

**A Seat At the Table:
Seeking Culturally Competent Pedagogy in Librarian Education**

**by
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ABSTRACT

This paper is a work in progress for submission to the 2007 American Library Association (ALA) Forum on Library Education, a continuing dialogue “on issues in library and information science education” to continue to identify “new issues and new challenges confronting [the] profession” (www.ala.org//ala/hrdr/abouthrdr/hrdr liaisoncomm/committeed/ libraryeducationforum.htm). In this work, the need for multiculturalism in librarianship as part of the core curriculum in American library schools is introduced as part of the conversation focusing on applicable education for librarians in the twenty-first century. The forum will be held in Seattle, WA, during the 2007 ALA Mid-Winter Conference, January 19-24, 2007.

Keywords: POV means “point of view”

INTRODUCTION

The current president of the American Library Association (ALA), Leslie Berger, spoke at the Association for Library and Information Science Education’s (ALISE) and the ALA’s joint forum on library education at the ALA Mid-Winter conference in San Antonio, Texas, in January 2006. Ms. Berger spoke about the qualities that library science graduates should possess as they enter today’s job market. She stated eleven competencies:

1. creativity
2. collaboration
3. communication skills
4. being change agents
5. flexibility (able to adapt to change)
6. decision making
7. problem solving (to be able to analyze and take action quickly)
8. leadership skills
9. risk takers
10. tech savvy
11. political skills of negotiation

(Berger, ALISE, 2006)

Berger said "that the biggest thing library education can do is to instill the passion, commitment and social standing of the values of librarianship" (Berger, 2006).

What is intriguing about her statement and her list, is that there is no mention nor call for the need for librarians or library educators to be culturally responsive or competent in a diverse

society, or the need to even appreciate culture of oneself, others, or society. At the time Berger made this statement she was president-elect of the ALA. Now in her active year of presidency (2006), her theme is “libraries build communities,” which is an important theme, an exciting theme, a theme that has long been needed as a source of remembrance and renewed inspiration in librarianship. My position in support of Ms. Berger’s platform, is that this theme needs to come from a cultural POV, an overlapping layered POV, as in a multicultural POV, due to the fact that America is an increasingly diverse society with an immediate global connection to the rest of the societies of the world that (in addition to being predominantly societies of color), thanks to technology, has never been so intimately connected on this magnitude nor immediacy ever before in known recorded history (Lerner, 2005, c1998, p. 168).

THE MAKINGS OF A LIBRARIAN

To become a librarian one needs a master’s degree in library science. This master’s degree currently takes the form of different guises as in M.L.S. (master’s in library science), M.L.I.S. (master’s in library and information science), M.S.L.S. (master’s of science in library science), and other various acronymic designations. While the letters behind the name may vary, the bottom line is that one has attended an accredited library school (accredited by the American Library Association, National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and regional university accreditation entities) fulfilling that school’s requirements for a librarian’s degree. Librarians typically possess an undergraduate bachelor’s degree and then continue for a fifth year master’s in library science degree. If someone wants to work as a law librarian, a J.D. (jurist doctor) may be desired or required. If someone wants to work as a school librarian, they will usually work within an accredited media certification track (within a library school) to qualify as both a teacher and a librarian. However, such certification is not

usually required to work in school libraries within private or parochial schools. Also, if someone wants to work in preservation, oftentimes a C.A. (certified archivist) is desired or required. For public librarianship, no other certification or education other than the master's degree is required. However, I posit that public librarians need to also be degreed in social work. It would be a tremendous advancement in library education to actualize a double degree program at universities where students can earn a joint M.L.S./M.S.W. for public librarianship. This kind of double degree may be an answer to the question of cultural competency within the praxis of librarianship as a whole.

In recent years, student librarians have taken on a different look with degree candidates being older, seeking a second career and/or a second master's degree. (Gorman, 2003, p. 9). Younger candidates tend to be teachers seeking to become a school library media specialist (school librarian), working towards state certification in this specialized area. Also, rural librarianship is on the rise, with more and more library school candidates from rural areas seeking the degree with the accessibility of online library science programs (e.g. Clarion University of PA, Connecticut State University, and Syracuse University, to name a few).

Regardless of a student's intent upon entering library school, I posit from my own experience as a librarian educator that many student librarians enter library school with a preconceived notion of what it means to be a librarian and what it takes to become a librarian. I call it the "Patron POV." Student librarians with no experience with working in libraries come into library school with a patron's point of view (POV), thinking that it is going to be easy to "read" books for a year or so, and then qualify to sit behind a desk and answer questions with a smile day in and day out. I have found that such student librarians are often disillusioned to the rigors of just the mentality of librarianship, let alone the actual practice of the profession, which

for those of us who are paraprofessionals or professionals seasoned to the reality of wearing multiple hats at one time, much in alignment with Ms. Berger's list of competencies as discussed earlier.

THE LIBRARIANS

The current population of professional librarians holds two demographic pools (Gorman, 2003, p. 9). The older group of librarians who were educated during the late- to post-civil rights movement era, and the newer "CornyCool" librarians (as I like to call them) who have been educated within the last 10 years or so (Morris, Appendix A, "CornyCool Librarian Handout"). Librarians who are retiring in recent years have typically served for 30+ years in all areas of librarianship. Librarians I have known over the 20+ years that I have been a student and professional of librarianship have been older generation social justice-oriented librarians, serving in academic, public, special, and school libraries. As a librarian educator since 2005, the master's degree students that I've had the pleasure of teaching have commonly been of the newer, more tech savvy generation.

One of the most admirable traits of librarians, I find, is our willingness and ability to adapt to change. Admittedly as humans, there are always a percentage of individuals who are resistant to change, but for the most part, when we look at librarianship as a profession, librarians have always had the accurate reputation of adapting to new technologies and social changes in library practice. In yesteryear, librarians adapted to technology changes in the format of books (such as paperbacks, picturebooks, and graphic novels), typewriters, key-punch operators, and more (Gorman, 2003, p. 11). However, with the advent of the computer in the library, "change" and "trends" take on a new meaning. I posit that this "new meaning" has a lot to do with the fact that in yesteryear technology in libraries were primarily used by

librarians and staff. Nowadays, technology in libraries equalizes the playing field between librarians and patrons. Because of the pervasiveness of the Internet and computer technology as we know it today, librarians are challenged to service new levels of literacy: computer literacy and information literacy.

Michael Gorman (2000) talks about this new era of change for society and in turn for libraries. He states that

[T]he impact of technology on libraries is a microcosm of the impact of technology on the whole world. It is important to note that we, as human beings, are part of the society in which we live and that society is part of an increasingly interconnected network that constitutes, potentially, an emerging global society. We must always bear in mind that what is happening to libraries is a result of what is happening to social life, social organization, and global economic trends (p. 3).

Because of the impact of technology in society and libraries in this unprecedented way, Gorman is very concerned about library schools being able to adequately prepare library students to serve in a globally technologized society (Gorman, 2003). He is very clear about the fact that in this early part of the twenty-first century, library schools are not equipping graduates “with an education that will enable them to work in libraries successfully” (p. 10). Gorman states that student librarians need a core curriculum that is consistently taught in library schools throughout the profession. That core curriculum has to include the basics of librarianship: cataloguing, reference skills, collection development, bibliographic instruction, a specialization (as in children’s, young adult, schools, public libraries, archiving and preservation, government documents, etc.), and “other areas of practical work in libraries” (p. 10).

I wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Gorman. I think that as a profession, because we advocate for the traditions and cultures of the communities we service, that we need to first and

foremost advocate our professional traditions (core curriculum) and our cultures (multiculturalism as part of the core curriculum to service diverse communities). Avocation of librarianship as tradition, and as a culture, begins in library school.

WHO IS WHO IN LIBRARIES

We have to look at who is teaching library school, who is attending library school, and who is seeking library service, all from a cultural perspective that proactively acknowledges the fact that libraries, especially school and public libraries, exist and operate in communities that house a variety of peoples who are all multicultural in nature, and are seeking information *and service* that honors and reflects who they are. We, as Americans, additionally as North Americans, can no longer afford to not look at our societies from a cultural lens. As we all are familiar, the latest U.S. census statistics tell us that America is more pluralistic than ever. The continuous debate about Hispanic demographics, immigration issues, public services for the homeless population, inner-city services or lack thereof to impoverished African Americans and Latinos, technology access for persons with various learning and physical disabilities, and equal education for children of all languages and socio-economic levels, all speak to the imperative need as an information- and service-oriented profession to view our philosophy, theory, and praxis from a multicultural framework.

If libraries intend to remain relevant, important and central as informational and cultural resources in American society, this multicultural framework must be addressed, embraced, and institutionalized in library school. Are library schools teaching reference from the POV of servicing the global village? Are library science students being exposed to literature and discourse of a multicultural nature? How is “multicultural” defined in librarianship?

With “few candidates of color ... attracted to the field” this “overwhelmingly white” (Adkins and Espinal, 2004) profession of librarianship currently services an American society of 14% Hispanic, 13% African American, 5% gay and lesbian over the age of 18, 4% Asian, 1.5% Native American, 18% physically disabled, 25% children up to age 18 (of which 5% aged 13 and up are gay), 12.5% elderly, and an elusive percentage of homeless persons due to the insidiously transient nature of homelessness (the figure teeters around the 3%-4% range from various sources), of which 39% are children in urban areas, and even more in rural areas (Dell’Angela, 2001; U.S. Census, 2004, 2006; National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). Concerning the homeless population, NCLB Action Briefs cite sources that tell us that 87% of homeless children are K-12, with 77% attending school regularly (NCLB Action Briefs, retrieved 12/01/2006). Many homeless are elderly, and alone as well.¹ Suffice it to say that American library patrons, especially in the public sector, are a pluralistic group of citizens (or not) in need of a variety of informational and cultural resources that reflects their environment, their traditions, and their experiences in America. At present, those services are being provided predominantly by white female librarians.

WE’VE GOT ISSUES

Two salient issues stare us in the face here. One is the reality that the librarian profession is comprised of an overwhelming roster of librarians (89%) who are white females (Davis and Hall, 2006). The second issue is that, as delineated herein, library patrons are

¹ In one of the multicultural classes that I taught with the Department of Library Science at Clarion University of PA, a student once shared a quandary concerning a homeless patron who the library staff and administrator decided they would no longer service, because the patron was becoming physically infirmed, requiring “too much” of the staff’s help. After the student shared their concern during an online class chat session, in which other students and myself offered ideas and support, that very next day, the student posted to the class “village square” discussion board that the homeless patron had died that previous night in her car. Serving the underserved affects all of us, all the time.

invariably members of cultural groups that do not necessarily subscribe to the demographic of the mainstream American (e.g. white, male, middle class, 100% physically functional, etc.), but subscribe to the American idea of “other” (Apple, 2006, pp. 61-62). One might posit: “Well whites go to libraries; they are library patrons, too.” Fair enough. However, the issue that raises its snarly head here is access; more specifically, *equity of access*. Whites dominate mainstream culture in American society, holding historical and contemporary access to informational and cultural resources whether those resources are available in libraries or not. When we think of the prevailing issue of the “digital divide” we recognize this issue of equity of access to be real and true. Libraries and schools in areas where middle and upper class whites live invariably contain more resources (because higher income communities can provide higher tax dollars for community resources like libraries) and more accessible technologies for a wider range of patrons. Upper and middle class communities also have wider access to various resources because residents can afford cars, cable TV, and home computers that provide convenient access to real-time information and cultural activities. Since most librarians are of the mainstream demographic, we can posit that they are coming into library school from a privileged place of access and the economic wherewithal to have *convenient* access to information, cultural and artistic activities, as well as a mirrored reality (whites serving whites) while enjoying such social privilege.

When these students enter library school, are they entering library school for the sake of helping others? Are they entering library school because they ‘enjoy’ libraries, reading books and the idea of working in a ‘nice quiet’ library? As a librarian educator, I rarely see students who enter librarianship for the purpose of altruistically helping others or for the purpose of social justice. My experience has been thus far, that students enter librarianship to promote up

in a job they already have as a paraprofessional, to get a job as a librarian within their isolated rural communities, or they are pursuing it as a lifelong personal interest finally realized. There is nothing wrong with the aforementioned intentions; however, because librarianship is a profession, it is important to inspire library students to see the profession from a wider humanistic lens as part of the *pedagogy of library school*.

In the foundations course I teach at Clarion, I ignite students to other possibilities for librarianship, such as international librarianship and urban librarianship. Many are interested in the academic, corporate or specialized settings where the service communities are contained and more educated than the generalized public. Some library students are teachers who want to work in the school media center. I find that teacher student librarians have social justice leanings, and are passionate about working with children and teens for the purpose of promoting information literacy, heightened reading skills, and some kind of creative compliance to the standards movement of the NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act). If students are already trainees in a library setting (e.g. The Free Library of Philadelphia librarian trainee program), I find that students are warm to the idea of librarianship as a social justice venue, where the student/trainee is already working as a public servant in the community. Kathleen de la Pena McCook reminds us that “librarians must be involved in community-building initiatives so that our work is seen as vital to the grown national agenda for civic involvement. This is important because the work we do can be essential in helping communities gain resiliency” (2000, p. 165).

Library schools must be up to the challenge of igniting student librarians to the reality that our professional work, regardless of its venue, has socio-cultural purpose and meaning that requires competencies of a social and cultural nature. Because the profession is basically white

and female, it behooves library schools to ensure that students are taught competencies that create librarians that are culturally aware of their own social and cultural privilege as well as aware of the social and cultural realities of the underprivileged.

DEFINING MULTICULTURALISM FOR LIBRARIANSHIP

Iivonen, et al, (1998), define culture for libraries as, “a framework for our lives, something which affects our values, attitudes and behavior” (p. 3 of 11). Citing other scholars, the Iivonen team further defines culture as a manifestation of “everyday life as well as myths and value systems of society” (p. 3 of 11). Working with this definition I would like to further define culture as:

A working and ever-evolving manifestation of one’s individual and group identity as expressed publicly and privately via everyday life, tradition and ritual within one’s own particular ethnic/cultural group(s) as interspersed in social discourse.

This definition speaks to the importance of culture as an important and necessary component of library school curriculum because librarianship as a profession is a social, helping profession of a diverse population in American societies that are always in discourse collectively and individually. Libraries are unique places where the public sphere intersects with the private sphere (e.g. reading a book privately in public, seeking private information in a public place), where cultural idiosyncrasies are bound to intersect and interact.

When we’re talking about multiculturalism in libraries, we’re talking about library service to fluidly pluralistic patron communities where citizens possess overlapping cultural identities, and may have interchanging information needs based on those various identities. Librarians and educators are keepers and promoters of American culture. As such, librarians and educators are endowed to promote library materials, curriculum and curricular support, services and programs that are applicable, supportive and edifying to all cultures within a

diverse American society (Morris, *Librarianship as a cultural profession*, 2005). Therefore, a definition of multiculturalism for librarianship can be expressed as:

[T]he process of engaging librarians, staff and patron communities in materials that reflect their own personal cultural acceptances, as well the promotion and acknowledgement, acceptance and appreciation of all cultures in American society that illustrate its historical and progressive diversity (Morris, *Librarianship as a cultural profession*, 2005).

Library service from this perspective requires engaged and passionate librarian educators who have realized and accepted their own racial identities, and are lifelong learners of self and others. Before we can require multicultural classes in library school, we have to librarian educators have to be open to the merits of a culturally responsive librarianship in a multicultural society, and experiential pedagogy that supports multicultural library service.

TEACH THE TEACHERS FIRST

During IFLA's (International Federation of Libraries Associations and Institutions) 1998 General Conference, a paper was presented by the aforementioned Iivonen research team (who are librarian educators from the University of Finland), that spoke to the need for librarian educators to become self-culturally aware and therefore empowered to embrace and service multicultural patron communities. In their paper, "Analyzing and Understanding Cultural Difference: Experiences from Education in Library and Information Studies" (1998), Iivonen, et al, report on a study of two library science classes, one in Finland, and one in North Carolina, USA, where they compare and contrast library best practices to come to a realization of the following competencies for serving cultural groups in libraries:

It is important to pay attention to how members of various cultures see

- i) the nature of people,
- ii) a person's relationship to the external environment,
- iii) the person's relationship to other people,
- iv) the primary mode of the activity,
- v) people's orientation to space, and
- vi) the person's temporary orientation.

.... In addition, [attention is paid to] language and communication styles as a dimension of cultural differences. (Iivonen, etal, Abstract, 1998)

The Finland team posit that librarians must come out of their shell of seeing themselves from a parochial POV where such a perspective “neither recognizes other people's different ways of living and working nor appreciates that such differences have serious consequences” (Adler, 1997, as quoted in Iivonen, etal, 1998). The Iivonen group echoes the sentiments outlined herein that while technology has made our world a smaller place, it still takes the collaboration and interaction of people face to face, heart to heart, to garner true meaning of self, others, and of life. Truly this is the essence of lifelong learning, the overarching tenet of librarianship itself.

Thus, librarian educators must be willing to recognize their own racial identity development (Carter and Goodwin, 1994). As I posit in a field experience paper that I wrote for my doctoral program at the University of Pennsylvania entitled, *Librarians of a flock: Racial identity development as a means to cultural competency* (Morris, 2006) “an educator's internalization of their own racial identity is the crux to the interchange of learning” (p. 1). While it isn't practical for educators to go back to school to learn cultural competency for librarianship, initiation of such pedagogy in library school can be a powerful tool through which both teacher and student learn from one another.

IS MULTICULTURALISM IN LIBRARY SCHOOL?

There are 56 ALA-accredited library schools currently operating in North America (see <http://www.ala.org/ala/accreditation/lisdirb/Alphaaccred.htm>). According to U.S. News and

World Report's 2006 ranking of library schools, the top 10 library schools are:

1. University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign
 1. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
 3. Syracuse University
 4. University of Washington
 5. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
 6. Rutgers State University-New Brunswick
 7. Indiana University-Bloomington
 7. University of Pittsburgh
 7. University of Texas-Austin
 10. Florida State University
- (Zammarcelli, c/o "Library Underground" Posting, April 2006)

In researching the websites of the above schools, the following offer at least one course on multicultural library service:

1. University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign
1. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
4. University of Washington
5. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
6. Rutgers State University-New Brunswick
10. Florida State University

According to their websites, these six schools have courses that incorporate a cultural lens for library students studying library science and service from a cultural POV. However, only one school has a course that is *specifically* geared towards a full inquiry and discourse into library service as a multicultural resource. That school is the 10th school listed in the top 10 of library schools, Florida State University (FSU). According to FSU's website, the library school offers a course entitled; *Multicultural Literature & Information Resources for Youth* (see <http://ci.fsu.edu/go/graduate/courses/ms>). Other schools had courses for outreach services where the topic is explored from a cultural POV, either nationally or internationally (e.g. University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Rutgers, and University of Michigan), courses for children's and young adult materials where culture is an aspect of the course (e.g. University of

Washington), or a course where culture is examined as a social construct of contemporary society (e.g. University of Illinois-Urbana).

Yet and still, out of the top 10 schools, none of them offer a course that is specific to multicultural resources and services for librarianship as a holistic cultural profession. FSU comes closest to clearly identifying a multicultural pedagogy for its multicultural literature course. The other schools' course descriptions promote the courses with culture as an aspect of the course topic, from a mainstream lens.

Further research would need to be explored in this avenue to get a full view of what library schools across North America are offering in terms of multicultural pedagogy and discourse. It would be fascinating to research all 56 schools, to see exactly what is offered in terms of multicultural services and resources (I particularly like the idea of courses focusing on outreach with a cultural lens, especially within a public librarianship track). It would be pertinent to see if the research reveals any library school(s) that offer multiculturalism as a part of its *required core curriculum*. We can only hope.

THE CORE CURRICULUM?

It all has to do with contemporariness, relevancy, and respect for librarianship's tradition as a humanistic profession.

With the worry in the profession about information technology and librarianship's place within technology (Gorman, 2003, p. 95), I posit that we reclaim our original tenet of focusing on and serving *the people*. John E. Bushman, in his work, *Dismantling the public sphere* (2003), he comes from a Habermasian POV to discuss the downfall of librarianship as a marketing device in this information age, which is taking the profession away from its original intent, to be a pillar for democratic discourse of *the people*:

[I]t is the vision of a library democratically connected to its community (be it university, school, or town/city), engaging it in a rational dialogue about what it should be in light of democratic public purposes, and the need to provide alternatives and alternative spaces in a culture dominated information capitalism and media image and spectacle. It is the core responsibility of librarianship in a democracy (p. 180).

My question is, in this 21st century where there are more bi-cultural and multi-culturally self-identified citizens than ever before in our nation's history, are we, as librarians, living up to our core responsibility of engaging our communities in dialogue that is reflective of who those communities are, what those communities' unique information and cultural needs are, and of how those communities uniquely function? For example, are there librarians serving in Latino communities who are versed in the tradition of Quinceaneras or syncretization of Catholicism with traditional African religion? Are there librarians who have been exposed to Hip Hop culture with an understanding of how it reflects the realities of impoverished inner-city black and Latino youths? Do librarians understand graffiti from a cultural POV? Are librarians acculturated about the issues between Koreans and Japanese peoples or Koreans and African Americans? Are librarians required to have exposure and an understanding to the homeless citizenry, disabled children, the elderly, etc., with practical competencies for acknowledging such communities? These are examples of various cultural constructs that exist in many cities and towns in America on any given day.

In teaching the course, *Multicultural Sources and Services for Librarians and Educators* within the Department of Library Science at Clarion University of PA, I have found that student librarians gain a heightened sense of themselves and their purpose in librarianship, a heightened open-mindedness to other lifestyles, and are willing to be exposed to learning about America's subcultures. As an African American female who subscribes to many overlapping subcultures, teaching full classes of white student librarians (majority female,

married, rural and middle class), in classrooms and online, I have found that while at the beginning of the semester students are resistant to writing a cultural narrative to identify and explore their own multi-cultural identities, moan and groan at reading literature they would not have otherwise been aware of, nor interested to read or discuss; by the end of the semester, students felt transformed. For every one resistant student (and there's usually just 1), I receive positive feedback ten-fold. I offer a rigorous look into self as a multi-cultural entity, regardless of gender or race or other preconceived notion; I walk with my students along their path of discovery of librarianship as a cultural profession and not just an administrative or computerized profession; I do not apologize nor dilute the rigors of the way in which I teach this course (course code: LS540), because I feel it is vital, if we are to have strong, capable librarians for the 21st century, that student librarians are informed of the realities of our pluralistic society, both the positive and the negative.

GETTING ON PAR

I do not offer my pedagogy for multiculturalism in librarianship to say that we have to do it my way. After all, I am a newbie librarian educator, and librarianship is a collaborative profession. I am looking for multiculturalism in librarianship to be added to the plate of 'issues in library education.' We are missing this important piece; a piece that I passionately feel leaves us out of the equation of professions who are contemporarily aware of *and care about* the communities they serve.

What I am positing is that as a profession overly focused on technology's impact on praxis; we need to shift back to focusing *on the people*, firstly with empowering student librarians to become culturally competent professionals. We do this by initially unmasking their own sense of who they are, allowing them to redefine themselves from a cultural POV. This

unmasking is a powerful strategy for professionals gaining a balanced, unbiased, professional lens from which to service individuals from all backgrounds and locations.

In my admissions essay to the Graduation School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania (January 2006), I stated:

With such a balance of cultural assessment, librarians are empowered in the workplace to service patrons and staffers with a clearer lens. With this clearer lens, librarians are more effective in servicing diverse groups, thus enhancing access to the library on terms that are inherently connective and comprehensive.

Such practical yet profound educational experiences need to be implanted into all Master of Library Science (MLS) degree programs as a required core course as opposed to an elective. When we direct our attention to the truism that one cannot help another if one does not possess self knowledge; we recognize that as a helping profession, librarians cannot provide evolved services that are culturally literate until they are culturally empowered and literate themselves.

This position leads us back to the issue of equitable access. I am reminded of Carole Edelsky's idea of cultural activities as "communities of practice" (2006, p. 152). Edelsky informs us that participation is key in cultural activities as communities of practice. She feels that "situated learning focuses *on people*" (italics mine) participating in cultural activities with the intent of becoming members, of joining the club (p. 152). Edelsky admonishes us that in order for people to have membership in a community of practice, "they must have *access to the activity*; they have to be privy to its enactment by those who are already central members of the community of practice (p. 152).

While Edelsky is speaking primarily in the context of classroom discourse for second language learners, her advice informs librarianship quite well. For librarians are central members of their community of practice (the library). Thus, as such, if the librarian is not attuned to the culture of the service community, that service community will not feel an entry into the library in which the librarian services and invariably, manages. This is why it is vital that as a profession we centrally position multicultural praxis into library education, so that student librarians are taught cultural competencies that will serve them and their communities

well throughout their careers. Steps to such competency would include a reflective lens focusing on self assessment, immersion of self into multicultural literature and other media, and discourse on worldviews of various American and even international cultural groups, resources, and services.

For the ALA accreditation committee to require a multicultural course as part of the core curriculum for all accredited library schools would be a serious step towards placing librarianship on par with other helping professions such as social work, medicine, and law. Indeed, social workers have to be culturally competent to work with the same communities libraries serve, and doctors and lawyers are conversing about the importance of cultural competency within their respective professions (Weaver, 2004; AMSA, 2006; Voyvodic, 2006).

IS IT TOO MUCH TO ASK FOR?

I recognize that there are other pressing issues when it comes to the core curriculum for librarianship. I attended the 2006 ALISE/ALA library education forum, and was moved by Gorman's lamentation about library schools doing away with cataloguing as part of the core curriculum, and even some accredited library schools doing away with a core curriculum all together (Gorman, 2006). Once again, I have to agree with our elder statesman of librarianship. While I am of the younger generation of librarians and librarian educators, I share Gorman's frustration (2003, p. 120). I simply do not understand how student librarians can become librarians without at least a rudimentary knowledge of the history, theory and application of cataloguing, collection development, reference, research methods, foundations of the profession, as well as multiculturalism in librarianship, within which technological competencies would be addressed via the execution and submission of assignments for each

course. I am looking for librarianship to lessen its focus on the computer, and to heighten its focus on communities.

Given a typical 36 credit requirement for the M.L.S. degree, with six core courses at 3 credits each, we are talking about half of the curriculum being specifically guided by ALA standards, and the other half of the curriculum being employed at the discretion of the student's specialization track. Is this too much to ask for? Surely this doesn't impinge on academic and intellectual freedom as we know it? I worry, and I wonder. Case in point, not even the proposed "core competencies" for librarianship that are still under review, contain the words "culture," "cultural," or "multicultural." Any mention of "diverse" or "diversity" within this document speaks to merely retrieving varied resources for various groups of people (ALA, 2005). As a younger generation librarian, this lack of inclusion of cultural competency within librarianship feels disillusional and frustrating. I feel as if perhaps I am speaking out of turn.

APPENDIX A

**THE “CORNYSOOL” LIBRARIAN:
Skills and Talents of the Coolest Librarian**



Paul Wartenberg
Palm Harbor, FL



Tiffeni Fontno
Cleveland, OH



Jessamyn West
Bethel, VT



Heather Sparks
Philadelphia, PA

CORNYSOOL (adj.): The librarian or other educator who services their community with passion and commitment. He/she is able to maintain their “currency” by keeping up with societal trends while still being able to maintain their personal life-stage with grace and dignity. Their approach to librarianship belies the stereotypical image of the profession.

Characteristics of “CornyCool” Librarians*

Energetic, Upbeat
Unabashed
Cooperative
Instructor
Enthusiastic
Problem Solver
Reference Librarian
Articulate
Budget Savvy
Politically savvy
Organizer
Tech Savvy
Enjoys Youth

Intelligent
Nonjudgmental
Freedom Fighter
Ethical
Empathetic
Interior Designer
Rule Breaker
Risk Taker
Respectful
Reviewer
Statistician
Culturally Competent
Encouraging
Good Writer

Discussible
Barista
Persistent
Knows Pop Culture
Booktalker
Socially Conscious
Knows Psychology
Sensitive
Creative
Knows Literature
Research Minded
Sense of Humor
Flexibility
Merchandise
Decision Maker
Advocate for the Underserved

Approachable

The Makings of a CornyCool Librarian

1. CornyCool Librarians are excited about what they do without seeming frantic about it.
2. CornyCool Librarians are authentic in their passion for the culture of the communities they serve.
3. CornyCool Librarians carry themselves with a sense of confidence mixed with clear boundaries and an open heart. Their fortitude makes their patrons feel safe yet comfortable.
4. CornyCool Librarians have a great sense of humor and allow their patrons to express themselves fully, in contained environments.
5. CornyCool Librarians have a following of clients that respect them and revere them for their contemporariness coupled with professional wisdom and dignity.
6. CornyCool Librarians know their stuff and share information, but they are also not afraid to *not know* and are always willing to learn. They don't take themselves too seriously.
7. CornyCool Librarians will push the envelope for the great cause of literacy and equitable access. They are gutsy and not afraid to take risks. They are smart, and know *when* to take risks!
8. CornyCool Librarians are pioneers; they connect libraries and people where no connection was before.
9. CornyCool Librarians don't have jobs, they ARE their jobs. They love what they do and do it within business hours and beyond.
10. CornyCool Librarians don't mind being corny, because they know they're cool.

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*Adapted from Patrick Jones' *Connecting Young Adults and Libraries*, 2nd edition, 1998.

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