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Black, Yellow, Red & White

Public Libraries & Cross Cultural Outreach

Her eyes sparkled and a bright smile covered her face. She had just read the Maryland Public Libraries', *It's Never Too Early* poster in Spanish—her native language. In her country, there were no free public libraries; only the wealthy could use libraries. It had never occurred to her that she would be welcome to come to the library. This incident occurred as a result of a collaborative effort between Baltimore County Public Library (BCPL) and the county's health department. Which local organizations could you partner with to encourage the removal of health care disparities?

Why talk about this now? In San Francisco, 52% of the public school students are American Indians, African American, Latino and Asian Pacific Islanders. In a recent article in the Washington Post, it was reported that the Census Bureau had announced that Hispanics are now the country's largest minority—38.8 million as compared to 38.3 million African Americans. By the year 2050, it is predicted that over 21% of the population of the United States will be Latino, 10% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 11% African American and 4% American Indian. Who are these people and what kinds of library services do they need? What role can public libraries play in addressing health disparities among various racial groups? What's unique and different about cross-cultural outreach? Does it work?

I have found, as a result of a number of cross cultural outreach experiences, that serious thought and planning are required for such a venture. It is not necessarily intuitive, and it often requires a "cultural" organizational change along with the reallocation of library funds.
The following is the short list of what needs to be in place:

- Both library administrators and staff need to increase their cultural awareness
- Staff needs to be representatively diverse
- Knowledgeable spokespersons from the groups to be served need to give input regarding the services desired
- Library collections need to be relevant and representative of the various cultures—everything from newspapers to books, videos and websites

The following excerpts from interviews with public library administrators address these and other significant issues and approaches. The interviewees are:

- **Raineyl Coiro**–Administrator, Eastern Shore Regional Library, Salisbury, Maryland (RC)
- **James Fish**–Director, Baltimore County Public Library, Baltimore, Maryland (JF)
- **Jo Ann Mundowney**–Assistant Director, Flint Michigan Public Library, Flint Michigan (JM)

1.What racial and ethnic minority groups have you outreached to? Where and in what capacity?

RC: We are planning to outreach to the Latino/ Hispanic non-library user on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. We believe that this population is starting to put down roots here instead of traveling up and down the coast doing migrantwork.

JF: I have been director of several public libraries that made significant attempts at responding to different groups in the community. In Leominster, MA the focus was on Hispanics from Puerto Rico. In Springfield, MA it was primarily Hispanics from Puerto Rico and African-Americans. In San Jose, it seemed like everyone since the city had no "majority". There were major concentrations of Spanish-speakers (Latinos, Chicanos and other groups that were very different from those from Puerto Rico) and Asians (Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Cambodian, Japanese and on), as well as other groups (e.g. Native Americans). San Jose even had a branch library specializing in services to Hispanics. In Baltimore County (BCPL) we have targeted African-Americans (77% increase from the 1990 to 2000 census figures), Russians, Spanish-speakers and Koreans.

JM: African Americans at the Enoch Pratt Free Library throughout the city of Baltimore, as a young adult librarian, branch librarian and library administrator. Currently, as the Assistant Director at the Flint Public Library in Flint, Michigan.

2.What differences and similarities have you found between these and majority groups?

RC: This group in particular is very different in that technically they speak Spanish but there are many dialects (Mexican, Central American, Cuban, Puerto Rican, etc.) which presents a challenge if you are trying to develop some kind of written and/or spoken materials for them. Actually I guess it would be the same as the differences in speech patterns between Bostonians and Mississippians. There are also legal problems with INS for this group all of which are not self-inflicted.

JF: It is difficult to talk in generalizations, and one of the things that I have learned is to respect what I call "diversity within diversity". By that I mean that there are tremendous differences within groups even. For example, someone declared "Hispanic" in the census might be so Americanized that he does not speak Spanish. Someone arriving from another country might already have considerable English, education and/or job skill. Someone else might have none of these. Some cultures are very educationally and print oriented while others have oral traditions primarily. Some cultures interpret eye contact as a show of respect while others do just the opposite. While the differences I have seen are incredible, I found that one could not go too far wrong in using the approach of being friendly, patient, and treating others the way you would like to be treated.

JM: As a public service librarian for over twelve years, in serving African-Americans, I found in general they place a high level of trust and acceptance in the information you provide. They also do not tend to want several resources on one topic unless it is required for school reports. In most cases, their information requests are similar to the majority population (diseases, drugs, pop culture, etc.) with one exception, minorities have rarely asked me for consumer product/service information.

3.What kinds of services/programs/collections have you provided? How were they chosen? How were they received?

RC: We have not provided any programs directly to this group yet. We co-sponsored a cross-cultural Workshop with Bienvenidos in January where speakers addressed the issues and concerns that agencies have and spoke about their perceptions of what needs to be done to provide access. Agencies in attendance included Social Security Administration, Boards of Education, Social Services, etc. We have written a grant called Project Adelante! The goal of this grant is

to do an assessment of this population and their informational needs. We will partner with other agencies in the community because various other agencies beside the libraries would like to know how to reach this community. For example, libraries may find that we need to have more audio and/or visual materials on health, finances, landlords, etc.

We felt that agencies have just been "throwing money" at this issue instead of trying to find out from these people who they are and what they want.

JF: Much of the effort has focused on collections (San Jose had 42 languages represented in its collection) and programs in different languages (story hours in Spanish, for example) and about different cultures. The groups are chosen on the basis of demographics usually and could be a system-wide or branch-specific focus. I cannot recall an effort that failed to be well received by the targeted groups. I have encountered some backlash from a few members of the "majority" from time to time. Of particular note should be staff awareness and training issues. San Jose had a terrific Diversity Committee that, among other things, organized "Perspectives in Diversity" a series of staff meetings where the special guests were members of selected community groups, like Vietnamese. They talked about their experiences and offered advice of how the library might serve them better. BCPL has made a similar effort to increase staff awareness and training in the area of diversity. We also used a consultant to review our hiring policies and staff handbook, to conduct some public surveys and to help us design the training program and to train the trainers.

JM: Programs: GED, Adult Basic Education, Tax Preparation, Talent shows, Cooking Contests, Job and Career Workshops, Resume Writing, Art Contests, Tutorial Programs, Author Programs. Racism Series (see *www.flint.lib.mi.us*), exhibits, and bibliographies. **Collection**:Street Literature (i.e. Donald Goines, Iceberg Slim, Easy to Read, Reluctant Readers). Often requested by library customers as well as library specialists. Generally, what we provided was well received and greatly appreciated.

4.In these efforts, have you worked collaboratively with other organizations in these efforts?

RC: Yes, we are working with Bienvenidos a Delmarva and BEACON (both groups are funded through Salisbury University Business School. We have hired a marketing person to help with the focus groups

JF: The short answer is "yes". Other organizations usually have more experience and closer connections with various groups. Sometimes, it is better, at least to begin with, to support groups that support individuals rather than to attempt to serve individuals directly only. Libraries that get a "place at the table" and listen attentively are halfway home in serving non-traditional library user groups. (See Also: Question 3)

JM: Yes, health professionals, police and fire personnel, ministers, daycare providers, recreation and parks staff, attorneys, politicians, bankers, teachers, community associations and local businesses.

The responses show that there are a variety of perspectives and approaches to cross-cultural public library services. A key is to know your community and the needs of various library users. Along with this knowledge, collection development is important. The State Library of New Jersey, for example, has a unique approach to meeting the needs of various ethnic and linguistic groups. MultiMAC, a collection of books, videos, magazines, newspapers, etc, is held in a central location and available to libraries in New Jersey. The materials are available in Chinese, Haitian, Creole, Korean, Polish, Spanish and many other languages. Bot libraries and library users have benefited from this service.

Libraries are about promise. A public library, perhaps more than any other kind, has the potential to change, expand and improve the lives of citizens of all ethnic groups and socio-economic levels. A common thread in all of the answers above is the need to appreciate, value and regard with respect the potential, contributions and perspectives of the various cultures we set out to serve. But first, we start by looking at ourselves.

What does a person from a group other than the majority "see" when they enter your library? What sounds do they hear? Serving the need to acquire and maintain good health would be a great way to meet an existing community need and perhaps open a cross-cultural dialogue.

Suggested Resources

A portal sight containing Resources about several ethnic/ racial populations
http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/ICCTP/Resources/Index.html

American Library Association, Office for Literacy and Outreach Services
www.ala.org/olos/

Information on a statewide multi-cultural lending service
http://www2.njstatelib.org/njlib/ill/multimac.htm

U. S. Census Bureau
http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html

Recommended as a first step in considering cross-cultural outreach
Williams, Mark. *The 10 Lenses: Your Guide to Living & Working in a Multicultural World.* Sterling, Virginia: Capital Books Inc., 2001

About the author: **Marseille (Marcy) Pride**

Marcy Pride MLS, MA, is the Director of the Oyer Memorial Library at Washington Bible College and Capital Bible Seminary in Lanham, Maryland. Prior to this position, Ms. Pride was a Public Library Consultant, with the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Library and Services. She has also held positions as a business and reference librarian at American University, and the Head of Collection Management at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

Most recently, her work on the statewide campaign It's Never Too Early won the American Library Association's John Cotton Dana Award for Library Public Relations. The Campaign was prominently featured at the White House Summit on Early Childhood Education and serves as a model for state libraries throughout the United States.

After working in the corporate arena for Merrill Lynch, K-12 education for the Richmond Public School System and as Director of Development and Public Relations for central Maryland's largest family service agency, Marcy became a librarian. She has held offices in a number of community and civic organizations and has volunteered at the Enoch Pratt Free Library's Lifelong Literacy Center. Currently she is the Secretary of the Maryland Library Association and recently was appointed to the National Advisory Board for Healthy People 2010 and an ATLA Task Force on Theological Librarianship.

She earned a BA from Spelman College, MA from Antioch and MLS from the University of Maryland College Park. Marcy has a multitude of experience in establishing and managing collaborative efforts and in multicultural cooperatives. She believes in the power of libraries to enrich our lives and expand our horizons.