

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

This final chapter presents a brief summary of the content of the study; reaches conclusions; and makes recommendations - based on the findings from the study. Suggestions are also made for future research into areas not covered by this study.

2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the multicultural nature of South African communities is reflected in the collections and services of public libraries, specifically those of the CJLIS, Region Eight. It aimed to investigate suggestions on how these might be improved to ensure the representation of library collections and services to diverse South African communities. The study also sought to provide recommendations - based on the findings - that may be applied not only to the CJLIS, but also to other public libraries that, similarly, serve culturally diverse communities in Johannesburg and the rest of South Africa.

To achieve the above purpose, the following procedures were used:

- An international literature study was undertaken to investigate the concept of multiculturalism in public libraries. Practices of public libraries abroad regarding collections and services to culturally diverse communities were identified. International guidelines for the provision of multicultural services, including those of IFLA (1998), were also examined. These guidelines were used as the basis to complete an interview guide which

was used during the interviewing process. A local literature review was performed to obtain the views of other South African authors on multiculturalism in South African public libraries.

- Interviews with librarians of the CJLIS, Region Eight, were conducted to determine how their libraries have responded to the multicultural nature of the communities they serve in the collections and services they offer.
- Suggestions were obtained from the librarians of the CJLIS, Region Eight, on how services and materials can be improved so as to better meet the needs of the culturally diverse communities they serve.
- Finally, recommendations - based on the findings of the research - are provided that may be applied not only to the CJLIS but also to other public libraries in Johannesburg and the rest of South Africa that serve culturally diverse communities.

After introducing the research in Chapter One, Chapters Two and Three examine the concept of multiculturalism and diversity. These chapters review related literature on multicultural librarianship and the development of multiculturalism in public libraries abroad. Existing policies and guidelines on multiculturalism in public libraries are also examined.

Chapter Four provides an overview of multiculturalism and public libraries in South Africa - based on a local literature review. It includes a description of the development of public libraries in South Africa, focusing on the segregated cultural environment in which these developed.

The methodology employed in the study is described in Chapter Five. This includes the main research methods employed – namely, the literature survey; the interviews; and the statistical data collection.

The results of the data collected are presented in Chapter Six, followed by an analysis of the results pertaining to the semi-structured interview guide used to

interview the branch libraries and the heads of sections of the Central Johannesburg Public Library. The results of the interview held with the manager of the CJLIS, Region Eight are also presented.

The results of the study - based on the set objectives - are interpreted in Chapter Seven.

Based on the findings of the study, conclusions are reached and recommendations are made in this chapter. Further research possibilities are also suggested.

3. CONCLUSIONS REACHED

It has become evident from this investigation that for public libraries to be truly representative they need to provide relevant and equitable services and collections to culturally diverse communities. This is made clear in the international literature (see Chapter 2) and the guidelines reviewed (see Chapter 3). IFLA (1998:6) maintains that in order to achieve fairness and equity, "library services should be provided to all ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups at the same level and according to the same standards."

The local literature review supports this. The provisions made in general policy documents, such as the Constitution of South Africa (1996) and Act 19 of 2002, emphasise the fact that the South African nation consists of a diversity of cultural, religious and linguistic communities and that everyone has the right to use the language of their choice and to participate in the cultural life of their choice. Beukman (2000: 140) explains that according to the legislation one can conclude that there should be an equitable distribution of public resources among the cultural, religious and linguistic communities of South Africa.

It became evident from the local library and information literature review that South African library policies, including that of LIASA (2005) and those of the CJLIS, favour the principle of providing equitable materials and services for culturally diverse communities. As noted in Chapter 4, Section 4.2, this includes the *Minimum Standards for the CJLIS* (2003:3) which maintains that the library should reflect the variety of cultures represented in the community; support cultural traditions; and be provided in the languages spoken and read in the local community. This is also expressed in the *Policy for the Selection of Materials for the CJLIS* (2002) – that the library's materials should reflect the cultural diversity of the City, especially materials in the languages of the indigenous communities.

However, it is also evident from the investigation that although there are policy documents – national, international and even internal CJLIS policies - that support the importance of providing equitable services and collections to culturally diverse communities, the CJLIS, Region Eight - which operates within an extremely culturally diverse environment (see Census 2001: Appendix 2) and includes what may be considered one of the largest public libraries in South Africa (the Johannesburg Central Library) - is failing to provide these.

This confirms what has been observed by other local authors that have touched on the issue of multicultural library services in South Africa, including Schimper (1992), Mothuloe (1992), Walker (1994), Van der Merwe (1995), Mostert (1999), Ocholla (2002) and Fredericks and Mvunelo (2003).

The findings presented and interpreted from the CJLIS interviews show that although a diversity of languages is spoken in Region Eight - including 73.5% that speak indigenous languages - 85% of book stock (only statistics available from the CJLIS) is in English. The findings further reveal that although the representivity of collections for other types of cultural diverse communities could not be established according to statistics, it could be established - from the perspectives of the librarians interviewed - that if these are representative, this is

purely by chance. The collections offered by the libraries in Region Eight are not based on, or selected according to, any needs assessments or any profiles of the communities in terms of any cultural diversity facet.

Other services, besides collections, are not representative of the culturally diverse communities the CJLIS Region Eight serves - also due to these not being based on any needs assessments or statistical profiles of the communities. It is evident that the services being offered are disproportionate to the populations being served. For example, although 37% of the population of Region Eight speak isiZulu and 18.5% are English speaking, the majority of services are offered only in English.

Another conclusion that can be reached from the findings is that the libraries in Region Eight are not welcoming places for people from culturally diverse backgrounds. All promotional activities, signage and brochures are in English - making the libraries less accessible to other communities.

However, an area that is more representative - especially in linguistic terms - is that of staffing. The results of the interviews indicate that members of staff speak a variety of languages that are representative of the communities they serve (see Chapter 6, Table 6.19). This is also commented on by the manager of the CJLIS, Region Eight, who reported that the members of staff are multilingual - largely due to the natural process of transformation in LIS. As a result, certain services, such as reference services and library orientation, are offered in various community languages. It was, however, established that these are informal and are not based on any needs assessments or user profiles.

It may also be concluded that there are some valid reasons why the librarians interviewed find it difficult to offer certain collections and services that are representative of their culturally diverse communities. This finding supports the statement made by IFLA (1998: 6) which says that for a number of reasons it

might not always be possible to provide multicultural library services and collections at the same level and according to the same standards. A specific reason - previously mentioned by the Australian Guidelines (Working Group, 1982:9) - which was cited by most of the librarians from the CJLIS, is the lack of published materials in certain languages which makes it difficult to build an equitable collection. Another major reason emphasised by the librarians is the lack of financial resources to develop these services and collections. Other reasons given include:

- The absence of needs assessments and statistical profiles of the communities in terms of their cultural diversity.
- A lack of awareness regarding the provision of these services.
- Limited Skills to offer these services.
- A lack of practical internal guidelines.
- Limited support from management.
- Perceptions that only English materials are important - or that users prefer English - because of the prominence given to English in South African society.
- Libraries are only promoted in English and in the English media. Therefore, certain cultural and linguistic communities are not being reached.
- Libraries seem to only welcome English speaking users as their facilities, such as directional signage, shelf labels and orientation brochures, are 'English only friendly'.

In the recommendations that follow, suggestions are made which will assist libraries to minimise - or eliminate - difficulties. These include suggestions for overcoming some of the obstacles that may seem beyond the control of the library, such as the lack of published materials. As mentioned earlier, although recommendations are based on the findings of the interviews held with the CJLIS, Region Eight, they may be applied to other public libraries in South Africa

which are also confronted with serving culturally diverse communities. This is pointed out by Bouma (1995: 221) who suggests that although, on the one hand the conclusions and recommendations made by a study apply to the research population studied, this is a narrow interpretation. On the other hand, research is undertaken to gain an understanding of greater issues and the conclusions drawn - and recommendations made - should be applied to a broader context.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Objective Six of the study aimed to make recommendations - based on the findings - that can be applied to all libraries in South Africa that serve culturally diverse communities.

From the findings of the study, it was observed that for the CJLIS, Region Eight, and other public libraries that, similarly, cater for culturally diverse communities to become multicultural libraries in the full sense of the concept, the following areas should be addressed:

- **Needs assessments and user profiles (statistical data):** In order to develop an equitable and representative library service for the diverse communities within the jurisdiction of a library, there is the need to conduct proper needs assessments and to compile definite profiles of communities - based on the best statistical evidence available in terms of cultural diversity. As determined by the study, some statistics regarding certain cultural diversity facets (languages and nationalities) are available from Census 2001. Other facets should be identified by individual libraries by means of surveys and needs assessments. It is also recommended that the computerised membership system of public libraries should allow for the inclusion of languages other than English when identifying the home language of a user. This will assist in determining the user profile of a

library and in identifying which collections need to be developed and which services need to be offered in order to be representative.

- **Awareness:** Before any multicultural library services can be developed, it is recommended that an understanding and an awareness regarding the importance of these services needs to be created amongst library staff. This should include awareness workshops. It is suggested that the initial workshops should be offered to create awareness and to get the initiative started. The findings and recommendations of this study should be presented at these workshops to give participants an understanding of the current situation. All levels of staff should be involved in such workshops, including management, so that they are made aware of the importance of offering these services and also to gain their support.
- **Multicultural library committees:** It is recommended that multicultural committees be formed by public libraries. It would be the responsibility of the committees to initiate the development of these services. These initial responsibilities should include conducting needs assessments and compiling profiles in terms of the diversity of the population within the libraries' jurisdictions.
- **Support from management:** For the development of these services to be successful, they need to be supported and encouraged by management. Management should be made aware of the importance of these services at the initial workshops recommended, and a commitment from them should be sought.
- **Training:** For the development of multicultural library services to be successful, library staff need to obtain skills in offering such services. Based on the findings, this study suggests that this training should mainly include cultural sensitivity awareness; skills for conducting needs

assessments and compiling user profiles; selection of materials for culturally diverse communities; other services that should be offered to diverse communities, such as library orientation and story-time in community languages; and how to promote library services to culturally diverse communities.

- **Budgeting:** One of the main priorities is the need to address the lack of financial resources. A commitment from management for budgeting for these services needs to be obtained. An adequate and equitable allocation of funds for collections that are representative of the diverse communities being served also needs attention. Financial support should also be sought from government. This is pointed out by Frederick and Mvuleno (2003:139) when they refer to collections development in indigenous languages. They suggest that – in terms of funds – public libraries need all the support that they can get from government in the development of these collections.

As observed in the findings of the study though, it is possible to offer some multicultural services without financial implications - for example, the use of volunteers from the actual communities to offer some of these services, including the offering of story-times in an indigenous language; the setting up of cultural displays, events or exhibitions; and helping with the development of appropriate signage for the library in community languages. Encouraging book donations from the community is also recommended as a way of building certain multicultural collections with little financial implications.

- **A representative collection:** It is recommended that public libraries in South Africa actively build up collections that are truly representative of the communities being served. In order to achieve this, needs assessments and user profiles need to be undertaken. As noted earlier,

though, it is not always possible to expand certain collections as some languages lack published materials, especially indigenous African languages. Therefore, alternative means of collecting materials for these communities should be sought, including tracing unpublished materials from the actual communities and community organisations. The recording of oral stories and oral information from these communities and housing these in the libraries is also recommended. This is especially relevant for communities that come from a non-reading culture and/or prefer oral information. The preference for oral information by some groups is supported by Leach (2001:60) who found that there is a preference - on part of certain communities - for verbal and oral formats in the provision of information. Communities that have high levels of illiteracy would also benefit from materials in this format.

Partnerships with publishers and authors that focus on indigenous materials should also be formed.

In the case of materials for foreign linguistic communities served by the library, book donations should be requested from these communities. This is suggested because - unlike indigenous materials - published materials in these languages are available. The problem of building up collections in these languages is often due to a lack of financial resources on the part of the library.

- **Representative services:** The provision of other services to the diverse communities of the CJLIS are also recommended. These include library orientation sessions in community languages; reference and information services in community languages; story-time in community languages; and displays and events representing different cultural groups. It is also suggested that book talks by indigenous authors be encouraged. These services should be properly planned and libraries should strive to offer

them, based on equity - i.e., that these services and the frequency that they are offered are truly representative of the diverse sizes of the communities being served.

- **Community involvement:** It is advised that libraries involve the actual communities in developing and offering these services. This includes asking communities what they want; getting community members to be involved in book selection; getting volunteers from the communities to offer some of the services, such as story-times and displays; and asking the community for donations.
- **Promotional activities:** It is suggested that the libraries be promoted in diverse media, including community radio stations and print media - in community languages, besides English. This will attract users to the library who are not exposed to English media and/or who are not proficient in English.
- **A friendly (welcoming) environment for all communities:** It is recommended that the library's signage, posters and orientation brochures should reflect the cultures of the different communities living within the boundaries of a public library - in community languages and in English. This is essential in creating an environment which all users understand and in which they feel welcome.
- **The Internet and the library homepage:** It is recommended that the homepage of a library be presented in English and other official languages of South Africa. The homepage should provide links to sites of interest to these diverse cultural communities - for example, a link to online search engines that are available in indigenous languages, such as Google that is available in isiZulu.

The homepage should also provide links to international web pages in foreign languages to cater for immigrant communities present in South Africa. According to Skrzyszewski (2004:1), globalisation and new technologies, such as the Internet, offer public libraries the opportunity to provide many with access to online materials all over the world in a variety of languages and representing a variety of cultures. This can be beneficial to especially immigrant communities in South Africa which come from linguistic groups that are widely published on the Internet. Unfortunately, the Internet - as a multicultural source for indigenous African linguistic communities - does not provide the same opportunities as the presence of these languages on the Internet is minimal.

- **Guidelines:** National guidelines for the delivery of multicultural services should be developed. It is also advised that libraries develop internal multicultural guidelines. These should provide library staff with practical steps on how to develop and select materials for culturally diverse communities and how to offer other services that are representative of these communities. Guidelines on the proportion of indigenous literature in public libraries should also be compiled (Fredericks & Mvunelo, 2003: 139).

If these recommendations were applied, they would certainly improve the provision of services and collections to the culturally diverse communities served by libraries, and they would assist in making these more relevant and representative of their users.

Finally, it should also be noted that awareness and training in the broader LIS profession - in terms of multicultural library services - is also recommended. This includes creating an awareness of the importance of offering equitable collections and services to culturally diverse communities throughout the LIS profession in South Africa which could be achieved through seminars,

conferences and articles published in accredited journals. Hopefully, awareness will also be created through the dissemination of this study. The training of the broader LIS community - in terms of how to offer these services - is also advised and should include formal LIS educational programmes and continuing education.

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focuses on determining whether public libraries – specifically the CJLIS, Region Eight - are considering the multicultural nature of the communities they serve and how services and collections to these communities may be improved. To achieve this, the study considers the perspectives of librarians and some statistical data gathered from the actual library.

It is suggested that for future studies, researchers should focus on the perspectives of the actual cultural communities to determine their specific needs. This should include identifying culturally diverse groups and conducting surveys within these communities to establish - from their views and opinions - whether their needs are being met by public libraries in South Africa.

More in-depth research is also necessary in certain aspects of multicultural library services, including research in

- cross-cultural communication between users and library staff.
- the management of culturally diverse staff in public libraries.
- the development of user education programmes for culturally diverse users.
- the development of alternative collections for languages that lack published materials.
- research which has as its purpose the compilation of national guidelines for multicultural library services in South Africa.

Finally, research into the inclusion of cultural diversity issues in LIS educational programmes also needs to be considered. This should include research into the contents and outcomes of multicultural syllabi in a South African context.

6. CONCLUSION

A public library service is fundamentally a community service. Through the collections and services they provide, public libraries help to build the capacity of communities. By doing so, they make a major contribution to the cultural, social, economic, and educational development of society. However, for South African public libraries to contribute towards the development of all their communities, they have to ensure that the services and collections they offer are equitable, relevant and representative of all the culturally diverse communities they serve. A means for public libraries to achieve this is by striving to become a multicultural library in the full sense of the concept. By adopting a more inclusive multicultural approach, South African public libraries will benefit all South Africans.