

CULTURAL COMPETENCE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS

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Today's twenty-first-century library and information science (LIS) professionals are faced with the challenge of a growing population of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, many of whom are from minority and underserved populations representing the poorest segments of society with little or no experience with libraries. This article argues that although considerable efforts have been made by LIS professionals to meet the needs of minorities and underserved populations, a cultural competence framework is needed for these efforts to be successful. This article proposes a conceptual framework for developing cultural competence for LIS professionals and identifies three domains in which cultural competence is developed: cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental. The development of cultural competence within these domains is discussed, and essential elements needed to develop cultural competence within the domains are identified.

Introduction

For decades, a corps of library and information science professionals have advocated for greater cultural awareness within the profession to meet the needs of a growing population of diverse library users [1–15]. Discussions surrounding cultural issues within the library and information science (LIS) profession have focused on multiculturalism [16] and diversity [2, 17], as well as the importance of libraries and LIS professionals in appreciating and recognizing ethnicity [13] and the “multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual nature of society” [16, par. 23]. However, despite enormous efforts within the LIS profession to promote a greater understanding of culture as a key to providing adequate library services to a changing population, a lack of cultural competence continues to be evident within the profession [18].

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Cultural competence, a term used in the literature to describe the ability of professionals to understanding the needs of diverse populations [3, 19], is a highly developed ability to understand and respect cultural differences and to address issues of disparity among diverse populations competently. A considerable amount of work has yet to be done for the LIS profession to fully embrace and understand the needs of culturally diverse populations, particularly since the cultural background of many LIS professionals differs from those they serve [13, 20], and issues surrounding diversity (e.g., immigration, English only legislation) have become increasingly complex. To develop cultural competence, LIS professionals will need a clear definition of cultural competence to avoid the use of the word as a “catch phrase” with little substance. LIS professionally will need to fully understand cultural issues affecting minority and underserved populations, and how cultural issues affect perceptions of libraries. This article argues that greater understanding of cultural issues will result in increased library use. To achieve this, a framework for developing cultural competence is needed. The framework proposed in this article provides a guide to understanding critical issues, such as language differences, cultural sensitivity in planning the physical settings and properties of libraries, and challenges in creating culturally competent institutions.

The proposed cultural competence model presents a conceptual framework for moving beyond cultural incapacity at the low end of a cultural competence continuum to exceptional cultural knowledge and understanding at the high end. The proposed framework provides a foundation for developing a broad understanding of the role of culture in accomplishing the mission of the LIS profession (i.e., promotion and development of collections for underserved populations, improvement of information and referral services, and inclusion of minorities into the LIS profession). The cultural competence framework also provides a guide for addressing challenges in establishing and implementing cultural competence guidelines within the LIS profession. The challenges are similar to those faced in other professions such as health [21], counseling [22], education [23], special education [24], and psychology [25]. Thus experiences in developing and implementing cultural competence gleaned from these professions serve as a road map for public, school, and academic library professionals.

To provide a context for a cultural competence framework, the first section provides background information about library services to minority and underserved populations. This is followed by a theoretical framework for a cultural competence model and working definitions of key concepts. Then a broad review of the literature on cultural competence from fields outside of library and information science where an extensive body of

literature exists is provided. Finally, a proposed framework for cultural competence and guidelines for LIS professionals are discussed.

Background

The United States Census Bureau [26] statistics show a dramatic rise in the last twenty years in percentages of minority and other underserved populations in many regions of the United States. Latinos, for example, have increased in numbers at unprecedented rates from 500,000 in 1900 to 41 million in 2004 [27] and now comprise the largest minority population in the United States. Such increases will result in an even larger population of minorities for libraries to serve in the next several decades [28]. The term minority as used in this article, refers to African American, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic/Latino and other Spanish-speaking groups. Underserved populations include poor, homeless, individuals with disabilities, elderly, and rural populations, many of whom are also minorities [29, 13].

Of great concern within the LIS profession are the large percentages of individuals from these populations who come from the poorest sectors of society and who have little or no experience with libraries [30]. A national survey in the United States in 1991 indicated that a high percentage of minorities did not use the library at all [16, 30]. In 1990, 62 percent of Latinos and 58 percent of African Americans were not library users [30, p. 448]. Surveys such as the Gallup poll also confirmed that many members of minority populations were not library users. Their findings indicated that those who use libraries are generally white, middle class, upper income, and educated [29], mirroring the population of individuals in the LIS profession. Although use of public libraries by minorities has increased since these surveys were taken, many minority and underserved populations are still underrepresented among library users [20, 31] placing them at a distinct disadvantage in accessing information and in attaining opportunities such as those espoused by members of the profession who have proclaimed that the library is “an open door which admits the world’s poor to the universal aristocracy of intellect” [32, p. 79]. One has to project that the type and quality of service available has had an effect on library use by diverse populations.

Library Use among Diverse Populations

Inadequacy in library services to culturally diverse populations has long been recognized [10, 13–15]. As early as 1969, Arnulfo Trejo advocated for a broader interpretation of the function of libraries to meet the needs

of individuals who did not fit the background of traditional library users [14]. Although data on many minority and underserved groups has been limited, information about library use among Latinos is well documented and is therefore used throughout this article as an example of cultural considerations needed to adequately serve diverse populations [14, 8, 9]. In 1977 a dissertation on Latino communication patterns found that one-third of Latinos responding to a survey on library use were “unaware of the library” [16, p. 39]. Almost a decade later, informal neighborhood interviews with hundreds of Latinos suggested that another factor in low library use was the lack of cultural relevance of libraries [10]. Salvador Guëreña’s review of surveys, which had been conducted over a decade, highlighted findings that cultural considerations were essential in providing library services to Latinos [8]. The surveys were carried out in communities such as Richmond, San José, San Diego, and Santa Barbara [8]. However, almost ten years later the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) suggested that little had changed in library use among Latinos with 32 percent of Latinos surveyed indicating that they had not used the public library in the year before the study [16]. Salvador Guëreña and Edward Frazo attribute this to the limited understanding of cultural needs by LIS professionals. They state, “evidence indicates that the acceptance of library services and materials for Spanish speaking is still an emerging concept” [9, p. 139]. This suggests a gap in understanding the connection between library services, the kind of information found in libraries, and library use among minorities and underserved.

National Focus on Cultural Issues

Recently, the need for a broader understanding of how culture affects library use has become a national focus within the LIS professions. For example, at the 2007 American Library Association (ALA) annual conference, a program on cultural competence was sponsored by REFORMA. In an overcrowded ballroom, panelists representing public and academic libraries discussed successes and failures of the profession in becoming more culturally competent. At the 2008 ALA annual conference and again at the REFORMA National Conference III, a program on cultural competence was sponsored by the Association for Library Services to Children and the Children and Young Adult Services Committee demonstrating continued interest in cultural competence. The presentations, which focused on developing cultural competence in public libraries, used a well-known children’s program (El Día de los Niños/El Día de los Libros—Day of the Children/Day of Books) to demonstrate culturally competent libraries and the process they engage in to develop cultural competence.

These panel discussions come years after ALA’s establishment of the American Library Association’s Committee on Diversity and the creation

of the Diversity Council and Office for Diversity, which oversees resources to improve library services for minority populations [33], and illustrate the difficulty in moving from good intentions to action. As Sandra Balderama notes, even where there is a clear interest in making needed changes within libraries related to diversity issues (e.g., recruiting students from diverse populations, outreach to diverse communities, creating an organization that respects diversity), there is a gap between what is said and what is done. This gap ultimately reflects deeply rooted “attitudes, comfort zones, policies structures and past practices” that impede change [2, p. 200].

Cultural Deficiencies

How underlying cultural differences between LIS professionals and those served can best be bridged has not been clearly defined, although greater understanding of cultural issues is recognized within the LIS profession as an essential component of providing library services [2, 3, 5–10, 13–15]. Library programs have attempted to meet the needs of minority and underserved communities by providing reading programs, language classes, bilingual story hour, and bookmobiles. However, these programs have often been created for diverse populations with little or no input from cultural and ethnic groups served. Much of the literature on library programs for underserved populations illustrates a tendency to focus on meeting the externally perceived needs of minorities and underserved populations by creating programs to interest underserved groups [7, 8]. Guëreña suggests that a disposition to “explore with the ethnic minority community” would result in more viable and beneficial services and make libraries more successful [8, p. 85]. Efforts to develop services without community input may have resulted in programming that lacked cultural considerations such as those identified decades ago by Roberto Haro and Guëreña [10, 8]. However, to increase library use by minorities and underserved populations will require LIS professionals who not only are capable of building relationships with communities and who recognize environments factors that contribute or inhibit library use but who also understand their own culture, values, and biases as a starting point in working with diverse groups.

Moving toward Cultural Competence

Among the reasons cited for low library use by members of minority groups are inadequate collections, services, and staffing [8, 14, 15]. On staffing, for example, minority library users note the lack of adequate multilingual staff to assist minority patrons and the lack of library professionals who are knowledgeable and sensitive to language and cultural issues [8, 14, 15]. Melanie Thwaites explains that some users have also found library catalogs include terminology to be culturally inaccurate in describing ethnic groups [34]. This was perceived by minorities as culturally insensitive

and posed a barrier to library use. In terms of collections development, other examples include the lack of comprehensive lists of titles of cultural interest for all age groups, lack of culturally sensitive children's literature, and few culturally relevant collections for individuals with disabilities [35]. Eurocentrism, especially in science and history collections, without the inclusion of other perspectives also contributes to these problems. The absence of culturally and linguistically appropriate periodicals, music cassettes, films, videos, and other types of print and electronic material also help explain the low library use by some minority populations [8, 13]. In a study by Sherry Su and Charles Conaway with elderly Chinese immigrants, reasons provided by participants in the study for not using the library support the findings of others on low library use [36]. Specifically, language barriers and the lack of staff who are culturally in tune with community needs (e.g., having newspapers available in the language of the community) are a concern.

Continued low library use across diverse cultural and ethnic groups indicates a problem that goes beyond providing adequate collections and consumer information. Other factors may be critical to increased library use by diverse populations including knowledge of and sensitivity to cultural differences, a broad vision of the role of libraries within communities [3], inclusion of minority and underserved populations in decision-making on programs, collections, and services [13], appointment of community members to library governing boards [13], and strategic planning of geographic location of libraries [37].

Theoretical Background for Cultural Competence

Cultural psychology and sociocultural psychology perspectives provide a theoretical lens for discussing cultural competence and form the foundation for developing a cultural competence framework. Underlying assumptions of these perspectives include the notion that culture defines every aspect of human life including how humans think and create knowledge [38–40], and that knowledge is viewed as a dynamic process, which is socially constructed [41]. A sociocultural psychology perspective proposes that the way in which individuals construct knowledge varies across cultures, and that cultural groups' knowledge is an "implicit, tacit, or intuitive" understanding of concepts in the world in which they live [40, p. 143]. Cultural traditions and social practices regulate, express, and transform the way humans think and learn.

Figure 1 provides a conceptual representation of cultural psychology, as described by Richard Shweder, which highlights differences in underlying assumptions between cultural psychology and general and cross-cultural

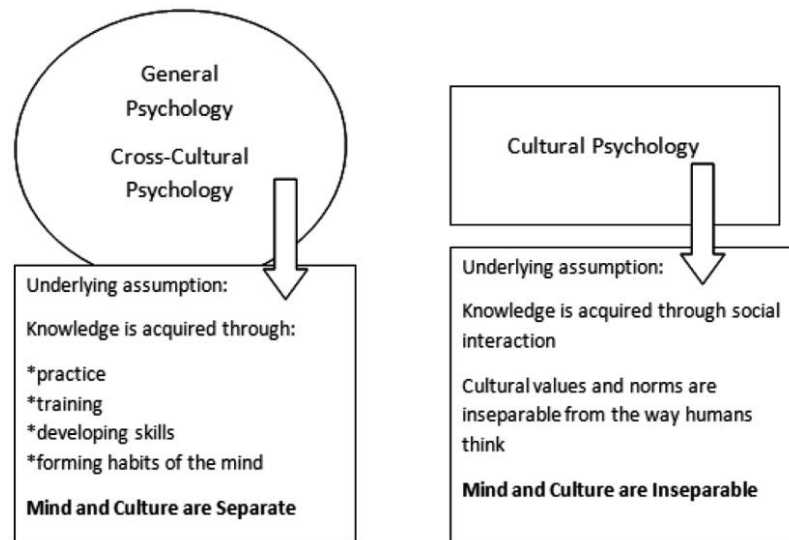


FIG. 1.—Illustration of two perspectives on how humans come to know. The illustration on the left reflects a traditional view of knowledge based on the assumption that mind and culture are separate. The illustration on the right is based on the underlying assumption that mind and culture are inseparable. This perspective is held by cultural psychologists and is the theoretical foundation for the framework for cultural competence proposed.

psychology with regard to the role of culture and its influence on how humans make meaning from the world in which they live [40]. Shweder explains that cultural psychology significantly departs from the idea that culture is superfluous to cognition. A cultural psychology perspective proposes that the way in which individuals construct knowledge is intrinsic to cognition and may vary across cultures. Cultural traditions reflect diversity in mind, self, and emotion, but thinking and culture are inseparable [40].

The importance of understanding this theoretical background in developing a cultural competence framework is that the LIS field traditionally has been grounded in objectivist notions of knowledge and behaviorist notions of learning described in figure 1 (i.e., practice, training, skills). The perspective illustrated in the left box of figure 1 differs from the perspective presented here in which the cultural competence framework is developed. A cultural competence framework for LIS broadens traditional views of how humans come to know, how they acquire information, and how they become literate. It expands traditional definitions of information, literacy, and culture. For example, information would be defined more broadly than “thing,” such as data, texts, and documents [41]. Literacy would also be expanded beyond the traditional notion of reading

and writing. The following sections discuss these two (and other) constructs more fully to exemplify how a sociocultural theoretical perspective broadens the meaning of constructs such as these.

Information is defined as anything that informs, builds, develops, and enriches thinking and human integrative thought [42, 43]. This perspective digresses from traditional views of information as objective things as discussed above. A broadened perspective accepts diverse forms of information, such as pictures, drawings, music, dance, media, text, symbols, signs, and aural tradition, which convey meaning to humans. This perspective allows for cultural differences about information and how it is developed and used. Jean Tague-Sutcliffe explains that information is “an intangible that depends on the conceptualization and the understanding of a human being” [44, p. 11]. She further explains that although information is for the most part “relatively permanent and cohesive physical representations” [44, p. 2], language-based products such as audio recordings and graphic information (i.e., maps, graphs, diagrams) are also considered information. Furthermore, “information does not really have a separate existence external to the things that contain it or to the reader or listener who perceives it. Information is association with a transaction between text and reader, between a record and a user” [44, p. 12]. Information provided in collections and records are merely tools intended to facilitate the acquisition of information by communities [44].

Information is used to construct knowledge, and is influenced by cultural considerations such as how information is created in families and communities and handed down (aural, written tradition), who has created it (government, grandfather), and the context in which information is created and used. In its broadest sense, information is treated as a message, which is cognitively processed within a context or cultural situation [45, p. 1054].

Similarly, understanding literacy within a sociocultural perspective effectively broadens its definition from traditional views of literacy. For example, literacy has historically been perceived as the ability to make meaning from printed material. The United States National Adult Literacy Survey’s definition of literacy states “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” [cited in 46, p. 91]. In an expanding world of technology and in an increasingly diverse society, this traditional definition fails to account for diverse ways of becoming and being literate including comprehending information through music, storytelling, drama, sign language, media, technology, and personal use and forms of communication such as diaries [47, 48]. These diverse literacies or multiple literacies as they are currently referred to [47–49] expand traditional notions of literacy as reading and writing to develop cognitive processes to the idea that literacy

is social construct [39] developed in multiple ways [50] for social as well as educational purposes [39]. Brian Street explains that diverse literacies are often interconnected and expand how learners make sense of the world and construct knowledge [51]. In modern society, new literacies include developing personal literacy, computer literacy, media literacy, and information literacy [48], which Douglas Kellner argues are critical to meet the challenges of a multicultural and changing society [49, p. 103].

Culture has been defined in multiple ways during the past century primarily within fields such as anthropology [52, 53], sociology [54], cultural psychology [39, 40], and cultural anthropology [55]. These generally include notions of historically transmitted customs and traditions. Jerome Bruner explains, "It is culture that provides the tools for organizing and understanding our worlds in communicable ways" [38, p. 3]. Shweder expands the notion of culture to include sociocultural contexts. He explains that culture is brought to life within a sociocultural contexts, which exist because of humans' involvement in and reaction to the world in which they live [40]. Renato Rosaldo refers to culture as activities that occur in daily life [55].

For the purposes of this article the latter two definitions of culture are used. Culture is defined as acts and activities shared by groups of people and expressed in social engagements that occur in their daily activities. For example, actions and activities are found in families and households where daily activities occur. Some cultural practices are readily recognized such as differences in food preferences (such as rice or bread or potatoes), dress (such as style of skirts for women), and language (such as speaking another language or using "sir" or "ma'am" in the south), or religion (such as marriage ceremonies). However, many cultural differences are not as readily apparent (such as required protocol, gestures, titles of respect, and space).

Competence is defined here as a highly developed abilities, understanding and knowledge. For example, intellectual freedom competencies proposed by the American Library Association refer to knowledge of court cases, history and core professional writings [56]. And ALA e-competencies refer to an understanding of various electronic functions [57]. Although some professional guidelines continue to define competence in terms of behaviors,² competence is used here to refer to abilities (rather than behaviors) developed over time, which demonstrate a high degree of knowledge and understanding.

2. See, e.g., the American Library Association's Reference and User Services Association Professional Competencies for Reference and User Services Librarians, <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/archive/protocols/referenceguide/professional.cfm>.

Literature Review

Within a number of professional fields such as health and social work, the notion of cultural competence has emerged as a means of eliminating cultural barriers that impede service to culturally diverse groups. In developing a framework for cultural competence, this article considered the literature across the fields of health, psychology, social work, education, and library and information science. A summary of the writings in these fields is discussed in the following sections.

Health

Early discussions within the health field regarding cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, ethnic relations, cross-cultural competence, intercultural competence, and multiculturalism helped to shape the meaning of cultural competence as it is used today. Eleanor Lynch and Marci Hanson suggest that these phrases can be used interchangeably with cultural competence since their meanings vary only slightly [58]. However, a broad review of the literature identifies distinct ways of defining these terms. Health professionals, who have been in the forefront of promoting cultural competence in delivery of health care services, have embraced cultural competence as a strategy to address disparities in delivering adequate health to minority groups by removing sociocultural barriers through cultural competence interventions [59]. These strategies include acknowledgement of the importance of culture in health care, expansion of cultural knowledge by health care professionals, and adaptation of health care service to meet the needs of culturally diverse groups [59–61]. Culturally relevant health care services mitigate extreme cultural differences among health care providers and clients, and early evidence exists to support cultural competence as a factor in improved medical practices [60]. Joseph Betancourt and colleagues explain that cultural competence is essential in the health profession inasmuch as the influence of cultural beliefs and behaviors of patients from diverse population must be understood if health care delivery systems, clinical decision making, and interventions are to be effective [61]. As Marianne Jeffreys explains, cultural competence describes care that is customized to fit with the client's cultural values, beliefs, traditions, practices, and lifestyle [21, xiii].

Psychology

Another field that has focused on cultural competence is psychology. A review of some psychological terms may be helpful in understanding how cultural competence is defined by the profession. The American Psychological Association defines cultural awareness in professional guidelines through a series of commonly used terms including culture, race, ethnicity,

multiculturalism, and diversity. As defined in the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, *culture* is belief systems and value orientations that influence customs, norms, practices, and social institutions [62]. *Race* is described as a social construct, that is, “socially constructed rather than biologically determined” [62, p. 380]. *Ethnicity* is defined as the practices and mores of individuals within a group that provide a sense of belonging and connectedness through a culture or origin.³ *Multiculturalism* and *diversity* are defined as “aspects of identity stemming from gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or age” [62, p. 380].

The APA guidelines highlight the importance of multicultural sensitivity and diversity in the education of psychologists and in research on cultural issues. These guidelines for professionals in the field of psychology focus on applying culturally appropriate skills to practice, and supporting culturally informed policies. Ann Marie Yali and Tracey Revenson argue that contexts surrounding multicultural situations hold the key to greater cultural competence. They propose using the term context competency rather than cultural competency as a way of expanding health psychologists’ view of culture [63]. However, the term context suggests environmental factors and situations external to individuals, which is only one aspect of cultural competence discussed here (see the discussion of Environmental Domain below).

Social Work

Terry Cross and colleagues have had a major influence in promoting cultural competence in the field of social work. They have proposed a definition of cultural competence for child social services which has been used broadly since 1989. It defines *cultural competence* as a “set of congruent behaviors” for working effectively in cross-cultural situations [19, p. 13]. This definition and a model for cultural competence for health professionals proposed by Cross and his colleagues continue to be used as a measure of cultural competence among health service providers today. The model proposed by Cross and others, which has helped shape cultural competence among social workers, identifies a continuum of cultural competence, and describes a range of possibilities by which individuals demonstrate knowledge and acceptance of cultural differences. Figure 2 provides a graphic representation adapted from the work of Cross and colleagues of the continuum and building blocks for developing a cultural competence model such as the one presented in this article. At the low end of the continuum are *cultural incapacity* (inability to becoming culturally competent) and *cultural blindness* (stated as “I don’t see differences.

3. It should be noted that a more complete definition of ethnicity includes an individuals’ national or geographic place of origin or ancestral place of origin.

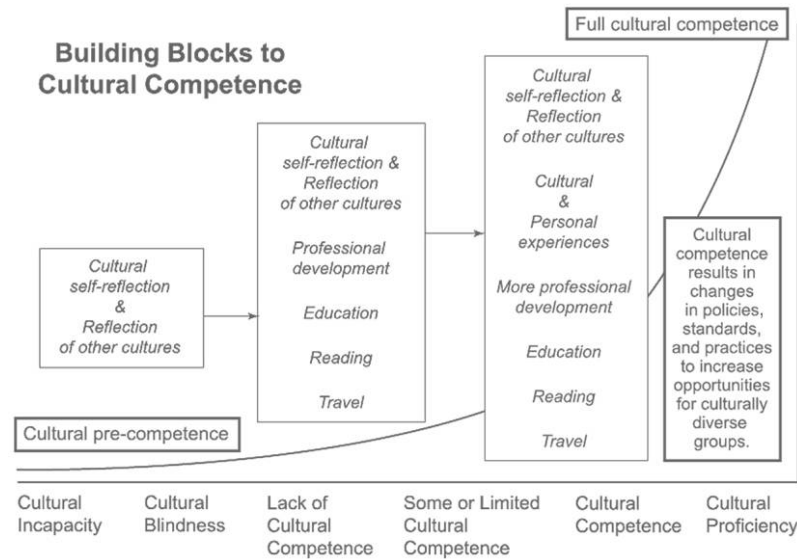


FIG. 2.—“Building Blocks to Cultural Competence” reflects various stages in the process of becoming culturally competent. The illustration is adapted from the continuum proposed by Terry L. Cross, Barbara J. Bazron, Karl W. Dennis, and Mareasa R. Isaacs [19]. The range of possibilities of cultural competence is identified at the bottom of the figure (x-axis). The y-axis illustrates “depth” or “extent” to which cultural competence is evident. The continuum begins with cultural incapacity and moves through cultural blindness, lack of cultural competence, limited or some cultural competence, full cultural competence, and cultural proficiency. *Cultural incapacity* refers to individuals who have no desire to become culturally competent. *Cultural blindness* refers to individuals who state “I don’t see differences. Everyone is the same to me.” *Lack of cultural competence* refers to those who are capable of learning about their culture or the culture of others but have not done so. *Some or limited cultural competence* refers to those who are beginning to acquire cultural competence. At the high end are individuals who are culturally competent and demonstrate a high level of expertise in understanding and respecting cultural issues. Culturally proficient individuals are individuals who are bicultural or who demonstrate excellent knowledge of cultures. The first three upright boxes illustrate strategies used to develop cultural competence. The far right box within the figure represents the result of cultural competence at an institutional level, which includes changed policies, standards, practices, and increased opportunities for culturally diverse groups.

Everyone is the same to me.”). At the high end are *cultural competence* and *cultural proficiency*, which refer to individuals who demonstrate a high degree of expertise in understanding and respecting cultural issues. *Proficiency* is defined as exceptional abilities in dealing with diverse cultures. Figure 2 also illustrates strategies, which this author proposes will result in a shift from one end of the continuum to the other. These strategies include self-reflection, professional development, and personal experiences with other cultures (see the section on Personal and Cultural Experiences below).

Education and reading are also effective in developing cultural competence.

The work of Josepha Campinha-Bacote has also contributed greatly to cultural competence. She suggests that cultural competence is a process of becoming rather than being and that cultural competence should be possible to develop as greater knowledge of culture is acquired over time [64]. Others in the field of social work who have influenced cultural competence practice among social workers include Dorman Lum, who provides a comprehensive framework for cultural competence, and Rowena Fong and Sharlene Furuto, to name a few [65, 66].

Education

Educator Jerome Bruner's statement that "education is not an island, but part of the continent of culture" has had important implications for educators, including librarians in educational settings working with multicultural and multilingual students [38, p. 11]. For example, by valuing cultural differences, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are transformed into more democratic educational practices. James Banks suggests that transformation is made possible through greater collaboration among educators to ensure that all aspect of minority students' needs are met [23]. Patricia Montiel-Overall also considers collaborative efforts in developing cultural competence for school teachers and librarians [67]. Elise Trumbull and María Pacheco propose a model to develop cultural competence for teachers through teacher preparation and professional development. Their model incorporates culture, language, and ethnicity [68], and as the authors explain, "cultural competence entails recognizing differences among students and families from different cultural groups, responding to those differences positively, and being able to interact effectively in a range of cultural environments" [68, p. 3]. Building on the work of these authors, examples for LIS professionals are presented in table 1. The examples describe ways in which individuals develop higher levels of cultural competence through self-reflection (inward development), which in turn affect institutional change (outward development). Examples on table 1 reflect an asset model [27] for developing culture, language, and ethnicity. Under language, for example, culturally competent LIS professionals would regard the ability to speak a second language as an asset that demonstrates greater cognitive ability [69] rather than a deficit, and would strive to further develop it as a foundation to improve learning.

Library and Information Science

In library and information science (LIS) literature, the term cultural competence is not commonly used except within library health services [5, 70–72]. A mention of cultural competence by Debbie Abilock occurs in

TABLE 1
THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE PROFESSIONALS IN THE AREAS OF CULTURE,
LANGUAGE, AND ETHNICITY (Adapted from Trumbull and Pacheco [68])

Development of Cultural Competence	Culture	Language	Ethnicity
Inward perspective	Developing cultural awareness of self and of others	Becoming knowledgeable about linguistic needs of communities served	Developing an understanding of distinct ethnic groups
	Developing greater self-awareness and knowledge through increased self-reflection of one's own culture and the culture of others	Building an understanding and knowledge of language proficiency and literacy of underserved native English speakers, and knowledge of how to address linguistic needs of English language learners (ELLs)	Developing greater self-awareness and knowledge through increased self-reflection of one's own ethnicity and the ethnicity of others
Outward perspective	Creating culturally relevant library environments, providing culturally relevant library collections, through professional and staff development	Building first language (L1) literacy to assist clients maintain L1 while offering second language (L2) literacy instruction for ELLs	Recognizing and encouraging institutional cultural sensitivity through policies, rules, and regulations
	Regular interaction and collaboration with community members ensuring culturally appropriate services, programming, policies, rules, and regulations are reflected in the library	Regular interaction and collaboration with community members to ensure multilingual and multiliteracies found within the community are also found in library programming and services	Regular interaction and collaboration with community members to institutionalize equitable policies, rules, and regulations for library users of all ethnicities

NOTE.—The upper portion of the table (Inward perspective) represents levels of development within the individual in becoming culturally competent. The lower portion of the table represents levels of development at the institutional level. Together, the cells reflect the development of cultural competence in the areas of culture, language, and ethnicity.

the context of school librarianship [73]. She suggests cultural competence is developed through interaction among different cultural groups and is deeply grounded in interpersonal skills. Although much of the LIS literature on cultural competence is limited to discussions of multiculturalism, diversity, and cultural sensitivity [74–77], a panel discussion of cultural competence at a recent annual professional conference of the American Library Association illustrates the growing awareness of its importance of cultural competence for LIS professionals. The panels agreed that cultural competence needed to be an integral part of service delivery, workforce equity, and leadership development. They explained that in effective communication knowledge of others' culture is critical in planning and implementing LIS services. They also agreed that the profession needed a clear definition of cultural competence and guidelines for developing cultural competence [78].

Commonalities

Across disciplines, several common threads emerge from the literature. First, discussions of cultural competence consistently refer to essential natural abilities of empathy, respect, understanding, patience, and nonjudgmental attitudes required for cultural competence to reach cultural proficiency [19, 64–66, 77–79]. These abilities can be further developed and finely tuned through personal experience and contact with culturally diverse groups, and through extended personal and professional interaction. They can also be developed through education, training, and reading. Second, it is clear that developing cultural competence is seen as an important ability needed by professionals across fields to improve services to diverse cultural groups, and to improve interpersonal relationships among diverse groups. Finally, the literature discusses learned abilities developed over time through self awareness, interaction, and education [19, 53, 58, 65, 71]. The remainder of this article focuses on a conceptual model of cultural competence, which incorporates these aspects into a framework for LIS professionals.

Defining Cultural Competence for LIS

Drawing on definitions of cultural competence from other fields, the following definition of cultural competence for LIS professionals is used for the purposes of this article. This definition emphasizes construction of meaning and abilities rather than behaviors in keeping with the theoretical framework discussed previously:

Cultural competence is the ability to recognize the significance of culture in one's own life and in the lives of others; and to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse

linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work, and institutions in order to enhance the lives of both those being served by the library profession and those engaged in service.

Cultural Competence: A Conceptual Framework for LIS Professionals

A primary goal in proposing a framework of cultural competence for the LIS profession is to improve services to and increase library use by diverse groups. Having culturally competent LIS professionals who know how to effectively integrate social, cultural, and linguistic information into LIS services is essential to reaching this goal. The cultural competence framework proposed here considers current efforts within the LIS profession and extends these efforts by adding components of cultural competence models developed in other fields. An underlying assumption of the proposed framework is that understanding cultural differences and learning to appreciate them is in part a “learning process” that involves cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental contexts of human life [21].

The model represented in figure 3 illustrates three domains (cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental) in which cultural competence abilities develop. Within each domain key components contribute to increased cultural competence. In the cognitive domain, cultural self-awareness and cultural knowledge are developed. In the interpersonal domain, cultural appreciation and an ethic of caring are developed. In the environmental domain, language, conditions, space, policies, rules and regulations are considered. The backdrop for the framework is the culture of communities, which provides a rich source of information about values, customs, daily practices, religion, and other cultural aspects of a community. Luis Moll and Norma González refer to this source of information about the wealth of knowledge already available within communities as “funds of knowledge” [69]. Understanding and appreciating the culture of communities is at the heart of developing cultural competence. After a brief introduction describing the process involved in developing cultural competence, key components within each domain are discussed.

Cultural Competence: A Process

Developing cultural competence is a dialectical process in which individuals examine their own mental representation of the world along with the mental representations of others. Adjustments in preconceptions about others’ culture results in a readjustment of the place of culture in society. Cultural competence is the ability to make the adjustment and to participate in making culture an important part of the ethos of an organization.

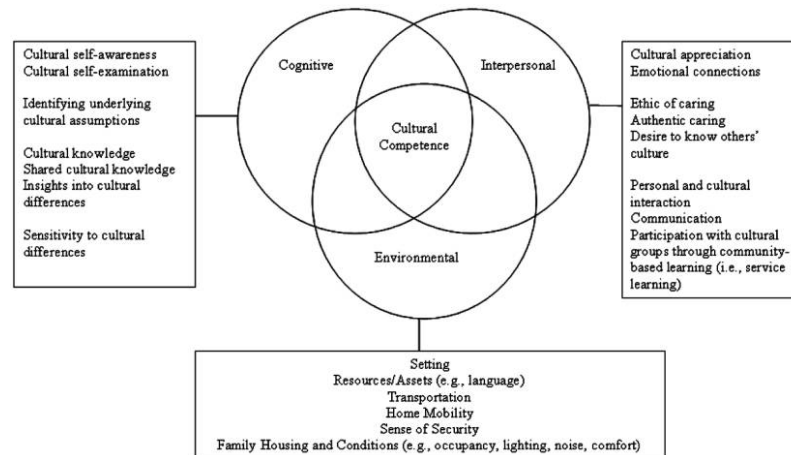


FIG. 3.—The graphic illustration depicts a cultural competence model for LIS professionals, which draws heavily on cultural competence models identified from an extensive review of the literature (e.g., Campinha-Bacote [80]). The cultural competence model depicted for LIS professionals identifies three critical domains of cultural competence necessary to fully understand and appreciate diverse cultural groups and underserved populations. These domains are cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental. The cognitive domain refers to individual perceptions of one's own culture and the culture of others. The cognitive domain includes self-examination, identification of underlying cultural assumptions, and cultural knowledge. Through cultural knowledge, individuals learn about such basic differences as required social protocol. Interpersonal domain includes cultural appreciation and caring about diverse and underserved populations. This domain also defines interpersonal relationships developed through interaction and communication, and through matching practices with expressed values. The environmental domain refers to numerous environmental conditions that must be understood in order to be culturally competent. The environmental domain includes knowledge of community resources and assets such as the languages and dialects of the community. The environmental domain also involves knowing about how such things as transportation, home mobility, safety issues, and housing conditions (e.g., occupancy, lighting, noise, and comfort) affect the community (e.g., development of literacy). The three overlapping circles indicate that the domains are not separate components of cultural competence. LIS professionals who are culturally competent have the capacity to understand the full range of possibilities within each domain. Cultural competence in each domain may range across a continuum such as the one presented in fig. 2.

The effectiveness of this process is determined by the level of open discussion, participation, and disagreement in arriving at consensus about how to develop cultural competence among professionals and how to infuse culture into practices within the institution. The cultural background of LIS professionals (e.g., cultural and ethnic groups, language, socioeconomic status, the environment) is an important consideration in the process inasmuch as members of minority groups within the ranks may be able to help bridge communication, interpersonal, and cultural gaps. The following sections will examine aspects of the process within three do-

mains—cognitive, interpersonal, and environmental—as they relate to the LIS profession. It should be noted that although the domains are treated as separate entities, there is considerable overlap among them.

Cognitive domain.—The cognitive domain refers to the way individuals' actions demonstrate how they make meaning, think, reflect, and feel emotionally about the world around them [38]. Two essential components in the process of developing cultural competence identified in the literature, which fit into the cultural domain, are cultural self-awareness and building cultural knowledge [58, 64–66].

1. *Cultural self-awareness.* Knowledge of the culture of self is at the heart of understanding others and the surrounding world, and is seen as a starting point in becoming culturally competent [19, 24, 28, 64, 68, 71]. Through cultural self-awareness, individuals come to know about themselves as well as others. The process begins with self-examination of cultural background, ethnic roots, family customs and behaviors to become aware of ways that culture has shaped one's own life. The purpose of cultural self-awareness is to begin to examine unconscious cultural values, norms and ideas. Anthropologist Roger Keesing states "Becoming conscious of, and analytic about, our own cultural glasses is a painful business. . . . With some mental effort we can begin to become conscious of the codes that normally lie hidden beneath our everyday [lives]" [52, p. 69]. Researchers such as Lynch have found that until members of a community are able to examine their own culture and unexamined cultural assumptions, understanding and appreciating the culture of others within minority and underserved communities is difficult [58].

Through knowledge of self, individuals become aware of underlying cultural assumptions in their background that may not have previously been examined. As Jerry Diller explains, cultural backgrounds examined or unexamined are often seen as "reality itself" [28, p. 15]. Cultural self-awareness enables individuals to identify actions and beliefs within their own culture that may prevent effective dialogue with culturally different individuals and may inhibit interaction with them. Self-awareness and self-reflection broaden perspectives about diverse cultures allowing for greater appreciation and acceptance of other cultures [24, 58]. Having a single perspective about group differences limits the extent to which cultural practices and activities (e.g., marriage, bar mitzvah) can be understood. It is equivalent to "looking through the one-way mirror; everything we see is from our own perspective" [58, p. 48]. Alternatively, thinking through cultures allows humans to recognize that processes such as self-maintenance, learning, reasoning, and emotional feelings vary across cultures [39].

Although the LIS profession widely supports cultural diversity and the

need to provide services to diverse groups, becoming aware of personal cultural perspectives has not been widely prescribed nor has it been seen as a necessary prerequisite to understanding others. Self-reflection would provide an opportunity for examination of cultural and ethnic differences and to consider the effect of dissimilarities between a profession and the population it serves.

2. *Building cultural knowledge.* Building knowledge of diverse cultures occurs in multiple ways through formal and informal shared knowledge. Ways of informally building shared knowledge include shared personal experiences with community members (see right side of fig. 1). Shared knowledge with community members requires developing trusting relationships that are “reestablished or confirmed with each exchange” and lead to mutual trust [81]. It also requires having confidants who are able to provide insights into cultural differences between community members and LIS professionals. Confidants may include frequent library users as well as library personnel who live in the community and can provide insights into cultural differences, protocol for socializing, appropriate actions and practices at meetings or gatherings. Lynch and Hanson suggest that knowledge of socializing customs may be a prerequisite for all activities particularly if personal encounters are to be successful [58]. This requires sensitivity about how to bring community members together for discussion and the types of customs considered important such as incorporating food and beverage into meetings. Shared knowledge about family practices, beliefs, and values of minority and underserved populations occurs through information obtained formally or informally from community members themselves [58, 60, 82]. Confidants are particularly important in providing information about cultural norms such as who is responsible for making family decisions (mother, father, grandmother) and who are respected community leaders. Such information is helpful for LIS professionals responsible for planning services for diverse communities.

Cultural knowledge is also developed through personal encounters with members from diverse groups [64]. These encounters develop the ability to communicate effectively across cultures even when different languages are spoken. As Haro discussed over twenty-five years ago, “The most important step is the actual contact with people” [10, p. 23]. Individuals who engage in personal encounters are in a position to observe cultural differences such as forms of greeting, working relationships, pace of work, forms of nonverbal communication, organizational structure [83], and other information that may help clarify cultural differences and highlight cultural similarities. Through cross-cultural communication individuals become more aware of cultural differences in eye contact, facial expressions, proximity and touching, body language, gestures, and language variations (e.g., nonstandard English) [58].

Building cultural knowledge also occurs in more formal settings such as planned instruction for LIS professionals. Included in planned instruction are professional development workshops and seminars, colloquia for staff and LIS professionals, and course development for students enrolled in LIS degree programs [5]. These formal ways of developing knowledge of diverse cultures incorporate historical, demographic, linguistic, and social information. However, even within formal settings, building cultural knowledge requires first hand experience with communities. Examples of successful methods of working with communities during academic study are service learning, internships, and volunteerism.

Many elements of building cultural knowledge have already been undertaken by LIS professionals. However, within an LIS cultural competence framework, it is essential to create opportunities for communication with diverse populations *within* the communities where they live, work, and play to fully understand resources within communities that are available [69].

Interpersonal domain.—The interpersonal domain shapes the way humans behave toward one another and communicate within social contexts. “Communicating and interacting with culturally different others is psychologically intense” and requires understanding on multiple levels [83, p. 1]. Three elements of this domain include cultural appreciation [84], an ethic of caring [85], and personal and cultural interaction [64, 79, 80, 86].

1. *Building cultural appreciation.* Appreciation has been defined as “acknowledging the value and meaning of something—an event, a person, a behavior, an object—and feeling a positive emotional connection to it” [84, p. 81]. In a study to develop a measure of appreciation, Adler identified aspects of appreciation including actions used to show thanks, approval or admiration of someone or something. For the purposes of discussing cultural competence, this definition of appreciation is expanded here to include appreciation of someone’s culture. Cultural appreciation is acknowledgement and approval of the cultural value and meaning of people, events, actions and objects that make up their lives, and is important in understanding how individuals experience happiness [84]. Cultural appreciation of minority and underserved cultures includes providing greater opportunities for minority groups to be heard and acknowledged, and to be given opportunities to share information about cultural values. Thomas Beckman and Jayawant Mandrekar’s study supports these notions by identifying several specific interpersonal abilities including being listened to without being interrupted and feeling comfortable asking questions [87]. Cultural appreciation is also demonstrated by providing opportunities for minorities and underserved populations to express ideas and opinions about perceived needs for information and other services provided by libraries, and to convey expectations for themselves and their families.

Finally, appreciation of culturally diverse learning styles and relying on cultural experiences to build knowledge are ways of demonstrating cultural appreciation [88].

Expanding current LIS practices to provide opportunities for diverse and underserved library users to contribute to discussions about cultural, linguistic, and other needs (different hours of service, bookmobiles) is the essence of cultural appreciation. This element of a cultural competence framework has the potential to shift the focus of LIS services from multicultural collections and reference services designed by library staff for underserved populations, to library services designed with members of the community served. Such programs would address specific community needs such as language instruction (i.e., English as a second language), improved computer access and technical support, and permanent outreach services (i.e., community bookmobiles).

2. *An ethic of caring.* Closely related to appreciation of other cultures is what Campinha-Bacote identifies as “desire”, a key component of cultural competence. She describes desire as “genuine caring” which is “the motivation . . . to ‘want to’ engage in the process of cultural competence” (not ‘have to’) [86, p. 205]. Building on this concept, a framework of cultural competence for LIS professionals incorporates the notion of *caring* as a construct. The theory of caring introduced by Nel Noddings in the early 1980s provides theoretical support for including caring as a key component of cultural competence. According to the theory, caring is central to building relationships and is expressed in actions such as listening, “humor or excitement of the message being spoken,” gentleness, and an attitude of reciprocity [85, p. 59]. Reciprocity may be as simple as positive responses by recipients of caring practices or actions which bring about a delightful feeling by those engaged in the caring act. The theory also distinguishes authentic caring (or caring for individuals) from “aesthetical caring” (caring about ideas and things) to reject the notion of universal caring, which becomes an abstract commitment (I care about everyone) in contrast to actual involvement in caring relationships [85, p. 18].

The ethic of caring is the transforming element of a cultural competence model for LIS professionals. The transformation is from obligatory caring to authentic caring which results in intrinsic personal satisfaction and motivation. Understanding cultural differences may lower barriers that previously prevented receptiveness of diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus LIS professional guidelines to provide equal services regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender preference is transformed from a duty (I must comply with professional guidelines to provide services) to a more natural sentiment of caring (I want to provide service) because of self-reflection about the inherent goodness of providing the service. The difference between “must comply” and “I want to comply” is a transformation

that is more likely to occur among individuals who are culturally competent.

3. *Personal and cultural interaction.* Cultural competence is also developed through personal and cultural encounters between LIS professionals and minority and underserved populations. Through a wide range of interactions within and beyond library settings a deeper sense of understanding of patrons from diverse backgrounds is developed.

Interactions such as face-to-face encounters provide opportunities to become familiar with sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal communication, which may differ from familiar communication styles [65]. Cultural differences in communication may also affect online interactions providing challenges as well as opportunities to develop greater cultural understanding. For example, online communication may require greater sensitivity to sociocultural experiences and linguistic differences in communication (e.g., need for details in online messages) [89].

Moll and González discuss cultural interaction within education which is highly applicable to the LIS field. Their work in communities to identify funds of knowledge within families and communities is a model that could be followed by LIS professionals to (1) build knowledge of minority and underserved populations, (2) increase use of library services, (3) improve programming, and (4) expand access to information [69].

4. *Reflecting on values.* Considerable overlap exists between reflecting on values in the interpersonal domain and cultural self-awareness in the cognitive domain. Both require making the connection between “behaviors, beliefs, and customs” with perceived favorable (or unfavorable) practices within a community [90, p. 53]. Awareness leads to greater clarity in identifying and establishing institutional values. John Elliott suggests that establishing and/or assessing institutional values can be addressed by seeking answers to questions such as:

- what institutional values are currently in place;
- whether espoused values and practices within the institution are consistent;
- if espoused values include knowledge and appreciation of the culture of the communities associated with the institution;
- how to improve institutional values; and
- whether standards are in place to determine adequate practices within the institution (i.e., library) [91].

Identifying values is a dynamic process that encourages diverse expression among individuals and allows for “creative conflict and tension between individuals over how values may be realized in practice” [91, p. 421]. Elliott also suggests that institutions must be able to recognize and evaluate gaps between espoused values and practiced values by gathering evidence

of values that are actually apparent within an institution and those that are theoretical. This evidence gathering opens up opportunities for reflection of discrepancies between theory and practice and for consideration of issues that confront institutions and hinder examination of values reflected by the institution and those who work in it [91].

The importance of reflecting on values for LIS professionals is to ensure that practices are aligned with expressed values and that words are put into action. LIS mission statements that state diverse and underserved populations are valued must demonstrate how these populations are valued (e.g., diversity is reflected in personnel in the workplace, underserved populations are served through outreach services) and make appropriate changes to practices where gaps exist.

Environmental domain.—The environmental domain refers to elements of surroundings, conditions, and setting in which people live. Burke explains that the environment of libraries include a functional aspect (e.g., a place for collections and services) as well as a social space in which part of the neighborhood community is extended [37]. These include places where activities occur, housing, transportation, home mobility, and sense of security. It also refers to information needs and how these needs are met [92]. Environmental issues affect every aspect of the lives and activities of minority and underserved populations, and LIS professionals must be culturally competent to mitigate, whenever possible, environmental barriers to library use. For example, culturally competent LIS professionals would carry out community-based research of the kind described by Moll and González to identify assets and to learn about family housing conditions such as space, lighting, and noise that may affect a family's interest in accessing library materials [69]. Information about the extent to which community members are able to engage in leisure activities, and child care issues may also affect library use. Transportation would also be considered along with security in traveling to and from the library when establishing hours of service and program times for library programs. Cultural competence also involves understanding that "Libraries are not stand-alone entities" [37, p. 423].

Another aspect of the environmental domain involves understanding the information environment. LIS professionals need to know how minority and underserved populations search for information, use it, share it, hold it, and even ignore it [67]. It is also important to know the extent to which communities has access to information through books, computers, newspapers, and other media.

Another aspect of the environmental domain is language. For example, languages and dialects spoken in communities affect how literacy is developed and whether language becomes a barrier to participation in society

(e.g., voting). Language also affects how successfully information needs of speakers are met [92]. Culturally competent LIS professionals have a broad understanding of first and second language acquisition that extends beyond political and emotional feelings about first language over second language use. Knowledge of language (which does not require an ability to speak that language) also involves having accurate information about the rights of second language speakers. LIS professionals who are able to bridge an understanding of language differences are culturally competent. These bridges can be built through signage, interpreters, translators, using volunteers identified through asset mapping of the community to determine the linguistic resources available, and by learning the language of the community, even at the most basic level. However, culturally competent librarians do not need to be able to be speakers of the languages of the individuals they serve.

An additional consideration that falls into the environmental domain is the atmosphere of the library itself. Included is the way staff members greet people who come into the library, and the physical properties of the library itself (its size, organization, décor, and appearance). Haro noted in his study that the lack of use of libraries in some communities was often due to a lack of understanding about how libraries operated and what their purpose was, rather than a lack of interest [10]. By creating a place that is culturally sensitive, comfortable, familiar, and relevant, culturally competent LIS professionals can address the concerns expressed by underserved library users such as those interviewed by Haro [10].

The cultural competence framework acknowledges environment as an important factor in increasing library use among culturally diverse groups. It requires a commitment from individuals at a personal level as well as from an institutional level to broaden cultural perspectives in order to attract library users from culturally diverse populations. The following quote succinctly summarizes the environmental domain: "Libraries are more than their internal working environments. They constitute a presence in society that contributes something to the community beyond access to information and materials. The library is interwoven into the fabric of society as a social institution, an ideal, and a physical space" [37, p. 423].

Implications and Conclusion

Based on experiences in other fields, implementation of cultural competence guidelines or adoption of a cultural competence model for LIS professionals will require several key components: broad discussion within the LIS field, and a clear definition of cultural competence for the LIS profession, and knowledge of how cultural competence is best developed

within different areas of the profession (e.g., academic, school and public libraries). Most importantly, cultural competence begins with the recognition that everyone has a culture, and that the current culture represented in many libraries is the culture of mainstream communities, even when those libraries are located in areas that are distinctly different from mainstream communities.

This article has attempted to do three things:

- summarize current understanding of cultural competence,
- fill in the gap in the literature on this topic in library and information science, and
- establish a basis for moving forward the discussion of cultural competence within the LIS profession.

There is a critical need to develop cultural competence among LIS professionals to address social, linguistic, and academic needs of culturally diverse individuals who represent a population most in need of library services. This article has sought to outline necessary elements of cultural competence by identifying ways to improve current LIS services and to expand current efforts and create culturally competent LIS professionals. Efforts to develop cultural competence within the LIS professions would undoubtedly provide more equitable access to information to minority and underserved populations, and would increase library use among diverse populations. Inclusion of information about the culture of diverse communities would enhance practices and makes libraries more relevant to more library users. Professional guidelines have been established in other professions (social workers, psychologists, school counselors, and others) to ensure a communal understanding of the importance of considering cultural backgrounds of those served. As Banks and others suggest, professional guidelines ensure that cultural competence becomes deeply embedded within institutions [23, 64, 84, 93]. Nancy Press and Mary Diggins-Hobson have stated: "Many fields have codified cultural competence. It may be time for librarianship to adopt a similar code" [72, p. 407].

Finally, as LIS professionals move toward adoption of cultural competence guidelines, it is important to recognize the many facets of cultural competence. Cultural competence means becoming knowledgeable about diverse cultures and using this information in ways that lead to greater understanding of diverse populations and thereby increasing library use; it means having the ability to create and maintain a more equitable environment for library users; and it means having the ability to establish and maintain relationships among diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Developing cultural competence for LIS professionals in its fullest sense means developing the ability to seamlessly weave culture into the fiber of all LIS endeavors in order to provide service that will attract library users from a

wider range of cultures and backgrounds currently underrepresented in library institutions. Cultural competence does not end with knowledge about diverse cultures. It begins a lifelong process of learning about cultural differences to effectively reach those who would benefit the most from library services. Developing cultural competence within the LIS field may ensure that the profession is truly able to develop the strength discussed by Thomas when he most eloquently stated: "The goal of managing diversity is to develop our capacity to accept, incorporate, and empower the diverse human talents of the most diverse nation on earth. It's our reality. We need to make it our strength" [94, p. 114].

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