[Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)](#) [Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln](#)

July 2005

Diversity and Collection Development

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This article was nominated for the 1999 **New Jersey Library Association-ACRL New Jersey Research Award**

Introduction

(This paper was originally presented October 1, 1998 at Penn State University, State College, Pennsylvania, at a conference entitled, "The Challenge to Change: Creating Diversity in Our Libraries.")

The "Rutgers Model" is very much a work in progress and I really have no "outcomes" to share with you at this point. I am delighted to have this opportunity, however, to share a number of concerns I have with respect to collecting multicultural materials.

In a recent essay called "The Historical Roots of Racism" the Near Eastern scholar Bernard Lewis begins by observing how "[i]n the state of nature, among wild creatures or primitive humans, he who is 'not one of us' or like us, is viewed at least with suspicion and more likely with hostility." [1] This hostility, Lewis notes, may be tempered if the so-called outsider conforms to the laws and customs of the majority. Trouble arises, however, when the outsider becomes part of the community, while wishing to retain his or her otherness. "How do we deal with the unbeliever who persists in his unbelief," asks Lewis, "the alien who accepts citizenship but does not fully share our identity and loyalties as we perceive them; the barbarian who wants to retain his barbarous customs, or at least customs that we regard as barbarous?" [2]

Of course Lewis does not include the problems that may arise when the obverse of this statement occurs: when newly emigrated people find themselves in a society that seems infinitely less civilized than the one they just left. If you have not already read it, I urge you to read Francine Prose's marvelous novel *Primitive People*, which is about a Haitian au pair who comes to live with an affluent, suburban American family whose shallow, self-centered antics are infinitely more hair-raising than anything an anthropologist might encounter in some remote village. [3]

In tracing the historical development of the ways in which different people have interacted with each other over time, Lewis credits George Washington with making the distinction between "tolerance on the one hand and coexistence with mutual respect on

the other." [4] Washington's contemporary, Thomas Jefferson, stated the case even more strongly by seeing a positive merit in religious diversity. In matters of religion, Jefferson noted, "the maxim of civil government should be reversed and we should rather say 'divided we stand, united we fall.'" [5]

It would be nice to think that this idea of strength in diversity-divided we stand, united we fall-informs the way in which we perceive and run libraries. As might be imagined, however, this is often not the case, and I think that the name of this conference, "The Challenge to Change," is wonderfully apt.

The Rutgers experience with the acquisition of multicultural materials probably mirrors that of any number of other academic libraries. We moved from the inadvertent to the (somewhat) more deliberate. By inadvertent I mean that we acquired materials that might be described as multicultural on either our approval plan or through firm orders placed under the rubric of such "formally" recognized subject areas as sociology, history, or political science. Deliberateness entered the scene when, in 1996, the Rutgers Libraries received $26,000 from University administration earmarked for the purchase, on all three Rutgers campuses, of "a broad range of materials relating to ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, the elderly, the physically and emotionally challenged population, and more." [6] This money was part of a larger, recently initiated effort by Rutgers administration to improve diversity on campus.

Reactions to this allocation, by the way, were interestingly varied. In these fiscally troubled times when important journal subscriptions have been cancelled in response to ever-increasing budget cuts, and money for the purchase of books is severely limited, $26,000 seems like a windfall. In the grand scheme of things, of course, it is not, and a major question at that time was-and continues to be-whether we will get additional money for diversity materials in the future. Is the glass half empty or half full?

At the time we received the allocation, a library "Advisory Committee on Diversity" had recently been formed in response to the University-wide diversity initiative. It was noted that there was one librarian who was on both the Diversity Committee and the Standing Advisory Committee on Collection Development and Management, namely me, and suddenly I found myself chairing the "Collection Development Subcommittee for the Selection and Acquisition of Multicultural Materials." The *Annual Report* of the Rutgers Libraries' Diversity Committee for 1996-1997 describes our efforts to determine how to spend the unexpected infusion of funds that year. "Joint committee meetings with other groups in the libraries system," occurred, according to the report, "to assess needs and to discuss materials to be considered for purchase." [7] What I remember most clearly about that time is not so much the formal committee meetings among librarians, but the spontaneous, enthusiastic, matter-of-fact response to the call for suggested titles that came from non-committee members, including both professionals and nonprofessionals. I remember lists arriving via e-mail and campus mail, and slips of paper thrust in my hand when I happened to pass through almost any department.

Another vivid memory from this time is of one of those more formal meetings, a meeting of the Standing Advisory Committee on Collection Development and Management. At one point in the meeting I expressed surprise that there had not been any suggested diversity titles from selectors at our Library of Science and Medicine (LSM). The LSM selector present at that meeting looked perplexed. He said he could not imagine that anything having to do with diversity might be relevant to the sciences; was that not all Social Sciences and Humanities? I should point out that this is not an "evil" man; he is as smart and as nice as anyone else. But he looked absolutely dumbfounded when I suggested that the Psychology Selector, for example, might want to buy some books on the psychiatric treatment of minority populations. It was as if a light bulb had gone on inside his head. He suddenly got it: diversity concerns are everywhere, and now he could not wait for the sciences to partake of this money as well.

The point here, of course, has to do with education-with making a signal effort to educate librarians-all librarians-about multicultural collection development. A passing comment, like the one I described, may be thought-provoking to one or two people for a moment but, in the long run, is not nearly enough. With this in mind, Rutgers and the Kean University Libraries jointly sponsored a program in May 1998 called "Building a Multicultural Collection in the Academic Library." The featured speakers at this program were Lyn Miller-Lachman, current editor of the *Multicultural Review*, and Dan Figueredo, Director of the Bloomfield College Library and noted authority on building multicultural collections.

Miller-Lachman considered the early age at which children are inculcated with the idea of what is "beautiful." She noted how broad waves of immigration, the Women's Movement, the global economy, and the advent of the information age all make isolationism impossible, and narrowly-focused perceptions of the "literary canon" untenable. It is interesting to note that in spite of these far-ranging trends, we must still look, for the most part, to small and alternative presses for titles that have less-than-mainstream appeal.

Dan Figueredo discussed multicultural collection development practices and very tellingly used the word "battlefield" to describe the tensions involved in agreeing on a definition of "multiculturalism," in finding the resources to support multicultural collection development, and in locating and buying the books and non-print materials that make up such a collection. He wisely observed that multicultural education does not necessarily "bash" European traditions, a common misperception. Rather, he suggested, we should look at the interactions among groups in a world that is constantly getting smaller and where old assumptions about the people who are our library patrons are no longer valid.

Figueredo encourages libraries to step beyond their traditional assumptions and to work as advocates, creating committees that include sympathetic librarians as well as administrators, students, and other members of the university community, such as a representative from the office of student affairs. In other words, create diverse committees to encourage diversity. That sounds very obvious, but one of the main

problems, I think, with this whole endeavor is the fact that we walk around nodding our heads and touting the right ideas without every really making substantial changes, though certainly we are not without good intentions.

In 1997-1998 the Rutgers libraries received a second infusion of money designated for diversity materials. Encouraged by this, and daring to hope that we might get a third, a fourth, and maybe even a fifth year of funding, it was agreed that we should create a Collection Development Policy Statement for Diversity Materials. I am working on this now, and am glad to have this opportunity to share with you thoughts on some of the background materials I have looked at in preparation for writing our statement.

Most obvious and easiest to digest and incorporate into one's own program are several very fine prescriptive books and papers on libraries and multiculturalism that have appeared in recent years. Riggs and Tarin's book *Cultural Diversity in Libraries* provides a comprehensive look at all aspects of multiculturalism in libraries. It includes a good chapter on "Collection Development in Multicultural Studies," though I find the word "studies" misleading here, since it seems to imply purchasing materials for specific classes only. We should be doing that, of course, but I do not think these purchases should be limited to the support of specific curricular needs.

Two Spec Kits from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), *Cultural Diversity Programming in ARL Libraries* and *ARL Partnerships Program*, document the development of exemplary cultural diversity programs at several ARL libraries. Our host for this conference, Pennsylvania State University, is well-represented in the ARL partnerships volume with a thoughtful description of how this library system implemented a university-wide diversity initiative begun in 1993 and a nicely articulated statement, "Diversity Guidelines for Collection Development." [8]

Another useful effort is from the Reference and Adult Services Division (RASD) of the American Library Association (ALA). RASD's Occasional paper on *Electronic Publishing Alternatives for Collections of America's Diversity*, which provides substantial reviews of online databases like the Hispanic American Periodicals Index (HAPI) and the Chicano Database, as well as an annotated "Resource List" with contact information.

In 1980 *Library Trends* devoted an issue to what it called "Library Services to Ethnocultural Minorities," and another in 1993 on "Multicultural Children's Literature in the United States." The earlier volume is obviously more akin to the purposes of this present conference. It includes everything from the general ("Ethnicity in Librarianship") to the specific ("Some Problems Connected with the Acquisition of Foreign Books in Sweden" and "New Forms and Methods of Library Service to Ethnic Groups and Minorities in the Far North of the USSR"). This is all very interesting, but also rather dated. The dramatic changes in the composition of both public and academic library users, the shrinking budgets of years since 1980, and the advent of the Internet, all suggest that an updated issue of *LT* on libraries and multiculturalism might be in order.

The going line-half serious, half in jest-about programs like this one today is that they consist of people talking about "How we did it good." I do not think Rutgers necessarily did "it" (i.e., implement multicultural collection development) good; I think we did it typical. And that is why I am delighted to be at this conference, where we can compare notes and share ideas. Two problems areas in multicultural collection development that seem to me to call for our collective attention and combined ingenuity are first, how to implement and/or maintain multicultural collection development efforts in the face of shrinking budgets, and second, the language that librarians use to describe the world as they perceive it.

First, the question of money. In a well-documented 1994 dissertation, Anna Hemer Perrault considered *The Changing Print Resource Base of Academic Libraries in the United States*. Perrault compared collecting patterns in seventy-two ARL libraries for non-serial imprints from 1985 to 1989. As most of us unfortunately know all too well, there was a considerable decline-27.76% to be exact-in the rate of acquisitions during the late 1980s. [9] Using the 1991 edition of the OCLC/Amigos Collection Analysis CD-ROM, Perrault's study looks specifically at what was and was not being bought at this time. Her conclusions are troubling, though probably not surprising: foreign language imprints experienced a much greater decline than English language imprints. (The greatest decline, by the way, was in Russian and Asian languages.) Added to this picture was the fact that the mean number of libraries holding a particular title changed very little. The number of unique titles in many subject areas declined, while there was increased attention to core materials. The result, more and more homogeneous collections, flies in the face of what we are trying to do here, for as Perrault observes, the higher the percentage of unique titles, the more diverse a library collection is considered to be. A high percentage of unique titles within the collections of a group of libraries is regarded as an indication of a broad and diverse collective resources base. For resource sharing purposes, the more diverse the collective resources base, the higher the number of unique titles, the greater the number of titles there are to share among the group. [10]

This leads to the question of how well ethnic, multicultural, small press, and other literary materials are being covered, and the possibility that there is a considerable amount of material not being acquired by any library in the nation. [11] As the saying goes, "attention must be paid." As for the language issue: can patrons find the materials we do get? This is, of course, not a new question: librarians have long acknowledged that classification and subject headings used to represent information are subject to bias. We have all giggled at the arbitrariness and formality of LC subject headings (we still have to look up "automobiles," rather than "cars"), but bias takes a more serious turn when it effects marginalized groups within mainstream society. One of the finest treatments of this problem that I have seen recently is Hope Aline Olson's dissertation, *The Power to Name: Marginalizations and Exclusions of Subject Representation in Library Catalogues.* "Universal" or "controlled" vocabularies Olson points out, may omit topics that do not fit the prevalent conceptual, cultural, or even spatial concepts. In catering to the convenience of a "general public," we may fail to "incorporate tolerance of minority or unpopular concepts." [12] This point is driven home-to a pretty frightening degree, I must say-in library historian Wayne Wiegand's recent article on "The Origins of the

Dewey Decimal Classification Scheme." In essence, Wiegand says, Dewey's way of organizing knowledge, first published in 1876 and still being used by over 200,000 libraries in 135 countries, is based on the traditions, curriculum, faculty, and assigned texts that existed at the Amherst College campus where Dewey was a student from 1869 to 1874. This curriculum reinforced the concept of "mind as vessel," and believed that "education was a process by which the student would passively 'fill' the 'vessel' with the best that a patriarchal White Western (and, of course, Christian) civilization had to offer." [13] The "moral center" of this little corner of the world was, Wiegand reminds us, "located in 'Anglo-Saxonism,' a doctrine that defined 'objectivity' and touted the unique virtues, mission and destiny of the Anglo-Saxon 'race.'" [14] As a result, Wiegand concludes, "the hierarchical arrangement of headings Dewey ultimately devised for the decimal scheme had the effect of framing and cementing a worldview and knowledge structure taught on the tiny Amherst College campus between 1870 and 1875 into what became the world's most widely used library classification." [15]

It is easy-or easier, I should say-for neighborhood public library branches to fine-tune their collections so they are in sync with their various constituencies. A recent *New York Times* article extolled a "bustling Queens library" that "speaks in many tongues" with an animated description of the Chinese, Bengali, and Spanish immigrants whose recreational and informational needs are met by a particularly caring public library system. Special collections, like the Schomburg, have well-defined missions, in this case to be a Center for Research in Black Culture. But what about multicultural collection development for the rest of us, academic libraries who have limited, idiosyncratic vocabularies but who must serve enormously diverse populations with a seemingly infinite number of research needs, but whose budgets are all too finite?

I believe we need to think in terms of cooperative buying plans to ensure that we complement each other's collections with unique materials of either regional concern (our Newark campus, for example, should focus on the substantial local Portuguese population that surrounds them) or existing strengths, rather than continue to duplicate mainstream core collections. I believe we need to seriously think about how minorities are ill-served-or not served at all, perhaps-by our standard classification schemes, and then we need to make changes as appropriate. And I believe that all of us-administrators, faculty, and staff-need to be made aware of and frequently reminded about the compelling need for multicultural materials, so we can insure that we will find the resources with which to pay for them.

Just as I finished working on this paper, our Library Director informed us that Rutgers University President Francis Lawrence had declared this the "year of the net." I would like to suggest that the Rutgers libraries put their own spin on this by redubbing it "casting a wide net."

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15. Ibid.