

American Library Association International Papers Committee
2009 Annual Conference-Chicago
IRRT Paper Presentation
by
Patricia Montiel-Overall, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
School of Information Resources and Library Science
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ
overall@u.arizona.edu

Developing Cultural Competence to Create Multicultural Libraries

Introduction

The multicultural nature of society has changed libraries world-wide resulting in the need for significant changes in the types of services, programs, and collections provided to culturally diverse communities of users. However, understanding how to provide services to diverse groups is a major challenge facing 21st century librarians. Few library and information science (LIS) professionals are prepared to deal with the enormous responsibility of transforming libraries into multicultural institutions, which truly meet the needs of diverse populations, particularly since the communities served are generally ethnically and culturally different from those providing services (Peterson, 1996). Transforming libraries into multicultural institutions will require culturally competent professionals who understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of individuals, and who have developed a high level of expertise and knowledge about culture and its significance in all aspects of librarianship.

During the past several decades, other service-oriented fields including health (Jeffreys, 2006), social welfare (Delgado, 2007), psychology (American Psychological Association, 2003), and education (Banks, 2001) have prepared for a multicultural society by developing cultural competence professional guidelines. Examples include The American Psychological Association's (2003) cultural competence guidelines, which identify specific areas where disparities among diverse groups can be eliminated by culturally competent practitioners and professionals in the field. Cultural competence guidelines do not exist for the LIS profession. However, the profession is moving rapidly to provide more services to diverse populations representing a broad range of cultural groups. To provide adequate library services for multicultural populations, the profession must ensure that providers of the services including staff and LIS professionals have a clear understanding of the cultural backgrounds of communities served. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the need for culturally competent LIS professionals to create multicultural libraries, thus ensuring improved services to multicultural populations.

A framework for cultural competence applicable to LIS professionals is identified in this paper. It is based on the work of others in service oriented professions (Banks, 2001; Campinha-Bacote, 1999, 2002, 2003; Cross, Bazron, Dennis, Isaacs, 1989; Delgado, 2007; Jeffreys, 2006; Lum, 2003; Lynch, 1992, 1998; Sue, Arredondo, McDavis, 1992) and lays a foundation for a cultural competence framework for LIS professionals. In the first section of the paper,

theoretical perspectives for understanding cultural competence are discussed. This is followed by a section in which terminology associated with multiculturalism and cultural competence is defined. Next, the process by which individuals become culturally competent is conceptualized within three domains: cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental. The domains are described and examples are provided in the way of best practices found in public, school, and academic libraries. Finally, this paper discusses critical sociopolitical issues associated with cultural competence that often affect the ability of librarians to create multicultural institutions.. Although differences exist among international communities, arguably there are sufficient similarities across library communities to merit consideration of cultural competence as the basis for creating strong multicultural libraries.

Theoretical Background

This paper draws on the works of social constructivist and sociohistorical cultural theories of Jerome (1996), Lev Vygotsky (1978), and others (Schweder, 1991; Scribner & Cole, 1981) whose writings inform us about the social nature of knowledge construction and the influence of culture in how knowledge is acquired. According to this theoretical perspective, individuals acquire knowledge through active cognition. Knowledge is a process involving social

Definitions

A starting point in the discussion of cultural competence is to establish clear definitions of concepts associated with cultural competence. This section provides definitions for terms used to define culture, competence and multiculturalism. Additional terms, which are relevant to the discussion of cultural competence are also defined in this section (e.g., ethnicity and race).

Culture is defined as the shared daily activities of groups or organizations (Rosaldo, 1989). This definition implies that what is meaningful to individuals is found in what they do and say and in what is evident in daily events. This definition of *culture* allows us to envision one or more linguistic, social, and cultural contexts shared by family, friends, and colleagues.

Competence

The *interpersonal domain* is developed through personal interaction with individuals who are culturally distinct from those we are familiar with. Understanding others occurs through professional development, travel, and learning another's language. Cultural understanding also occurs by attending events, participating in ceremonies and meeting and talking to individuals from other cultures. Self-awareness continues throughout this step also so that differences and similarities can be examined and reflected upon. The result of becoming more knowledgeable about language and culture is greater empathy and leads to what has been referred to as "an ethic of caring." (Noddings, 1989). The *environmental domain* involves developing an excellent understanding of environmental factors that influence culture. In planning library services, knowledge of factors such as space, transportation, child care, leisure, and language(s) spoken are essential for delivery of effective services.

Cognitive Domain

The cognitive domain is a starting point in the process of becoming culturally competent. It refers to the awareness of one's own culture including cultural activities, values, beliefs, actions,

in the United States and many other countries. The perceived function of a public library by a

developing culturally competent LIS professionals. In many countries, for example, standard languages are expected to be used and promoted in government entities such as libraries regardless of the language spoken by the communities in which they are geographically located. For library professionals, even those who have developed a high level of cultural competence, this potentially presents a conflict and challenge, which may or may not be possible to overcome. In some geographic areas of the United States, where “English Only” policies exist, it is not possible to obtain or use public funds for bilingual storytime, computer instruction, or reference interviews in languages other than English. In other countries, open discussion or display of certain information is prohibited (e.g., HIV-AIDS).

- Campbell, S. (2004). Defining information literacy for the 21st century. Paper presented at the World Library and Information Congress: 70th IFLA General Congress and Council, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Campinha-Bacote, Josepha. (1999). A model and instrument for addressing cultural competence in health care. *Journal of Nursing Education, 38*(5), 203-207.
- Campinha-Bacote, Josepha. (2002). The process of cultural competence in the delivery of healthcare services: A model of care. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 13*, 181-184.
- Campinha-Bacote, J. (2003). Many faces: Addressing diversity in health care. *Online Journal of Issues in Nursing, 8*(1). Retrieved July 1, 2009, from <http://www.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TabbleofContents/Volume82003/No1Jan2003/AddressingDiversityinHealthCare.aspx>
- Cashman, H. R. (2009). The dynamics of Spanish maintenance and shift in Arizona. *Spanish in Context, 6*(1), 43-68.
- Cross, T. L., Bazron, B. J.; Dennis, K. W., & Isaacs, M. R. (1989). *Towards a culturally competent system of care*. Washington, DC: CASSP Technical Assistance Center.
- Delgado, M. (2007). *Social work with latin@s: A cultural assets paradigm*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Davenport, T. H. (1997). *Information Ecology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Epstein, R. M., & Hundert, E. M. (2002). Defining and assessing professional competence. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 287*(2), 226-236. Retrieved January 5, 2009, from jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/287/2/226
- Gastelum, S. (2006). Inside Mexican libraries. *Críticas*. Retrieved June 2, 2009, from [http://www.cr.65011\(r\)2.3696903\(.65011\(r\)2.3696903\(.65011\(r\)2.622527\(w\)0.622527\(w\)0.62278439\(o](http://www.cr.65011(r)2.3696903(.65011(r)2.3696903(.65011(r)2.622527(w)0.622527(w)0.62278439(o)

Hall, C. & Coles, M. (1999). *Children's reading choices*. London: Routledge.

Haro, R., & Smith, Martínez, E. (1978). Sí se puede! Yes, it can be done. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 53(3), 228–31.

Haro, R. P. (1981). *Developing Library and Information Services for American of Hispanic Origin*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow.

Jazpon, A. C., & Gong, H. (2005). A neighborhood analysis of public Library use in New York City. *Library Quarterly*, 75(4), 446–63.

Jeffreys, M. R. (2006). *Teaching cultural competence in nursing and health care: Inquiry, action, and innovation*. New York: Springer.

Jenkins, B. L. (1990). A white librarian in black Harlem. *Library Quarterly*, 60(3), 216–31.

Joseph, C.A.B. (2005). Language in contact and literatures in conflict: Text, context, and pedagogy. *World Englishes*, 24(2), 131-143.

Keesing, R. M. (1981). *Cultural anthropology: A contemporary perspective*. (2nd Ed.), pp. 1-75. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Kniffel, L.(2009). Copyright or copy wrong? *American Libraries*, (January/February), p.79.

Lamont, M. & Small, M. L. (2007). Cultural diversity and poverty eradication. Background paper prepared for the World Report on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO. Retrieved March 18, 2009, from <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~mlamont/papers/UNESCO.pdf>

Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. G. (1990). *Naturalistic inquiry* (9th printing). Newbury 6903(r)2.3678(o)-0.956417(m)-

LR.70292(.)-017(:)-028(1915(a)3.15789(r)2.36842(o)

- Montiel-Overall, P. (2009). Cultural competence: A conceptual framework for library and information science professionals. *Library Quarterly*, 79(2), 175-204.
- Noddings, N. (1988). An ethic of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements. *American Journal of Education* 96(2), 215–230.
- Orange, S. M., & Osborne, R. (2004). From outreach to equity: An introduction. *American Libraries*, 35(6), 46–51.
- Peterson, L. (1996). Alternative perspectives in library and information science: Issues of race. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 37, 163-74.

Wiegand, W. A. (1998). The “Amherst Method”” The origins of the Dewey decimal classification scheme. *Libraries and Culture*, 33(2), 176-194.

See file My Documents/Cultural Competence Assessment. This pdf file has a cultural competence assessment that I could use with permission of the National Center of Cultural Competence 2006.

Campinha Bacote 2003