

MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY

We had an incredible response to our request for 'multiculturalism and diversity' articles for this issue of *inCite*. Thanks go to libraries, librarians, and information professionals from all over the country who wrote to tell us of the amazing programs, advances, and initiatives they and their workplace have instituted to make multiculturalism work. In order to best display the bumper crop of articles we received, we've organised them into sections: public/community initiatives, technology, higher education, story times, and a stand-alone article on the work at Milpera State High School. We hope you enjoy this feature section.

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Multiculturalism and the first Australians

Multicultural policies in Australia have been created as a way of generating national cohesion among immigrant groups and did not initially include Indigenous Australians within their scope. They have been developed within the auspices of government departments dealing with immigration and citizenship issues whose advisory bodies and stakeholders have included organisations representing the rights and needs of migrants. For example, the current policy, *Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity*¹, can be found on the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship website as are the programs funded by the government to promote its multicultural aims. Further, the policy confers rights as well as responsibilities with the underlying assumption of accepting Australian law, parliamentary democracy, access and equity principles, and respect for cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. While the current policy acknowledges that cultural and linguistic diversity were part of Australia well before European colonisation², its major focus is nonetheless the needs of migrants and refugees and is relative to a dominant Anglo-Celtic culture. The unique circumstances and needs of Indigenous Australians are not accounted for.

Indigenous Australians have the longest ongoing culture in the world and are recognised as the first Australians and many believe that they have always been here. In this context, for Indigenous Australians, multicultural policies may be seen as part of a long history of being treated as non citizens in their own country, subject to laws and structures that have been overtly imposed from an outside dominant culture. Migrants may be seen as 'invaders' and part of the ongoing and long history of dispossession from land. It must be recognised that no treaties were ever signed with Indigenous Australians for land nor were transactions made whereby Indigenous Australians sold their land. Until the issue of land rights is dealt with, equality for Indigenous Australians is a pipe dream. It is only as recently as 1967 that Indigenous Australians were recognized as citizens³. In 2007, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) was suspended in its application to Indigenous Australians, in order for the Australian Federal Government to impose its "Emergency intervention" on Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. In addition, for Indigenous Australians the challenges are profound in the areas of social inclusion, economic participation, employment, housing, health, and education⁴.

Regardless of whether multicultural policies exist or not, what is important for libraries is to provide services that take into account access and equity principles irrespective of cultural or linguistic background. Some proactive ways of doing this may include workforce training on the special needs of Indigenous Australians, inclusion of items in a variety of formats within collections in Australian Indigenous languages, and creating spaces within libraries that are culturally sensitive. Communications with local Indigenous communities should be ongoing to ensure that some of these services are not imposed from above. Libraries should be encouraged to adopt and incorporate the principles contained in the ATSI LIRN Protocols⁵ and acquaint themselves with and more fully engage with Indigenous Knowledge Centres⁶. This may take the form of partnerships to ensure that they are viable and that Indigenous communities have the infrastructure, skills, and expertise to maintain them as well as being proactive in the return of materials held in libraries to communities.

While these issues are not set in stone and there are Indigenous Australians who support their inclusion in multicultural policy frameworks, particularly in relation to linguistic diversity, a great deal of work needs to be done to ensure that Indigenous Australians enjoy their rightful place in Australia as equal citizens.

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1. Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2009, *United in diversity*, viewed 28 February 2009, http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/_pdf/united_diversity.pdf.
2. Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2007, *Fact Sheet 6 – the evolution of Australia's multicultural policy*, viewed 28 February 2009, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/06evolution.htm>.
3. Australian Human Rights Commission August 2006, *A statistical overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia*, viewed 28 February 2009, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/statistics/index.html.
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, *Themes: Indigenous statistics releases*, viewed 1 March 2009, <http://www.abs.gov.au/Websitedbs/c311215.nsf/20564c23f3183fdaca25672100813ef1/9b0439a3ce3e651aca2571ff001af040!OpenDocument>.
5. Australian and Torres Strait Islander Library Information and Resources Network 2005, *ATSI LIRN Protocols*, viewed 28 February 2009, http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/atsilirn/protocols.atsilirn.asn.au/index0c51.html?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1.
6. For a list of Indigenous Knowledge Centres in Queensland, see http://libraries.slq.qld.gov.au/home/browse_by_ikc