

# Diversity and Collection Development:

Some Thoughts On the Past, Present, and Future

By Bob Diaz, November 3, 2016

AZLA 2016

# Session Overview

- ▶ My background and experience.
- ▶ Why am I interested in this topic now?
- ▶ A quick literature review
- ▶ Key issues
- ▶ Recommendations
- ▶ Summary

# My background and experience

- ▶ Graduated from the University of Arizona Library School in 1986. While there, I compiled an extensive bibliography on the writer, Margaret Randall. The experience gave me lots of insights into publishing and collections.
- ▶ Worked for 8 months as a children's librarian. Selected new children's and adult titles as part of my job.
- ▶ Worked for 5 ½ years at the University of Michigan Undergraduate Library. Completed projects that involved enhancing literary collections in Chicano literature and LGBT literature. Got involved in “diversity” work.
- ▶ Wrote a book chapter titled, “Collection Development in Multicultural Studies” for the book, “Cultural Diversity in Libraries”, edited by Don Riggs and Patricia Tarin. Published in 1994.

# My background and experience cont.'

- ▶ **Hired as Assistant to the Dean for Staff Development, Recruitment and Diversity at the University of Arizona in 1992. While in this position, even though I had no collection development responsibilities, my scholarship and services activities included the following:**
- ▶ **I co-authored chapters providing recommended magazine and journal titles in Latino and Latin American Studies for several editions of the reference book, “Magazines for Libraries.”**
- ▶ **I conducted workshops for librarians and the public on Latin music, providing the participants with plenty of information they could use to build their own Latin music holdings.**

# My background and experience, cont.

- ▶ Transferred to public services in 2000. Assigned to the Fine Arts and Humanities Team with responsibilities for music, dance, media arts and theater arts.
- ▶ Built the Mexican movie collection. Focused on musical comedies.
- ▶ Diversified the Library's holdings of books and a-v materials in the areas of world music, jazz, Latin music and American popular music.
- ▶ Transferred to Special Collections in 2011. Responsibilities include coordination of exhibits and events and curatorship of the performing arts and architecture.
- ▶ Presented programming that attracted diverse audiences, and from there diverse collections. (Chuck Ford materials).

# Why am I interested in this topic now?

- ▶ I've always been interested in this topic, and here are some reasons why I think it's more important than ever.
- ▶ The gap in levels of education between “minority” and non-minority population have not closed. Literacy rates are low in the Latino and African American communities. The school to prison pipeline targets minority youth and is in full operation.
- ▶ At the national level, there is renewed interest in multicultural children's literature, and the lack thereof. There's research being done on this. And the evidence is showing that having multicultural books available is important.
- ▶ It's been a few years since the ownership vs. access model of libraries has been in place (at least the University of Arizona). Has it worked? How has this impacted the provision of diverse materials and the building of diverse collections.
- ▶ Patron drive acquisitions and approval plans have shifted attention away from librarian involvement in making purchasing decisions. Is this good or bad?

# A quick literature review

- ▶ Within the last five years alone, there have been numerous articles written about diversity and collections, or various practices such as demand driven acquisitions and the increased availability of e-books, and their impact on diverse user groups.
- ▶ Articles on the lack of diversity in the publishing industry clearly point to a need for more people of color in this arena.
- ▶ There have been articles on assessment of diverse collections and how diverse populations use libraries.
- ▶ There have been reports on library usage by Latinos/Hispanics.
- ▶ ALA has reaffirmed the importance of building diverse collections.
- ▶ There are articles on the importance of having diverse children's collections in libraries and on the use of bestseller lists for making purchasing decisions for young adult literature.

# Key issues

- ▶ Funding
- ▶ Professional expertise is lacking
- ▶ Diversity in the profession is lacking
- ▶ Not enough people of color in publishing.
- ▶ Not enough writers
- ▶ Systemic racism in the education system.
- ▶ Collection building is not a priority for many libraries now.
- ▶ Not enough teachers from diverse backgrounds.
- ▶ Is this all just a pipe dream? Will diverse “collections” ever be available broadly?



# Key Issues: Patron (demand) driven acquisitions.

- ▶ Those in favor of this model of building collections charge that “just-in-case” collections are passe’ and no longer viable. Too costly, material doesn’t circulate, space is needed for other activities etc. (Keeping Up with...Patron Driven Acquisitions, by Stephen Arougheti. -ALA-ACRL Publications. )
- ▶ “It is best to view PDA as a tool amongst several to augment a library’s collection development policy. User selection serves to facilitate the immediate and short-term demands of developing a collection within niches; yet the requisite foresight required to refine a comprehensive collection for future scholarship and address ongoing subject trends necessitates the continued role of librarians in advancing an inclusive strategy”. Aougheti, S.

# Key Issues: Patron (demand) driven acquisitions

- ▶ A critique of patron driven acquisitions can be found in the following article: Walters, William H. Patron driven acquisition and the educational mission of the academic library. Library Resources and Technical Services, July, 2012.
- ▶ The author expresses concerns about pda's impact on collection quality and about librarian expertise not being utilized. He argues that active participation is needed on the part of librarians in building collections.
- ▶ A new work, out in 2017, titled "Evaluating Demand-Driven Acquisitions", includes a chapter called "Assessing for Collection Diversity" by Laura Costello, and it argues that patron driven acquisitions helps to better meet the needs of diverse users, and it provides specific examples of institutions that have found that providing content digitally reaches a broader user population.

# Key issues: assessment

- ▶ Research on use of e-books. Do students of color have the same access to the technology needed to access digital content?
- ▶ What turns a student off? Turnaround time? Perhaps.
- ▶ E-books have limitations. Many users still prefer print, but those who promote patron driven acquisitions seem ignore this. The publishing industry has seen a drop in the purchase of e-books, and an increase in the purchasing of physical books.
- ▶ Economic feasibility? Who determines this? Why do libraries have to sacrifice their traditional roles as places where books can be found? Just in case is okay with me.

# Key Issues: access vs. ownership

- ▶ Access vs. ownership issue: more material will be lost and not replaced if there isn't a systematic way to re-order missing materials.
- ▶ Should paper collections become a part of the museum? It seems like there is a lot of interest in artifacts. Has the physical book become an artifact?
- ▶ College and University libraries have had to move away from building collections to providing access, but in the long run , has any money really been saved? It may be too soon to evaluate the cost benefit ratio of providing digital content in contrast to physical content.
- ▶ Providing access doesn't mean that the access provided is quick or that it meets user needs. Not all users want digital access.

# What did I learn from my experience building diverse collections?

- ▶ Whenever money is involved, there is entrenchment. Some people do not want to see funding go to collection building projects, especially if the areas of study are deemed less worthy. They have an inherent interest in maintaining the status quo. They will fight you every step of the way.
- ▶ While one has to work within the parameters provided, there are ways to argue effectively for adding diverse materials to the collection. Knowing one's user population and their needs is crucial. Data can help immensely if you use it wisely to make your case.
- ▶ There are ways to work under the radar to get things done, but proceed at your own risk. Whatever it takes.
- ▶ One needs to develop additional knowledge about publishing and sales to be able to know where to find diverse materials. Reliance on approval plans is going to leave lots of gaps.
- ▶ The more you study a topic, the better job you'll do.

# Recommendations

- ▶ If you think your library does a good job collecting diverse materials, share your story! The professional literature on the topic is sparse. We need more collective wisdom. How do you do it? What works? What doesn't. How can you tell you're doing a good job? What are your quality standards?
- ▶ Is diversity in your strategic plan? If so, advocate to focus on strengthening your holdings about and for ethnic minorities and people of color, and other populations that fall outside the dominant mainstream culture.
- ▶ Find out if your various communities are satisfied with what you are providing them. If they aren't find out how to improve services.

# Recommendations

- ▶ **Want to increase your libraries diverse holdings? Where to begin? Need a focus. Break it down somehow.**
- ▶ **Do you take time to assess what you already have and fill in the gaps or just move forward with a proactive approach for future acquisitions?**
- ▶ **How do you know how well you are doing?**
- ▶ **What are baseline standards for diverse collections? Do any exist?**
- ▶ **Need to define terminology.**
- ▶ **Encourage publishers to re-print titles that are important but out of print.**

# Final thoughts

- ▶ A very recent PBS article about the children's writer Duncan Tonatiuh, who advocates for more children's writing by writers of color, includes some interesting comments, including statements like “go back to your own country, if you want to retain your culture” and “we are a melting pot, so get over it”. The current volatile political climate has brought the nay sayers and racists out of the wood work.
- ▶ It's time to take a stand and fight the good fight. Helping children become literate should be a major priority for everyone in our society. We need to give extra attention to those populations who have been marginalized in US culture. We need to be advocates for diverse collections. We need to empower ourselves to learn our local systems and how they work so that we can influence them for the better.



# Conclusion

- ▶ Questions, comments?