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For more than one hundred years libraries in America have worked in one way or another to include services aimed at ethnic groups, at first mainly in the way of assisting the newly immigrated to become assimilated to mainstream American culture through help in learning English, with basic reading/writing skills, and assistance with social services and applications for citizenship (Rubin, 2004, p. 292). However, it wasn't until the 1960's that the importance of community representation in libraries and their staffs came to the forefront of discussions of library policies and practices. Finally, in 1970 the ALA's Social Responsibilities Round Table was formed, and, following that the establishment of such groups as REFORMA (advocating for the Hispanic community), the Black Caucus, and others.

A key focus of many of these groups has been the recruitment and retention of library staff that more accurately represents the increasingly diverse nature of the populations they serve. Unfortunately, this effort to diversify the library workforce has not yet been successful, as exemplified in Grob's statistics, "About 25 percent of the American population is other than white, but among academic librarians only 13 percent are a race other than white, and among RBMS members only 3 percent are a race other than white" (2003, p.77) How then might librarians who do not have the cultural and perhaps linguistic background of the population they're serving accurately assess and prioritize the selection, presentation, and preservation of materials to meet their patrons' diverse needs?

It is within the realm of possibility to expect that, although they face a number of obstacles such as socially and personally based biases and assumptions, library staff members who are participants in the dominant culture can shift their values regarding library collections to include a broader spectrum of the useful and valuable for current and future patrons. A

conservator who experienced this change related, "The shift in my awareness of how an artifact may be read not only expands my sensitivity to the objects in my care, it also increases my ability to assess materials for research potential" (Paris, 2000, p.3) In light of the failure to recruit members of nondominant cultures all librarians can, and perhaps must become culturally competent across cultures.

In Guyton et. al.'s examination of the Multicultural Efficacy Scale the interculturalist Bennett posited four areas of expertise in multicultural teacher education that may also be applied to the concept of cross cultural competency for librarians; knowledge, understanding, attitude and skill:

Knowledge is having a consciousness of the history, culture, and values of major ethnic groups, as well as

acquiring and articulating a theory of cultural pluralism. Understanding includes having cross-cultural interactions and immersion experiences in which to apply cultural theory. Attitude involves an awareness and reduction of one's own prejudices and misconceptions about race. Skill includes planning and implementation of effective multicultural teaching practices (2005, p. 22).

Bennett and other researchers have found that cross cultural competency can indeed be taught, and measured. However, libraries seem to be slow to integrate this aspect of librarianship into their professional development programs, as evidenced by a survey by Winston et. al. who found that only 18% of the responding college and research libraries had held diversity/sensitivity training workshops, only 14% had professional development funding at all, and just over 12% had had some form of diversity/sensitivity workshops on campus (2000, p.210).

This lack of institutional support in helping librarians become cross culturally competent is unfortunate as this ability can only be achieved with a struggle to overcome a collection of biases and assumptions. Looming large in that collection is the social construct created and propagated by the dominant culture in America under which we all consciously or subconsciously work. Harris (1986) portrayed this construct as a flawed "pluralist perspective" under which librarians, while thinking they are serving the greater good, actually serve the capitalist powers of the dominant class in American society. Harris believes that, no matter the personal ideology of the librarian, the political and economic masters of the nation are also the masters of the flow of information and the sole determiners of what in our culture has value. Certainly Harris' theory has some basis in all too many ugly truths; however, in the twenty-first century we might believe that concerns for justice and equality have their place in many librarians' considerations of policies for developing collections meaningful to their own communities. Also, Harris' theory was developed before the Internet and all its subversive possibilities really took hold of society.

As part of the influence of economic imperatives and mandates from the ruling class, librarians may have been prioritizing items for collections according to their own or society's imposed hierarchical categorization of culture into high, medium or low, or, as in Gans' theory of five taste cultures: high, upper-middle, lower-middle, low and quasi-folk low cultures (Harris, p. 229). As libraries were founded in the earliest days in America as hobbies of the elite class, a sort of gentleman's club, or later, to assist in elevating the mind, librarians may likely have taken what they supposed was the high road to educating the masses, collecting works identified as high culture by the dominant society, and leaving works by lesser know authors, and artifacts pertaining to the minutiae of daily life or unrecognized cultures to fade away.

However, these categorizations of culture may be being reassessed, as in the work of Bennett, Bennett and Allen, who look at culture as objective; the cultural creations and institutionalized patterns of everyday behavior, and subjective; invisible, less tangible aspects of culture such as world view (Lange, D.,et.al., 2003, p.243). These broader, less hierarchical categories of culture may be a reflection of a gradual shift in general in the identification of culture and the value of its artifacts. Librarians may be beginning to question the old divisions of culture and their concomitant values when reassessing their collections. The conservator Paris queried, "If we continue to invest all of our resources in materials that have traditionally been valued, will those that have not been so privileged be available for use by the researcher in the future?" (2000, p. 7).

Yet another issue which may have been working against librarians' forays into cross cultural competence, as well as well-meaning attempts to diversify collections, may be the variety of assumptions librarians might have been operating under regarding the population they serve. These assumptions about what is useful and valuable in their collections can be at odds with what their patrons are actually most in need of.

“Materials that libraries and archives have historically undervalued are often the most valuable resources for the study of non-traditional subjects and overlooked groups” (Paris, 2000, p. 1). Awareness of these assumptions, an aspect of cross cultural education, may be key to obviating the manner in which they can narrow a librarian’s focus on their patrons, and their collections. Figueredo, as cited by Gilbert, suggested that “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” (1999, p.3). Grob suggested networking with ethnic communities as another educational tool for the librarian developing a more diverse collection (2003, p. 104).

Cross cultural competence continues to grow as a discipline as more and more institutions see its value in addressing the needs of their constituencies. If professional development for librarians includes this vital skill, librarians may be able to overcome the social constructs, the cultural biases, and the personal assumptions they have been working under to better understand and serve the multiethnic, multilingual, multi-needs population through resources that are acquired, presented, and preserved with their cultural backgrounds in mind. Although library staffs may continue to not be representative of the society they serve, with staff members who are cross culturally competent libraries may be better positioned to fill the gaps in our representations of American history and culture, and meet the needs of their current and future patrons through a more diverse collection of materials.

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