

Multicultural Collection The Rationale

cated to me that, at least at my school, there is very little tolerance of, respect for, or appreciation of the cultural diversity that enriches our community.

It is quite easy to find obvious, compelling arguments for having a strong multi-cultural collection in our school libraries. Firstly, it helps remove the feeling of marginalization among students of various cultures by recognizing the contributions of their compatriots to the Canadian mosaic. Secondly, it provides students of all cultures with the opportunity to broaden their perspectives on the various peoples who influence Canada's cultural makeup. Thirdly, if we keep in mind that multiculturalism extends to recognizing cultural diversity among the different regions of Canada, it enables students to achieve a better understanding of their country, which has a unifying effect. I have found that these arguments work very well in schools where the student population is made up of many cultures. They have not worked well in my school. I don't think this is because students are insensitive to and lack respect for different cultures, but because they have so little exposure to diversity either at school or in their community. Also disturbing to me were the conversations I have had with parents, which reflected no interest on their part in promoting cultural diversity because they envisioned their children living in homogenous communities all their lives.

I decided that developing and showcasing a collection of multicultural fiction would be a priority for me during this school year. This will coin-

cide with an initiative through TAP to promote cultural tolerance and respect as well as a much more vigorous and visible celebration of Black History Month. We will also be using the month of February as an opportunity to celebrate other cultures. Although my library already possesses a large number of novels that represent many different cultures, they are buried in the regular fiction collection. We have pulled these books and ordered a large number of new multicultural fiction books. We have also purchased a new book spinner to display these titles prominently and we will be encouraging students and staff to read these books. We are also working on a number of initiatives to encourage integration of these novels into various segments of the curriculum.

As you can see, this is the beginning of a work in progress. I have found a wonderful multicultural toolkit on-line, sponsored by Library and Archives Canada. The address is www.collectionscanada.ca/multicultural/r25-300-e.html. It includes links to sites on developing multicultural collections, lists of jobbers, vendors and distributors of other language materials in Canada, a template for developing multicultural collections and much, much more.

As teacher-librarians, we have a responsibility to recognize and meet the needs of all of our students. It would be wonderful if teacher-librarians could share with *The Teaching Librarian* what they have done with respect to building multicultural collections in their libraries. ■