

NEWS/EDITORIAL

ChattState, cont'd

Chattanooga, Tenn -- Earlier this fall, Chattanooga State Community College students got together to discuss their Global Learning Collective virtual internship program experiences with College administrators, study abroad directors, and other students. Participants included William McElyea, Emily Bengyak, Francheska Cermeno, Keely Farris, Unenakam Ebiefung, Hannah Dutton, Jessyca Foster, Brittany Santiago, and Lael Reel. Faculty and staff planners included Mary Knaff, director, Multicultural & International Services; Juan Alonso, associate professor and Global Scholars interim director; and Dr. Ken Goldsmith, professor and program director, Paralegal Studies.

Hannah Dutton, a 19-year-old Global Scholars student from Jasper, AL majoring in Business explained that stepping out of her comfort zone made her appreciate the experience even more. "I became more confident with public speaking," shared Hannah. "Working with (online Zoom) partners from other places in the world really opened my eyes to other cultures and made me more interested in learning about them." She said she enjoyed learning about Chattanooga State's Global Learning Collective project and would definitely recommend it to others.

Tennessee Promise and Global Scholars student Lael Reel will be finishing up her degree in Biology with a Health Science concentration and a double minor in Chemistry and German before transferring to TTU. Lael said, "Community college is like a small taste and introduction into a life in higher education and likewise this internship was an introduction in getting to study abroad." In addition to making new friends all over the world, Lael gained international, business-related, and internship ex-

perience and exposure to other cultures and languages. "I improved my communication, teamwork and research skills, while learning social and cultural awareness and working on patience and any insecurities I had."

As an adult student, Keely Harris felt untethered by geography when the opportunity to be a part of the virtual Global Collective arose and the world opened up to her. "I felt like I got to travel the world this summer, sitting in my home office," said Keely, who is a wife, mother and a Tennessee Reconnect student immersed in Chattanooga State as a member of Global Scholars and Spire National Honor Society, majoring in social work. Keely explained that once classes began and they began learning about sustainable business, her world grew, and she became even more hopeful. "Suddenly, there was a marriage between my prior learning experiences and my passion," enthused Ms. Farris. "That is what this global learning experience meant to me; it helped me find 'my thing'. It gave me the tools and expertise to make a difference in the world."

The Global Learning Collective connects students through experiential learning, global education and localized support to all regions of the world. As a consortium of regionally specialized and experienced international partner organizations, college program directors can design a program for their own students or choose from a comprehensive catalog of intercultural programs and experiences.

Although the Global Learning Collective internship was a virtual opportunity, Chattanooga State offers a host of study abroad programs. Scholarships are available for 2022. See chattanooga.state.edu/study-abroad for details.

Burnt-out employees, cont'd.

in occasionally" and then changed their minds and demanded employees return to the office once vaccinated.

2. Confused remote-work policies
Another constant refrain we read in the worker comments was disappointment in their company's remote-work policy – or lack thereof.

Whether workers said they were staying remote for now, returning to the office or still unsure, we found that nearly a quarter of the people in our sample said their leaders were not giving them meaningful explanations of what was driving the policy. Even worse, the explanations sometimes felt confusing or insulting.

One worker complained that the manager "wanted butts in seats because we couldn't be trusted to [work from home] even though we'd been doing it since last March," adding: "I'm giving my notice on Monday."

Another, whose company issued a two-week timeline for all to return to the office, griped: "Our leadership felt people weren't as productive at home. While as a company we've hit most of our goals for the year. ... Makes no sense."

After a long period of office shutters, it stands to reason workers would need time to readjust to office life, a point expressed in recent survey results. Employers that quickly flip the switch in calling workers back and do so with poor clarifying rationale risk appearing tone-deaf.

It suggests a lack of trust in productivity at a time when many workers report putting in more effort than ever and being strained by the increased digital intensity of their job – that is, the growing number of online meetings and chats.

And even when companies said they wouldn't require a return to the office, workers still faulted them for their motives, which many employees described as financially motivated.

"We are going hybrid," one work-

er wrote. "I personally don't think the company is doing it for us. ... I think they realized how efficient and how much money they are saving."

Only a small minority of workers in our sample said their company asked for input on what employees actually want from a future remote work policy. Given that leaders are rightly concerned about company culture, we believe they are missing a key opportunity to engage with workers on the issue and show their policy rationales aren't only about dollars and cents.

3. Corporate culture 'BS'
Management gurus such as Peter Drucker and other scholars have found that corporate culture is very important to binding together workers in an organization, especially in times of stress.

A company's culture is essentially its values and beliefs shared among its members. That's harder to foster when everyone is working remotely.

That's likely why corporate human resource executives rank maintaining organizational culture as their top workforce priority for 2021.

But many of the forum posts we reviewed suggested that employer efforts to do that during the pandemic by orchestrating team outings and other get-togethers were actually pushing workers away, and that this type of "culture building" was not welcome.

One worker's company "had everyone come into the office for an outdoor luncheon a week ago," according to a post, adding: "Idiot."

Surveys have found that what workers want most from management, on the issue of corporate culture, are more remote-work resources, updated policies on flexibility and more communication from leadership.

As another worker put it, "I can tell you, most people really don't give 2 flips about 'company culture' and think it's BS." (The CONVERSATION-May 2021)



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Racism in books, cont'd.

published in the U.S. authored by and about people of color.

The data is disturbing.

In 2015 – when I began this research – there were 85 books published in the U.S. that included Latinx characters from the 3,200 children's books the center received that year. That's about 2.5% of the total, whereas Latinx kids represent about 1 in 4 school children in the U.S.

Since then, there has been an upward trend for all ethnic or racial groups. However, books written by and about people of color remain a very small proportion of books published each year. The most recent CCBC data reports books with Latinx characters were about 6% of the more than 4,000 children's books the center received in 2019.

The lack of representation of communities of color in children's books is another longstanding problem – one that has persisted since at least the 1920s when renowned sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois first expressed his concerns about anti-Black racism in children's books. Books can serve as important tools for children to develop their own sense of self and identity. When children of color do not see themselves in the books they read, this sends the message that they and their communities are not important.

In a study published in 2020, my colleagues and I used critical race theory to develop a rubric to critically analyze racial representations in children's books. Drawing from this research, here are five questions to consider when choosing books about people of color:

1. What roles do the characters of color play?

It is important to see people of color represented in a wide array of characters to avoid falling into racist tropes and stereotypes. When characters of color are present, it is important to recognize the position they play in the story line. Children should have the opportunity to see characters of color as main characters, central to the stories they read.

For example, in Pam Muñoz Ryan's "Esperanza Rising," the story follows Esperanza, a young Latina girl whose affluent Mexican family loses everything in a series of tragic events that force her and her mother to migrate North to California, where they become farmworkers.

For younger readers, Matthew A. Cherry's "Hair Love" tells the story of a young African American girl named Zuri, who wants to celebrate a special day with a special hairstyle, which she gets with the help of her father.

2. Does the book contain racial stereotypes?

Research has found that dominant perspectives of communities of color are often guided by views that they are culturally deficient. These deficit views often blame people of color for the social inequities they face, such as low educational attainment or poverty.

In my view, it is important to identify whether stories about people of color perpetuate or challenge these views.

One example of deficit views would be the book with a character that perpetuates the racist stereotype of the Mexican bandit, which I mentioned earlier. Images like those have historically targeted Latinas and Latinos in the U.S.

3. Are characters represented in culturally authentic ways?

Culturally authentic stories are accurate portrayals of a particular culture. For example, the book "I'm New Here" by Anne Sibley O'Brien is a story about three young students from Somalia, Guatemala and Korea who immigrate to the U.S. and come to school for the first time, but does not recognize how these students can have different immigration experiences from one another.

Language used by and between characters is an important signal for cultural authenticity. Education scholar Carmen Martínez Roldán has found that mock Spanish is used frequently in the best-selling children's book series "Skippyjon Jones" by Judy Schachner. Mock Spanish, according to Roldán, is the borrowing of selective aspects of Spanish that serve to mock those who speak it, such as phrases like "no problem-o" and "no way Jose."

4. Do the books include the bigger picture?

Effective storytelling about people of color should provide a broader historical, social, political and other context. This gives children the ability to understand how everyday experiences exist within the larger society.

For early readers, these contexts are usually subtle clues that can help children better understand a broader issue. For example, in "We Are Water Protectors," author Carole Lindstrom warns of the effects of environmental pollution through Indigenous perspectives of water as a precious resource to be protected.

Context becomes more explicit for older readers in chapter books and books aimed at middle or high school students, like George Takei's graphic novel "They Called Us Enemy," which is about his personal experience growing up in a Japanese internment camp during World War II.

5. Who has power and agency in the story?

There are many vantage points from which a story can be told. When a book tells a story through the eyes of a character of color, there is a power assigned to the character in the telling of their own story. This strategy gives the character agency to construct the narrative, and to resolve the ending. Juana Martínez-Neal's "Alma and How She Got Her Name" is a moving story of a little girl who learns the power of her name is connected to the history of her family.

One problematic strategy I have seen in books with characters of color is the use of nameless characters. Using general references like "the girl" or "the boy" shifts power and agency away from the character and creates a social distance between the story and the reader, rather than make a humanistic connection.

For example, Jairo Buitrago's "Two White Rabbits" tells an important story of a young girl's migration north from Mexico with her father. However, there is a missed opportunity for readers to connect with the main character, who is not given a name, and thus to her migration story.

One of the most important things parents can do is to engage with their child readers about what they are reading and seeing in books. Helping children to make sense of what they see, challenge ideas and recognize problematic storytelling are critical tools they can use to read the world around them. (Source: The CONVERSATION/January 04, 2021)