

Raison d'être for Multicultural Library Services

By: Clara M. Chu

Chu, Clara M. "Raison d'être for Multicultural Library Services," *IFLA Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section Newsletter*, pp. 6-7, November 2004. <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s32/news/s32-newsletter-Nov04.pdf> Translated and available in Danish, Dutch, English, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Spanish, Swahili and Swedish. <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s32/index.htm>

Made available courtesy of International Federation of Library Associations and Institutes: <http://www.ifla.org/>

*****Note: Figures may be missing from this format of the document**

There is no denying that almost every nation around the globe has a multicultural population. The evidence is clear when one examines the sociodemographic data of each country) and sees the diversity in language, ethnicity, religion, among other variables. Furthermore, in a century with easier and faster modes of communication, and increased human migrations, nations are becoming even more multicultural. Our Section is cognizant of this and thus we are "striving to share [our] experience in library services to multicultural populations in view of the necessity to ensure that every member in our global society has access to a full range of library and information services." (IFLA Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section Website, <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s32/index.htm>). To this end the Section has published *Multicultural Communities: Guidelines for Library Services* (2nd edition, revised, 1998), which is available in eight languages (Dutch, English, French, German, Russian and Spanish are available online, Japanese and Italian are available in print). However, these guidelines are only helpful if communities themselves recognize the multicultural nature of its user population and have decided to implement services responsive to its needs.

It is the purpose of this article to tackle this issue – convincing libraries to provide multicultural library services. The Section recognizes that it is important to identify arguments underlining the importance of multicultural library services and thus placed it on this past year's agenda. I have been thinking about these issues and proposed *Ten Reasons to Offer Multicultural Library Services* for the Section to consider at the Buenos Aires meeting this past August.

To begin I offer the following definition:

"Multicultural library services" (MLS) include both the provision of multicultural information to all types of library users and the provision of library services specifically targeted to traditionally underserved ethnocultural groups. Often we consider multicultural library services as mainly benefiting "minority" communities as it is these communities whose ethnocultural background is different from that of mainstream society and whose needs are often not or minimally addressed. Multicultural library services ensure equity in library and information services. However, multiculturalism refers to the make-up of a whole community so as such, the whole community should benefit from "multicultural library services." Thus, the other half of delivering multicultural library services is the provision of multicultural information that will benefit the entire user community. Members of a community can learn of each other's respective cultures, languages, contributions to society, values, etc. The end result being increased understanding and communication.

Ten Reasons to Offer Multicultural Library Services

Multicultural library services should be offered for the following reasons:

- 1) A library's mission is to serve its community, which in many cases is multicultural or becoming increasingly culturally diverse.
- 2) Multicultural library services ensure equity of service and access to information.
- 3) In an era of globalization with more ease in transnational communication and travel, individuals need to learn about other cultures, languages, and peoples, which foster appreciation for different experiences and broaden one's outlook on life, locally and globally.
- 4) Information in languages and through channels accessible to diverse user communities enables their democratic participation in civil society.
- 5) Information about one's own heritage as well as that of others reinforces one's own culture and promotes understanding of other experiences and perspectives, respectively, and contributes in the development of a more harmonious society.
- 6) Information in languages and through channels appropriate to diverse user communities promotes multiple literacies, which facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills to ensure equity of opportunity in all realms of civil society.
- 7) The world's knowledge, creative forms of expression, and cultural practices are documented in diverse formats and languages, thus, the offering of a multicultural collection should be made available for all to access.
- 8) Information to support learning about different forms of creative expression, work and problem solving lead to fresh insights and opinions which can result in novel ways to innovate, act and resolve situations.
- 9) Information about and for a library's multicultural community demonstrates to community members that they and their cultures are valued.
- 10) Libraries are spaces for intellectual and recreational engagement and libraries offering multicultural services and collections become a community space to bring people together.

It is hoped that this list constitutes only ten of many more reasons underlying the important role that libraries play in bringing a community together, quenching a community's thirst for intellectual and recreational engagement, and supporting lifelong learning; all of which empower community members to achieve their potential and enact social change. The Section and I request your feedback (please send to cchu@ucla.edu) in the form of other reasons and/or ways to refine this list so we can consider them to potentially adopt as the Section's *raison d'être* for multicultural library services.