



ART LIBRARIES SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA

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Diversity Forum: Raising Awareness of Diversity Issues

Sunday, May 4, 2008 8:30 – 9:30 am

Speaker: Trevor Dawes, Princeton University Library

Generously sponsored by Joan Benedetti.

Summary:

Trevor Dawes addressed different ways in which we respond to diversity issues beginning with two stories. The first one provided an example of how, even with the best of intentions; sometimes we expect those different from us to make all the changes in order to fit in. With the second story, he exemplified how an organization can successfully serve a diverse community by knowing their users and focusing on their needs even if their staff is not representative of that diversity.

Departing from his definition of diversity as “acknowledgement of the difference and similarities among people in a particular context” he talked about how diversity can make our libraries more successful and have more meaning to the people we serve. Dawes discussed the benefits of embracing diversity from various perspectives, including business and economic. He reminded the audience that diversity needs to be understood as more than racial and ethnic differences to include other dimensions such as gender identity, disabilities, age and religion.

Among his recommendations to raise awareness and better serve diverse populations were to ensure hiring practices address representation –but not just to meet a quota–, to host programs and provide services focused on the users and to work as part as a team to draw on diverse backgrounds. Other suggestions included newsletters, activities to share similar interests, diversity task forces, a buddy program, workshops and educational programs on diversity and building community.

Recorder: Martha González Palacios, Liaison Librarian, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC.

Presentation:

Diversity and You

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. Thank you also for getting up as early as you did to attend this session. I think this is a testament to your interest in the subject of diversity and I hope that by the end of the discussion (and that’s what I want to have this morning) we’ll all walk away with some additional tools for managing diversity in our own work spaces.

The conference program notes that I will discuss the “importance of diversity and what we can do to encourage it in our libraries and our professional organizations.” I will certainly try to do that. But before I do, I want to tell you a little about my background and about my work with diversity initiatives, and then I’ll also share two stories that I find very powerful.

It is only recently that I began researching and working in the area of diversity. In part, coming from the Caribbean where diversity is not a word that was used much, the topic simply was not on my radar. Later, working in New York City, diversity took on a lot of meanings and in many ways the city and the people of the city and certainly at my former place of employment seemed to embrace diversity in many ways. It’s not my intent to paint a rosy picture of New York City or my former employer, but in fact diversity and issues surrounding diversity were not as important to me because I don’t think I was personally affected by many – any – of the issues that many of us commonly associate with the word. I had a (fairly) good public school education; did my undergraduate work and some graduate work at Columbia University; obtained my MLS from Rutgers University; and was employed by the Libraries at Columbia University. My experience at each of these places helped to set the framework for the work I would later do with respect to diversity education and initiatives because I am now able to see my experiences at that public school and at both the private and public universities through the lens of someone for whom the word “diversity” has now taken on a new meaning and greater importance. Shortly after accepting my current position at Princeton University in 2004, I was appointed by the university president to the Diversity Working Group whose charge was to explore ways in which to make our campus a more inviting and welcoming place for all people and where all staff members (and this group focused on staff because there were other efforts focused on students and faculty) would thrive. I won’t go into details about the ways in which Princeton University operated and in some ways still does, or what earned it the reputation of being the most southern of the northern colleges, and I am sure I don’t have to say much about the ways in which Princeton University was (and perhaps still is) perceived by some; but suffice it to say such a working group was long overdue. This was the beginning of my journey into the research of and work with diversity issues. Through this new lens I was also able to look back at the previous experiences – to my time spent in the Caribbean and in New York City, and I now believe that some of this newfound knowledge would have been really helpful in making those experiences more enriching as I would have taken advantage of and learned so much more about the city, the country and of the people with whom I came in contact with. I was later asked to chair the American Library Association’s Committee on Diversity and served in that capacity until last year. I had the opportunity there, to work with Laurel in a different capacity because she was the ARLIS liaison to the ALA COD. While chair, the committee hosted or sponsored or co-sponsored programs and workshops too numerous to mention, but that really helped to both broaden and deepen my understanding of diversity issues particularly in the library setting. There is one program with which I was particularly pleased – White Privilege 101, offered by Art Munin, a consultant out of the Chicago area, and if any of you plan to attend ALA’s annual conference in Anaheim this year, Art will follow-up this successful program with another – “Beyond White Privilege” that I encourage you to attend.

I am pleased to be here with you today not as an expert on diversity (there is a wonderful book, *The Experts Speak : The Definitive Compendium of Authoritative Misinformation* by Christopher Cerf who quotes some ‘experts’ in various subjects. I think the book title says it all; I couldn’t put my hands on my copy to give some

examples). So, I stand here, not as an expert, but as one who continues to learn about managing diversity and about diversity education and I hope that you will, in your own ways, continue to educate yourselves and your colleagues about diversity issues at your respective organizations and indeed also within ARLIS.

The first story I want to share with you is about giraffes and elephants. If you've done any work with diversity initiatives you're probably familiar with this story. It is a story told by Roosevelt Thomas Jr. who for me, and for others, is one of the fathers of diversity education. Although a relatively simple story, and one that I have basically committed to memory, I will read from his book, *Building a house for diversity*, published in 1999 by the American Management Association.

In a small suburban community just outside the city of Artiodact, a giraffe had a new home built to his family's specifications. It was a wonderful house for giraffes, with soaring ceilings and tall doorways. High windows ensured maximum light and good views while protecting the family's privacy. Narrow hallways saved valuable space without compromising convenience. So well done was the house that it won the national giraffe home of the year award. The home's owners were understandably proud. One day the giraffe, working in his state-of-the-art workshop in the basement, happened to look out the window. Coming down the street was an elephant. I know him, he thought. We worked together at a PTA committee. He's an excellent woodworker too. I think I'll ask him in to see my new shop. Maybe we can even work together on some projects. So the giraffe reached his head out the window and invited the elephant in. The elephant was delighted; he had liked working with the giraffe and looked forward to knowing him better. Besides, he knew about the workshop and wanted to see it. So he walked up to the basement door and waited for it to open. Come in, come in, the giraffe said. But immediately they encountered a problem. While the elephant could get his head in the door he could go no farther.

It's a good thing we made this door expandable to accommodate my workshop equipment, the giraffe said. Please give me a minute while I take care of our problem. He removed some bolts and panels to allow the elephant in. The two acquaintances were happily exchanging woodworking stories when the giraffe's wife leaned her head down the basement stairs and called to her husband: telephone, dear; it's your boss. I'd better take that upstairs in the den, the giraffe said to the elephant. Please make yourself at home as this may take a while. The elephant looked around, saw a half finished project on the lathe table in the far corner, and decided to explore it further. As he moved through the doorway that led to that area of the shop, however, he heard and ominous scrunch. He backed out, scratching his head. Maybe I'll join the giraffe upstairs, he thought. But as he started up the stairs he heard them begin to crack. He jumped off and fell back against the wall. It too began to crumble. As he sat there disheveled and dismayed the giraffe came down the stairs. What on earth is happening here? The giraffe asked in amazement.

I was trying to make myself at home, the elephant said. The giraffe looked around. Okay, I see the problem. The doorway is too narrow. We'll have to make you smaller. There is an aerobics studio near here. If you take some classes there, we could get you down to size.

Maybe, the elephant said looking unconvinced.

And the stairs are too weak to carry your weight, the giraffe continued. If you go to ballet class at nights I'm sure we could get you light on your feet. I really hope you'll do it. I like having you here.

Perhaps, the elephant said. But to tell you the truth I'm not sure that a house designed for a giraffe will ever really work for an elephant, not unless there are some major changes.

We'll return to this story and explore the diversity implications shortly. Before we do that however, let me tell you the second story. This story is about a library, a public library, where on any given afternoon there will be a program in the community room that is being attended by a number of senior citizens from the neighborhood; upstairs the young children are enjoying story-time and other activities with the librarians; throughout the building young adults are getting help with their homework; other users are browsing the collections, especially the popular fiction collection, the audio books, the CDs, and DVDs; just outside the library yet other children and young adults will enjoy some outdoor activities such as skateboarding or other games on the library plaza. The people that I'm describing are from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, a variety of socioeconomic classes, and as I alluded to earlier a variety of age ranges. What they have in common however, is the library. This library is a place where they can get whatever they want and usually whenever they want it because this library is open seven days a week and is an integral part of the community. What these people probably don't realize, and really shouldn't have to, is that all the library staff-with minor exception of some of the nonprofessional staff-are white and mostly female. There are at least a few of you in the audience who know the library that I'm talking about because you've probably used it. If you've experienced something other than what I've just described let's talk about it. For those who have not used this library, or don't know the library about which I speak, it is the Princeton Public Library in Princeton, NJ. These two stories tell us quite a bit about diversity but from different perspectives. Before getting into these differences however, let's try to define diversity.

Q. Anyone here wants to tell me what diversity means to them?

Merriam-Webster defines diverse as, "composed of distinct or unlike elements or qualities (as in a diverse population)." Another definition reads, "distinctly dissimilar or unlike; "celebrities as diverse as Bob Hope and Bob Dylan"." However, in diversity education, I like to think not only of the differences, but also of the similarities. So, to me diversity is the acknowledgement of the differences AND SIMILARITIES among people in a particular context (ARLIS-NA, Princeton University, your work place) that lead to discussion, inclusion and ultimately the celebration of the people. I hope we can all agree with this working definition of diversity.

[repeat] Can we all agree with this definition of diversity as we move forward?
So, now we know what diversity is, why is it important? How can diversity make our libraries more successful and have more meaning to the people that we serve?

Dr. Sylvia Hurtado, in a 1999 article, pointed out that an institution's ability to provide a "comfortable environment for learning and socializing is a key factor in facilitating the intellectual and social development of all students." Although she was speaking about institutions of higher education, the same could be said of libraries because we also

serve an educational function. A part of that comfortable environment to which Dr. Hurtado refers is the presence of a diverse workforce.

In the corporate world, diversity makes good business sense. In a manner similar to the recent ALA study, *Diversity Counts*, most major corporations have analyzed past census data as well as projections and understand that in the near future, “the person knocking on our door for employment is not going to be a white male” (Conference Board, 1999). And just as the majority of workers will be non-white, so will the majority of consumers. It should come as no surprise then that in the last 10 – 15 years, the way in which companies market their products have changed dramatically and have become more inclusive. There is a business imperative – a financial incentive – for embracing diversity. Research also shows that diversity contributes to effective problem solving (Scott Page: *The difference* Princeton University Press, 2007). Diversity in this context is not limited to racial and ethnic, age, or gender diversity, but rather to diversity of opinion – which may be obtained through the other types, but not exclusively. Dr. Roberta Ibarra at the University of New Mexico speaks of Contextual Diversity in which he says the institution would apply solutions appropriate to their needs. I’ll also return to this concept shortly.

I glossed over the business case for diversity in the corporate setting – the financial incentive – but what about the academic setting, or the library environment? Most of you are probably familiar with the University of Michigan lawsuits a few years ago that challenged the admissions policies and practices at the school’s undergraduate and law schools. Although the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of affirmative action policies at public universities, there are still challenges for schools to maintain racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse student bodies. Lee Bollinger, former president at the University of Michigan argues that for universities to remain competitive, they must determine and deliver what future graduates will need to know about their world. And as we, our colleges and universities, our communities, and our libraries become more global in our focus, we have to provide the necessary exposure, knowledge of, and education about different cultures and different peoples. Having this knowledge, this exposure, and the set of skills that go with them makes us more competitive in the job market, in the educational market and makes us better informed citizens. These are some compelling reasons for diversity in the corporate sector and in the educational setting, but why should the library care about diversity?

Research shows that different people seek information in different ways. The elderly may use the library differently from the young, who uses it differently from the African American, who uses it differently from the disabled. I intentionally used these demographics as examples because they represent different aspects of diversity and some of the areas to which we should pay attention in our libraries. Too often, the term diversity is associated with racial and ethnic differences, but the term covers a wide variety of differences in our patrons as well as in our colleagues.

I spoke earlier of Dr. Roberto Ibarra’s concept of contextual diversity – where you (the library) would adapt to meet the needs of your user population. This requires an understanding of your users’ needs, and the library that I mentioned in the second story I told earlier, is a great example of contextual diversity in action. This library – and the staff members there – understand the needs of the library users and do what they must in order to meet the needs. It is therefore just as welcoming a place for the young Latina child who is brought there for story-time by her parent as it is for the African American

young adult doing homework, the White elderly woman there for the program or event and the other groups I mentioned before who are using the library for a host of other reasons. It doesn't matter that the staff is not representative of the community in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, or age; what matters is that they gather information about the needs and then provide the services and programs to meet those needs. Those of you who have heard Leslie Burger, director of the library, speak about diversity may have heard her tell the story recently about the immigration raids that were (and probably still are) popular in New Jersey and other states. Although most of the Latino population in Princeton would not have been affected by these raids, the library took an active role by engaging the services of an immigration attorney to provide information and assistance to those in the community who needed it. This was not an easy thing to do because, as you might imagine, those who were in jeopardy of being carted off by immigration officials are exactly the people who would not want to identify themselves in such a public way. The library therefore had to do extensive outreach to gain – AND KEEP – the trust of the community. But it is this sort of activity that in turn makes the population lifelong – or at least long-term – users of the library.

I couldn't help but re-visiting the Library's website to see written there, "The Princeton Public Library, the community's living room, connects people with ideas, information, technology, resources and each other in ways that enrich their lives and help them to realize their dreams." This is a statement that is clearly in line with what the library does.

Most discussions about diversity, and indeed the focus of the ALA "Diversity Counts!" report, is about the numbers – looking at the census data and making the case that the demographics of the library profession as a whole should be reflective of the demographics of the larger society. While I believe I could argue (and hopefully just made the case) that it is not necessary to have a staff reflective of the community served, there is merit to this idea. Diversity, in its many forms, can bring different and new ideas to the fore; can redress past wrongs; can help to establish a national society (where we learn to overcome our biases, etc.); and can bring people together. The ALA Diversity Counts study, originally released in October 2006 and later updated found several things:

- + About 25% of Americans are non-white, and only 11% of credentialed librarians are;
- + African Americans are 12% of the population and 5% of the profession;
- + Latinos are 12.5% of the population and 2% of the profession;
- + Native Americans are .9% of the population and less than 1% of the profession;
- and
- + Asian and Pacific Islanders are 3.7% of the population and comprise about 3% of the profession.

Additionally, the report found that although the percentage of librarians from traditionally underrepresented groups increased from 9% to 13% between the 1990 and 2000 census, credentialed librarians are still predominantly white and female (80%). These figures are based on the 2000 census data. The full report, with the updates, is available on the ALA website.

This report looked at representational diversity – looking at the population at large and the population of librarians. It also looked only at race and ethnicity, gender and age. The report suggests that ALA and other library organizations – like ARLIS – have a lot more to do to recruit AND RETAIN a more diverse workforce. In doing so, however, we

must also look at the different needs of the populations served by various libraries – perhaps by region or by state or locality – to see if such representational diversity makes sense. It is important for us all to understand that diversity does not equal quota; it does not mean we need to have a certain percentage of African American, Latino, Asian Pacific Islander librarians who are male, disabled, and between the ages of 23 and 38. I am merely suggesting that we understand that as the demographics of the United States continues to change libraries will also have to change the ways in which we provide services to meet the needs of the changing population. One of the ways we can do so is by changing the face of our libraries.

So, what are some of the other things we can do? There is the obvious – representation! But we need to do more than that. Going back to Sylvia Hurtado's quote, we can make the library comfortable and inviting for our users. Host programs and provide services in ways that are meaningful to the users – in their languages and at times that are convenient for them. But language and culture are not enough. It is easy to get and present data on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender and age, but less easy to get information on the other dimensions of diversity such as religion, sexual orientation, and, to some extent, disability status. This is by no means an indication that we should ignore these dimensions. Think of the elephant in the giraffe's house. The giraffe thought he was being a gracious host when he invited the elephant to visit to share in and discuss issues of mutual interest. But the giraffe still didn't realize that the house he built was built only for him and for other giraffes. So, despite the commonalities they have: their activity in the PTA; living in the same neighborhood; their love of woodworking; they don't see eye-to-eye on some basic concepts. Some might argue that the giraffe needs to change in the same way the giraffe suggested to the elephant that he needs to take ballet lessons and aerobic classes to be able to fit in the house. But embracing diversity requires that more than one party do all the work; it has to be a team effort.

I mentioned the Diversity Working Group of which I was a member at Princeton. This group was comprised of 22 members of the university administration and staff from all units on campus – the library, facilities, athletics, dining services, student life, human resources, the ombuds officer, information technology, and I can't remember the other areas. This group was created because achieving diversity and managing it effectively are important goals for the University. The president wanted this group to think of ways to institutionalize the positive ways we think about diversity initiatives so that current and future generations of Princetonians will benefit and where those from diverse backgrounds will not have to rely on a single champion, which had been the case at Princeton previously.

But, what can you do on a local or grass-roots level if you don't have this type of institutional support? Here are a few ideas – some of which will require more resources (human and/or financial) than others:

- + As with the elephant and the giraffe, managing diversity is, in large part, about getting to know each other. Create a newsletter (it could be an online newsletter) in which you and your colleagues author and disseminate information. Stories could be about things you find interesting that may or may not be work-related; it may include photos; listing of events of interest; or anything that will allow you and your colleagues to get to know each other better. This is a first step.
- + Following up on the newsletter idea, plan activities where employees can share similar interests and experiences. Start a wood-working club, a book club, tours to

museums or art galleries or other interesting places. These could be akin to affinity groups but they don't have to be as formal. The formal groups may need sponsorship and authorization from your Human Resources Department. Be sure that the invitation is extended to all employees however, so as not to appear discriminatory. This is, after all, an attempt to be inclusive.

- + Develop a face book. This can be an intranet face book for staff access only, or it could take advantage of social software that already exists like Facebook.com that has the group feature. Create a private group in FB where, again, you may share stories of interest to the individuals in the library. If you are planning on a budget, you might want to use the social software already available so there isn't any need for investment of IT staff time and resources to develop the intranet.

If you are, or your organization is able to do more, then there are a couple other things you may want to consider:

- + Create a diversity task force to see what can be done to make your environment more inclusive. This work may involve a climate assessment; it may involve seeking information from colleagues; it may involve seeing what others are doing – sometimes there is no need to reinvent the wheel;
- + Develop a buddy program. This is different from a mentoring program because the buddy program will primarily be for new or newer staff members who will be partnered with a volunteer member of the more seasoned staff to take them to lunch, give a tour, answer questions and to generally get the person acclimated to the new environment.
- + Develop (or hire someone to develop) and deliver workshops and educational programs on diversity and building community. This could be through stories, events such as a staff arts and crafts exhibit, formal workshops and social events.
- + Designate a diversity advocate; or volunteer to be the diversity advocate. This person will ensure that the efforts to manage diversity are well coordinated and sustained. This could be a rotating position so the work doesn't always rest on one person. If your organization is large enough, the person could coordinate the work of a diversity committee.
- + To improve communication and collaboration, find ways to determine staff members' personal preferences through tools such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI).

Finally, the organization must make a statement about the value of diversity. I said earlier that effectively managing diversity is not one person's job, but the message about the importance of diversity has to come from the leadership, and has to be a constant thread in the entire fabric of the organization – think about the places in which you advertise available jobs; think about the questions you ask in your interviews. Challenge yourselves and your own assumptions. Researchers at Harvard, the University of Virginia and the University of Washington believe that “people don't always 'speak their minds', and it is suspected that people don't always 'know their minds'.” To that end, they have developed the Implicit Association Test. The IAT measures your “attitudes toward or beliefs about [various] topics, and provide[s] some general information about yourself.” There are several tests that are available – on race, disability, religion, gender, age, and the presidential candidates, just to name a few. The IAT was reported in a PBS program I saw some time ago (I can't remember the program, but I bookmarked the link and have taken a few of these tests. To test your assumptions, visit <http://implicit.harvard.edu>. It's free, you get your results immediately. You won't get a detailed explanation of the results and it is not definitive proof that you are a racist, ageist, sexist person, but there's sufficient information to get you thinking about your view of the various attributes. If this were more of an educational presentation or a

workshop, I would have asked you to take a few of these tests. But, you have the web address, so feel free to take them on your own.

I think we're coming up on an hour now and I want to leave some time for questions, so thank you for your time and attention this morning, and I'll take questions now if there are any.