help students appreciate different perspectives. Carefully designed resources can also guide teachers in aligning literature with learning standards, recognizing authentic versus stereotypical representation, using inclusive language to navigate sensitive topics, and anticipating questions during class discussions. In places where policies restrict curriculum content, these tools can help reframe diversity lessons through broadly accepted educational goals like critical thinking, empathy, and student engagement, rather than through politicized language (CPCC, 2025). Teachers should recognize that this rubric serves as a starting point for reflection, as integrating cultural authenticity involves complex, nuanced perspectives that may vary within communities.

While resource-based mentorship cannot replace the collaboration and reflective discussion in traditional mentoring, it can provide helpful scaffolding when such support is unavailable (Johnson & Ridley, 2018). Well-designed tools, such as rubrics, can provide teachers with guided practice in applying Bishop's framework as they develop confidence in navigating restrictive policies. However, teachers may face implementation challenges, including subjective interpretations of diversity representation and varying levels of familiarity with cultural stereotypes. To address these limitations, the rubric includes specific descriptors and community perspective guidelines, though supplemental professional learning communities or informal peer networks remain valuable complements to resource-based approaches.

Conclusion and Implications

As DEI programs confront increasing restrictions and federal funding cuts reduce educational resources, teachers face a dual challenge (CPCC, 2025). Nuanced curriculum decisions are now required at a time when traditional mentor support is less available (CPCC, 2025; Walker, 2025). Bishop's (1990) mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors metaphor offers a way to maneuver through current political mandates while addressing the gaps in professional assistance (Botelho, 2021; Enriquez, 2021). It asks teachers to ensure all children can see themselves, understand others, and engage meaningfully with diverse perspectives through literature (Bishop, 1990; Botelho, 2021). This focus on core educational goals becomes particularly valuable when teachers need reliable guidance for maintaining equitable practices (Johnson et al., 2024; Pomerantz, 2025). To this end, a rubric has been devised that provides specific evaluation standards to transform Bishop's metaphors of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors into practical criteria across four dimensions of diversity representation. Rather than leaving teachers to conclude on their own what makes

an effective mirror, window, or sliding glass door, detailed descriptors help identify representation levels (Enriquez, 2021; Johnson et al., 2017).

Employing a “Mirrors-Windows-Doors” rubric can help teachers make critical decisions when selecting diverse books for their curriculum and classroom library (Enriquez, 2021; Jiménez, 2021). Easy-to-access tools such as rubrics, booklists, and instructional guides encourage an independent mentorship approach (Bigger Books, n.d.).

Teachers can obtain the assistance they typically receive from a professional mentor

without requiring supervision or additional school resources. This combined method makes selecting books a deliberate practice that helps ensure inclusive instruction despite prevailing political pressures or diminishing budgets (Pomerantz, 2025). The current political atmosphere need not prevent teachers from ensuring that all students are valued and reflected in the curriculum (Johnson et al., 2024). Bishop’s metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors continues to assist in creating inclusive classrooms, even in the most challenging environments.

Table 1

Rubric for Evaluating Children’s Books Based on Bishop’s Mirrors, Windows & Sliding Glass Doors Framework

Dimension	Exemplary – 4	Proficient – 3	Developing – 2	Inadequate – 1
1. Race/Ethnicity ____/4	Specific cultural details reflect lived experiences; authentic research evident; characters have individual personalities beyond racial/ethnic identity	Some cultural specificity; respectful representation; characters have distinct personalities with cultural context	Limited cultural specificity; basic exposure without depth; characters have some individual traits but limited cultural context.	Lacks authenticity; oversimplified/ stereotypical views; characters defined primarily by appearance
2. Disability/ Neurodiversity ____/4	Characters shown as complete individuals with full lives; disability as natural variation; respectful community language used	Generally positive representation; respectful exposure to different abilities; characters have personalities beyond disabilities	Limited representation focusing on limitations; basic exposure without depth; disability may be overly central to identity	Misrepresents or fails to include disabled experiences; stereotypical or pitying views; one-dimensional characters
3. LGBTQ+ ____/4	Authentic representation allowing positive self-recognition; age-appropriate exposure; LGBTQ+ identities as natural diversity	Positive representation; respectful glimpses into LGBTQ+ lives; encourages acceptance and understanding	Limited or token representation; basic exposure without context; characters defined primarily by orientation/identity	Assumes heteronormative identities; harmful stereotypes or complete absence of LGBTQ+ experiences
4. Gender Roles/ Expression ____/4	Characters engage in diverse activities without gender constraints; challenges traditional assumptions; natural individual expression	Generally, challenges gender expectations; shows flexibility in expression; awareness that activities aren’t gender-determined	Limited challenge to traditional roles; occasional exceptions to stereotypes; minimal exposure to flexible expression	Reinforces rigid gender roles and stereotypes; presents narrow views of gender possibilities
5. Family Structure ____/4 Total: ____/20	Diverse family structures represented as normal and loving; shows families formed in many ways; avoids deficit narratives	Some representation of family diversity; respectful glimpses; encourages acceptance of family differences	Limited diversity representation; token diverse families; superficial treatment without depth	Assumes traditional nuclear family as norm; narrow view or negative portrayal of non-traditional families

Table 2

Example of additional rubric resources on the website

1. For Books Scoring 17-20 (Exemplary) - Add to classroom library immediately - Consider for read-aloud and literature circles - Use as mentor texts for discussions about diversity - Share with colleagues as model examples	2. For Books Scoring 13-16 (Proficient) - Add to collection with contextual support - Use alongside other books to provide multiple perspectives - Prepare discussion questions to address any limitations - Monitor student responses and provide additional resources as needed	For Books Scoring 9-12 (Developing) 3. - Use with caution and explicit discussion - Pair with stronger examples of diverse representation - Address limitations directly with students - Consider whether benefits outweigh potential limitations	4. For Books Scoring 5-8 (Inadequate) - Do not add to the classroom collection - Replace with more respectful alternatives - Use only as counterexamples in professional development - Advocate for better options from publishers and suppliers
Self-Evaluation Questions:	Before Selection - Who is missing from my current classroom library? - What mirrors do my students need to see themselves? - What windows can broaden my students' understanding? - What doors can invite my students into new experiences?	During Evaluation: - Does this book avoid reducing characters to stereotypes? - Are diverse characters central to the story or peripheral? - Does this book normalize diversity rather than exoticize it? - What cultural details make this feel authentic rather than generic?	After Selection: - How will I contextualize this book within a broader collection? - What conversations might this book spark in my classroom? - How can I help students see this as both a mirror and a window? - What other books do I need to provide multiple perspectives?

Note: This rubric is a tool for reflection, not definitive judgment. Cultural authenticity and representation are complex topics with diverse perspectives within communities. As an individual evaluator, you bring your cultural lens and limitations to this assessment.

References

- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 6(3), ix-xi.
- Bigger Books. (n.d.). <https://sites.google.com/view/bigger-books/home>
- Botelho, M. J. (2021). Reframing mirrors, windows, and doors: A critical analysis of the metaphors for multicultural children's literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 47(1), 119-126.
- Congressional Progressive Caucus Center (CPCC). (2025, April 28). *Fact Sheet: The Trump Administration's education cuts are devastating our schools*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a5414caf9a61e90a854b98c/t/68123415ff391739d-4f0ba4e/1746023446116/FACT+SHEET_+The+Trump+Administration%E2%80%99s+Education+Cuts+Are+Devastating+Our+Schools+.pdf
- Enriquez, G. (2021). Foggy mirrors, tiny windows, and heavy doors: Beyond diverse books toward meaningful literacy instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 75(1), 103-106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2030>
- Freire, P. (1983). The importance of the act of reading. *Journal of Education*, 165(1), 5-11. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42772842>

- Harris, V. J. (2007). Profiles and perspectives: In praise of a scholarly force: Rudine Sims Bishop. *Language Arts*, 85(2), 153-159. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41962258>
- Ishizuka, K. (2024, September 10). With greater urgency around children's right to read, the International Literacy Association reissues advocacy measures. *School Library Journal*. <https://www.slj.com/story/With-Greater-Urgency-Around-Childrens-Right-to-Read-the-International-Literacy-Association-Reissues-Advocacy-Measures>
- Jiménez, L. M. (2021). Mirrors and windows with texts and readers: Intersectional social justice at work in the classroom. *Language Arts*, 98(3), 156-161.
- Johnson, N. J., Koss, M. D., & Martinez, M. (2017). Through the sliding glass door: #EmpowerTheReader. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(5), 569-577. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1659>
- Johnson, W. B., & Ridley, C. R. (2018). *The elements of mentoring* (4th ed.). St. Martin's.
- Johnson, W. F., Vlach, S. K., & Leija, M. (2024). Enacting reading comprehension: Using diverse literature to engage children's critical, sociopolitical knowledge. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 60, e584, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.584>
- Liang, L. A., Cromwell, R., & Hacker, D. J. (2024). The impact of children's and young adult literature courses on teachers' selection of global and culturally diverse texts for the classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 68, 118-128. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1341>
- Lowery, R. M. (2023). But these are our stories! Critical conversations about bans on diverse literature. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 58(1), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.58680/rte202332609>
- Mervosh, S., & Ngo, M. (2024, June 26). Why U.S. schools are facing their biggest budget crunch in years. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/26/us/schools-budget-cuts-pandemic-aid.html>
- Pomerantz, F. (2025). Teacher candidates' use of inclusive children's literature in interactive read-aloud. *Education Sciences*, 15(2), 245, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15020245>
- Tschida, C. M., Ryan, C. L., & Ticknor, A. S. (2014). Building on windows and mirrors: Encouraging the disruption of "single stories" through children's literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 40(1), 28-39.
- Walker, T. (2025, May 7). Four ways Trump's budget proposal slashes public school funding. *NEA Today*. https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/four-ways-trumps-budget-proposal-slashes-public-school-funding-FACT+SHEET_+The+Trump+Administration%E2%80%99s+Education+Cuts+Are+Devastating+Our+Schools+.pdf
- Congressional Progressive Caucus Center. (2025, April 28). Fact Sheet: The Trump Administration's education cuts are devastating our schools. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a5414caf9a61e90a854b98c/t/68123415ff391739d-4f0ba4e/1746023446116/FACT+SHEET_+The+Trump+Administration%E2%80%99s+Education+Cuts+Are+Devastating+Our+Schools+.pdf
- Enriquez, G. (2021). Foggy mirrors, tiny windows, and heavy doors: Beyond diverse books toward meaningful literacy instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 75(1), 103-106. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2030>
- Freire, P. (1983). The importance of the act of reading. *Journal of Education*, 165(1), 5-11. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42772842>
- Harris, V. J. (2007). Profiles and perspectives: In praise of a scholarly force: Rudine Sims Bishop. *Language Arts*, 85(2), 153-159. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41962258>
- Ishizuka, K. (2024, September 10). With greater urgency around children's right to read, the International Literacy Association reissues advocacy measures. *School Library Journal*. <https://www.slj.com/story/With-Greater-Urgency-Around-Childrens-Right-to-Read-the-International-Literacy-Association-Reissues-Advocacy-Measures>
- Jiménez, L. M. (2021). Mirrors and windows with texts and readers: Intersectional social justice at work in the classroom. *Language Arts*, 98(3), 156-161.
- Johnson, N. J., Koss, M. D., & Martinez, M. (2017). Through the sliding glass door: #EmpowerTheReader. *The Reading Teacher*, 71(5), 569-577. <https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.1659>
- Johnson, W. B., & Ridley, C. R. (2018). *The elements of mentoring* (4th ed.). St. Martin's.
- Johnson, W. F., Vlach, S. K., & Leija, M. (2024). Enacting reading comprehension: Using diverse literature to engage children's critical, sociopolitical knowledge. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 60, e584, 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.584>
- Liang, L. A., Cromwell, R., & Hacker, D. J. (2024). The impact of children's and young adult literature courses on teachers' selection of global and culturally diverse texts for the classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 68, 118-128. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1341>

- tion of global and culturally diverse texts for the classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 68, 118-128. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.1341>
- Lowery, R. M. (2023). But these are our stories! Critical conversations about bans on diverse literature. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 58(1), 34-47. <https://doi.org/10.58680/rte202332609>
- Mervosh, S., & Ngo, M. (2024, June 26). Why U.S. schools are facing their biggest budget crunch in years. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/26/us/schools-budget-cuts-pandemic-aid.html>
- Pomerantz, F. (2025). Teacher candidates' use of inclusive children's literature in interactive read-aloud. *Education Sciences*, 15(2), 245, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci15020245>
- Tschida, C. M., Ryan, C. L., & Ticknor, A. S. (2014). Building on windows and mirrors: Encouraging the disruption of "single stories" through children's literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 40(1), 28-39.
- Walker, T. (2025, May 7). Four ways Trump's budget proposal slashes public school funding. *NEA Today*. <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/four-ways-trumps-budget-proposal-slashes-public-school-funding>