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Levels of Diversity in Library Science: From Personal to Personnel

Diversity matters in libraries, because people who have information have power.

Libraries are institutions which can be viewed as gatekeepers of knowledge, culture, thoughts, and ideas. In order to promote the free flow of ideas and information, libraries have the unique responsibility to promote equity in access to information. Libraries strive to be neutral and open; however, all institutions are influenced by historical, social, and political context. By comparing the competency standards of different library organizations, we can identify areas which promote diversity. Based on the scope and type of the library institution, each set of competencies promotes diversity in different ways. Let us examine the competency standards and core values of the International Federation of Library Association, the American Association of School Librarians, Association for Library Service to Children, Web Junction, the Federal Library and Information Center Committee, and the Art Libraries Society of North America.

The core values of The International Federation of Library Associations are as follows:

1. The endorsement of the principles of freedom of access to information, ideas and works of imagination and freedom of expression embodied in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
2. The belief that people, communities and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic and economic well-being

3. The conviction that delivery of high quality library and information services helps guarantee that access
4. The commitment to enable all Members of the Federation to engage in, and benefit from, its activities without regard to citizenship, disability, ethnic origin, gender, geographical location, language, political philosophy, race or religion.
(IFLA)

These core values are reflected in many library association's competency standards. I believe that these overarching values of intellectual freedom and equal access are also mirrored in The Library Bill of Rights from the American Library Association.

Expectations for information professionals regarding diversity are explicitly codified and vary based on the focus of the organization. These codes range in focus from collection development, cultural preservation, customer service, and hiring practices.

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) codifies their expectations for diversity in two standards: literacy and access. In their standards for literacy, candidates should be "knowledgeable about historical and contemporary trends and multicultural issues in reading material for children and young adults" (ALA/AASL 10). Regarding access to information, candidates should "plan strategically to ensure physical and intellectual access to information for the entire school community" (11). In general the goal is to represent a diversity of experiences, opinions, social and cultural perspectives, supporting the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are prerequisite to effective and responsible citizenship in a democracy (ALA/AASL 6).

The Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of the American Library Association, addresses diversity in its standard for knowledge of client group: The candidate:

1. Identifies patrons with special needs as a basis for designing and implementing services following the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and state and local regulations where appropriate.
2. Demonstrates an understanding of and respect for diversity in cultural and ethnic values.

This standard is in congruence with IFLA's goal of inclusivity, taking into account both cultural and ethnic values as well as disabilities of customers. Another interesting goal under their collection development standard is that they strive to maintain a diverse collection, "recognizing children's need to see people like and unlike themselves in the materials they access" (ALSC). Since the renewed interest of multicultural portrayals in books after the surge of interest concurrent with the civil rights movement in the 1960s, kids from underrepresented groups have benefitted from positive portrayals in books (Smith 349).

Web Junction's competency index has the most standards involving diversity, probably due to the fact that they support many different types of librarianship and represent a compilation of standards. The five main standards which concern diversity are interpersonal, communication, collection development and outreach, values and ethics, and personnel management. The two policies concerning interpersonal conduct "Treats everyone with honesty, respect and fairness to build an environment of trust; pursues an understanding and embrace of individual and organizational diversity" (15) are quite inclusive. Two specific instances in which diversity is articulated in the communication standards are "fosters an inclusive, affirming and

respectful climate for communication” (13), and “responds appropriately to diversity and cultural differences” (13).

Web Junction’s outreach and collection development policies are subdivided based on age, with a focus on helping the underrepresented populations. In the adult services standard the specific populations they aspire to reach are “those with disabilities, homebound, institutionalized, remote, non-English speaking, immigrant, low literacy” (20). In the young adult arena, the outreach will focus on “those with disabilities, home-schooled, institutionalized, remote, non-English speaking, low literacy” (34). Under the children’s category of collection development, the standard “Ensures that the collection reflects the diversity of the community, and helps to familiarize children and their families with other perspectives (ethnic, racial, gender, socio-economic, sexual preference, etc.)” (27). This last standard is the first to explicitly address sexual preference, although the other standards may just imply inclusion. All of the age-specific standards try to create collections that enhance diversity and cross-cultural understandings (31).

Web Junction’s standard for ethics and values are concurrent with the Library Bill of Rights and the ALA code of ethics. Two instances of support for diversity in the ethics standard are “provides equitable services to all users” and “recognizes, respects and addresses the diverse nature of the library’s users and community” (15).

Web Junction codifies diversity for librarians at the personnel level in “diversity needs are respected and supported in HR processes” (7). The Federal Library and Information Center Committee (FLICC) also codifies diversity at the personnel level to “create an environment that promotes equal opportunity and diversity in the library” and “demonstrates ability to manage the full cycle of human resources management in a diverse workforce” (FLICC 9); otherwise FLICC’s standards demonstrate a paucity of promoting diversity in that only one of the eight

competency standards mention diversity practices specifically. The Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS) promotes diversity in many ways, including at the personnel level, striving for a “balanced representation of both users and staff, in regards to services and collections” (8).

ARLIS promotes diversity in three other areas including collection management, public service, and support of preservation of cultural heritage. A clear standard from ARLIS which promotes inclusion of diverse works is “familiarity with the work of artists, architects, and designers of non-western societies and traditionally under-represented groups” (Ball, et. al. 2). ARLIS’s public service standard is simple yet inclusive: “respectful and equitable treatment of all users” (6).

A wide array of library organizations strives to create an inclusive environment through their collection development, outreach, personal communication, and personnel recruitment. Although diversity is just one manifestation of competencies promoted by library organizations, it is reflected in many of the professional guidelines. None of the guidelines examined conflict with diversity; they just stress its importance at different competency levels within the organization. The two main underlying values stress the importance of equal access and freedom of information. Diversity can be interpreted through many lenses (age, race, ability, sexual preference, political views, etc.). The most salient point is that library professionals should strive to create equal access to a diverse collection supporting diverse ideas and cultural representations at all levels of their organization from personal interaction to recruitment and support of personnel.

Works Cited

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