

BRINGING DIVERSITY TO YOUR COLLECTION: THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Norma Levy

Description: To facilitate the free flow of information in today's rapidly changing world, public libraries across America are rethinking collection development procedures to better serve their international patrons. Suggestions for selecting and promoting materials to support diversity in public libraries will be presented by a California librarian working with a large Spanish speaking population.

Norma Levy, was born in the city of Los Angeles and has lived in Los Angeles County all of her life. She graduated from California State University Long Beach with a B.A. degree in English with a Creative Writing specialization. After graduation, Norma worked in a chain bookstore until starting library school. She graduated from California State University Fullerton with an M.L.S. degree in Library Science. Her first library job was at Rockwell International in Downey, California at the Technical Information Center. After three years, she left for a position as Technical Services Librarian at Downey City Library. In 1991 she left Downey to start her current position at Azusa City Library as the Technical Services Coordinator (Senior Librarian). At Azusa Norma has had the opportunity to supervise the conversion to their automated system. She is a member of the American Library Association, the California Library Association, and the AJL.

To facilitate the free flow of information in today's rapidly changing world, public libraries across America are rethinking collection development procedures. Selecting and promoting materials to support diversity in public libraries involves rethinking how you do it. Its core is a heart without boundaries and dedication to the essence of libraries being owned by their patrons, not just serving them. It's all about a point of view.

Let me tell you a little background information about the population and patrons of the city of Azusa. The City of Azusa patron population has been a mix of Spanish, Indian, and Anglo since the 1870s. The 2000 Census figures show a population in Azusa of 44,712 people living in 9.13 square miles. The census reports that 28,522 people described themselves as Hispanic or Latino - - 5.9% Asian, 3.5% Black, and 2.4% Other. Of the total student population, 78% of the school-age children in the city are Hispanic.

The Azusa library is a single level building of 18,500 square feet with approximately 104,000 items in the collection. The library staff reflects the diversity of the general Southern California population. We have three full time employees who are Librarians with degrees. Approximately five people speak Spanish; other employees speak Farsi, German, Hawaiian, and some French. Three members of the current staff have attended Tools for Tolerance training at the Museum of Tolerance.

Who selects material for the library collection? Although anyone on the staff may suggest an item to be ordered, the books and periodicals are selected by the Librarians. Non-print material is selected by both Librarians and Library Assistants. Patrons and city staff also suggest books and nonprint items for the collection.

Suggested guidelines for selecting material to increase diversity in your collection are:

1. Review your collection development policy to be sure it has a phrase or statement indicating selectors must actively consider the diverse nature of the community and the area.
2. Listen to requests and suggestions from your patrons and community groups.
3. Note subject areas and titles not found while helping patrons.

Many resources exist to help you develop a diverse collection. Resources to consider are:

1. From the American Library Association and its specialized divisions come Booklist, Library Journal, School Library Journal, Booklink, Choice, and Horn Book. EMIE Bulletin is published quarterly by the Ethnic and Multicultural Information Exchange Round Table of the American Library Association in cooperation with Queens College Graduate School of Library and Information Studies. The Bulletin was created to bring excellent resources and titles to the attention of the library world. All formats - - print, nonprint, and electronic - -are covered.
2. Publishers Weekly has reviews, best seller lists, publishing industry news, and interviews. Remember when reading this publication that their goal is selling.
3. Cretica is a new publication jointly sponsored by Library Journal, School Library Journal, and Publishers Weekly. It covers new Spanish language items in print, nonprint, and electronic format for all reading levels. Some of the items are from authors who are Hispanic; other entries are Spanish translations from English or other languages of recommended or popular items and authors.
4. The Los Angeles Times and other news media have reviews and interviews. Patrons often bring requests from these sources.
5. Book fairs and showcases are useful because the actual book, CD, video, etc. can be seen. A popular example is the Guadalajara Book Fair. I haven't had the opportunity to attend this fair yet, but look forward to doing this one day.
6. Publisher representatives visiting the library are sometimes helpful. Remember that the visitor's goal is to make the sell. During the excitement of the visit it is important to keep your budget constraints, patron habits, and collection needs in mind. Checking after the visit for objective reviews of the material should be part of the process.
7. Internet web sites are numerous and sometimes useful for determining content, review sources, and prices. The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance has an excellent link that lists bibliographies and individual titles covering diversity and multicultural subjects. The Library of Congress web site is free and can help pin down basic bibliographic information, such as author, title, publisher, subject headings and call numbers. It's important with web sites to note the source of their information and if they have an "agenda.."

I'm a technical services librarian and have a strong concern for getting material into the collection in an accessible format. When expanding the diversity of your collection, some of the more traditionally-minded users may be anxious about changes. Try one or more of these approaches:

1. If possible, use subject headings in the language of the material in your catalog. Check for subject heading lists in the language or translate from English subject headings. We have also used city employees with excellent verbal skills to assist us. You may need the assistance of outside temporary cataloging assistance.
2. Devote a shelf or location for new items and display items with colorful jackets face out like a bookstore does.
3. In a group of items intended for the New Shelf, include some items from the diversity selection with the more traditional items in the same batch of work.
4. Highlight your non-English language collection with signs in the language, in your library brochures and publicity, and on your website (if you have one).

Public libraries are a source of free information, available locally. City libraries have a proud tradition of supporting the education of newcomers to America. Collection development efforts by the library staff must continue the tradition of selecting materials covering all topics of information at a range of reading skills for all of the community. Diversity in the library collection continues to be crucial in a country dedicated to equal opportunity. The best defense against intolerance and hate is understanding, because it's all about a point of view.