Collection Development for Diverse Populations

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Abstract

As librarians continue to debate about what is at the core of librarianship, the types of people needing their services has shifted. A major challenge in today's interconnected world is how to incorporate diversity into a library collection. To address this challenge an overview of prior definitions of diversity has been compiled. This evaluation is then supplemented with advice on how to reach out to individuals with disabilities, immigrant populations. Two final populations, those who are bilingual and non-English speaking and the gender and sexual minority community are also considered. Overall this article provides an introduction to how a collection development librarian can begin to make minor changes to have major impacts on the diversity of their library.

*Keywords:* collection development, diversity, disabilities, immigrants, bilingual, LGBT

Introduction

If the average person was asked, "what is a library" their answers would likely range

from books to movies and focus on the material collection. The same question asked to a

librarian would likely result in a passionate speech on information access, public facilities and

the development and preservation of knowledge. All of these fall short in that they neglect the

heart of the library, people. From the patrons bringing their questions, desire for knowledge, or

just looking for a place to relax to the staff who strives to anticipate and meet their needs the

library is centered on people. Like any other people driven institution, diversity will become an

issue as no two individuals will come from exactly the same place. A library must be able to

adapt to the needs of a wide-variety of patrons, a variety which will never look the exact same as

another institution. To accomplish this goal, a foundation must be established on what diversity

is about as well as common methods of working with the most commonly encountered

populations. Thus a discussion on what is meant by diversity will lead to consideration of how a

collection development librarian can meet the needs of patrons with disabilities, who are

migrants, bilingual or non-English speaking, and/or are a gender and sexual minority (GSM).


Understanding Diversity

A major challenge facing any library which desires to build a diverse collection begins

with defining diversity. The ALA Bill of Rights implies diversity is critical in article two, the

first part of which reads "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all

points of view on current and historical issues" ("Library bill of," 1996). Yet what encompasses

diversity? Does having a multi-cultural group of characters make a resource diverse? Charles

Shields argues that it is not sufficient, and supports his point by referencing children's materials

which use non-white characters to teach counting or to reinforce cultural stereotypes (1994). One definition of multiculturalism examined by Shields was "books by and about people of color" (1994). He acknowledges that this definition fails to account for other multicultural groups such as books about European cultures. In the end the definition he supports has three categories, "books that are inclusive, books that are multicultural only in content and are not by people from the race/ethnic group featured and books that are multicultural and are by people of the same race/ethnic group portrayed". In addition to this definition Shields supported a focus on materials that build empathy (1994). In contrast Mildred Lee focuses less on the materials a collection provides, and more on how those materials are presented. Simply having resources which demonstrate a wide variety of cultures and holidays is insufficient if the resources and programs do not place these materials into context. She emphasizes that "respect for cultural differences should be taught all the time, not just reserved for the 'culture of the week'" (Lee, 1995). Perhaps the best definition of diversity and a diverse collection is the simplest "diversity simply means differences…differences in people" (Bouchard & Kunze, 2003).

<div align="center">Individuals with Disabilities</div>

One diverse population any library is likely to encounter, or at least needs to be cognizant of, is people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 requires libraries to "ensure full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations" for individuals who are disabled ("Americans with disabilities,").  These individuals my struggle with a physical disability, a mental disability or both and thus librarians must be sensitive to the wide variety of needs.

Part of the need is met outside of collection development. The structure of the facility, such as reading and study areas, check-out areas, catalogs, stack widths and magazine displays are all areas which need to be accounted for and are out of the collection development librarians direct control ("Ada accessibility guidelines," 2002). Steps to facilitate access, such as propping open doors, identifying trip hazards and leaving empty spaces at tables are free and useful tricks to invite individuals with disabilities to use the collection (Deines-Jones, 2007), but do not address needs within the collection itself.

Despite having all the official requirements met, individuals with disabilities may still be distanced from the library. They may struggle with a sensation that the library does not want to "their kind", have negative past experiences, or be unsure that the library staff will be able to communicate with them to direct them to the resources they need (Deines-Jones, 2007; Camaratta, 2009). Collection development staff can assist with these concerns by providing resources for the staff and community to face their biases about those with disabilities, access to fiction and non-fiction accounts which emphasize the perspectives of individuals with disabilities and  purchasing materials in formats such as large-print or close-captioned films which enhance access. By taking into account the challenges faced by patrons with disabilities and the current climate of their library and community a collection development library can build on the diversity of their collection by providing resources to enhance access and attract new patrons.

To meet the ADA requirements collection development staff must work with the library's administration to ensure the physical needs of patrons are met. Collection development staff will also have the additional responsibility of ensuring their collection provides access to different formats, meets training needs to ensure competent staff, and provides information for individuals about the nature of their disabilities.

Immigrant Populations

Depending on the location and type a library may notice a need to adapt to an incoming, or leaving immigrant population.  Immigration has certainly changed over the past 100 years. Immigrants of primarily European decent are currently superseded by rising numbers of Latin American and Asian immigrants (Burke, 2008). The variety of immigrant populations means that a library wishing to serve a diverse population must evaluate what populations are present in their community and how the needs of those populations can be met with current or additional materials. During the overview of current diversity research two tools emerged to evaluate the needs of immigrants in a community. The first, proposed by Rodrigo Diaz, consists of six questions a library reaching out to migrant farmworkers can ask. The second discusses how vernacular literacy can provide insight into the communities traditional literacy needs. While both tools focus on program development, they are easily linked back to collection development by remembering that programs serve to link patrons to the collection and that all programing a facility offers is dependent on the resources housed in its collection.

The first tool, proposed by Rodrigo Diaz, lays out six questions for a library which serves a large migrant farm worker population which can be easily adapted to structure analysis of any immigrant population (Diaz, 2005). The first question is "what do I want to accomplish?" (Diaz, 2005). This question is critical as actions designed to bring in new patrons will look remarkably different than those taken as a response to a patron group which is already using the collection. Next a library needs to consider what resources are already available, and why those resources might not be being used at present. Then outreach programs can be developed to emphasize the parts of the collection which meet the needs of the immigrant population. Finally questions about evaluation and what to do if a program is or isn't meeting a populations needs will be asked

(Diaz, 2005). By considering these questions a collection development librarian can ensure the resources they are purchasing will meet the needs of an often neglected part of their community.

Another tool to consider is to look at the vernacular literacy in the community you are working (Adkins, Bossaller & Thompson, 2009). To use this method a librarian must understand the difference between dominant literacy, that which is created by an authority and vernacular literacy, which is created and governed by cultural norms. Most of a library's collection is resources for dominant literacy, ranging from books and periodicals to full-text databases. Vernacular literacy is self-generated and can be seen by watching what signs a community uses to advertise, graffiti, bulletin boards and other non-moderated forms of communication (Adkins, Bossaller & Thompson, 2009). An enterprising librarian can examine the public spaces in their community to determine what the primary language of their patron base is, what types of needs are not being met and how the library can fulfill its goal of providing information access to everyone.

An immigrant populations needs may be very different or similar to the needs of the dominant group and to maintain the ideology of providing services to all, a library needs tools to evaluate the needs of immigrants. Both Diaz's questions for migrant workers and Adkin's work on vernacular literacy provide a starting point for a librarian to evaluate the needs of immigrants in their community.

<center>Bilingual Collections</center>

When revising a collection to account for immigration, another issue may emerge, the need for a second language collection. In the United States it is assumed that this second language will likely be Spanish, but depending on the population Italian, German, French, Vietnamese, Korean or any of hundreds of other languages may be required (Patton, 2008). The

Reference and User Services Association has published guidelines for Spanish-Speaking Library users. Many of the items proposed can be easily adapted for other languages depending on a community's needs. For example all materials in a second language collection should be relevant and reflect the culture the collection is targeting ("Guidelines for library," 2007). Additional considerations for a second-language collection include bibliographic access (i.e. would searching for "guerra" in the catalog return Spanish-Language materials on "war") and what outreach services need to be planned to advertise the new language collection ("Guidelines for library," 2007).

The process for determining if a second language collection is needed for a particular library is complex, and will include consideration of many factors. The key point in the diversity research is to consider the communities needs and to ensure that the library's collection reflects the whole community rather than a select part of it.

<div align="center">Gender & Sexual Minorities</div>

Another population to consider when diversifying a collection is the gender and sexual minority (GSM) community also known as the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. This population is characterized by an often invisible presence, despite the fact that 7-8% of US adults identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual and many more have engaged in sexual relations with someone of the same-sex ("National survey of," 2010). An additional .03% are transgender, but as with sexual orientation this population may not be identified during casual interaction with patrons (Gates, 2011). The fact that their presence is invisible may lead a library to question whether they serve GSM patrons or if materials need to be provided for them. Making the assumption that GSM patrons don't use library and require resources can lead to catastrophic consequences. Indeed, "silence is complicity" (Schrader, 2009). The complicity

Schrader refers to is complicity to a world where many GSM's do not have support at home, 71% of youth report hearing homophobic remarks and 81% were verbally harassed (Schrader, 2009; GLESN, 2012). This complicity can be broken by providing access to materials which GSM characters, provide information about GSM health concerns or simply by displaying materials the library has already collected. In "Accept the Universal Freak Show" Angie Manfredi discusses how preparation can play a critical role in promoting an LGBT collection to enhance diversity (Manfredi, 2009). By being aware of collection development policies regarding challenges, the research documenting the harm of censorship on GSM patrons and the presence of GSM's in your community a library can easily document the need to include resources for this population in their collection.

## Conclusion

Diversity will always mean different things for different people, but a emphasis on empathy and community awareness can ensure that library is able to meet the needs of their patrons. From providing tools and materials to ensure equal access for those with disabilities to evaluating a migrant community, the opportunities to enhance diversity are everywhere. Bilingual collections and resources for gender and sexual minorities provide a way to reach out to a segment of the population who may be alienated at other places. Overall, the challenges in developing a collection for diverse populations are far outweighed by the rewards which can be best expressed by the one person of many who takes the time to say "thank you".

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