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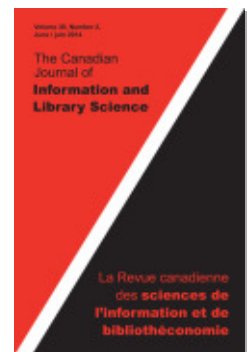
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New Immigrants' Perceptions and Awareness of Public Library Services

L'opinion des nouveaux immigrants et leur sensibilisation aux services des bibliothèques publiques

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Abstract: Although numerous articles and books offer advice on serving immigrant populations in public libraries, little research has been conducted which asks immigrants directly about their needs and experiences. This paper reports the results of three focus groups which took place with a total of 14 different individuals who moved to Canada in the past 10 years from countries in Asia, Central America, and Africa. Focus group discussions found that the participants appreciate the library system but were largely unaware of the range of library services available.

Keywords: immigration, library use, community relations

Résumé : Bien que de nombreux livres et articles offrent des conseils concernant le service des populations immigrées dans les bibliothèques publiques, très peu de recherches ont été menées s'enquérant directement auprès des immigrants de leurs besoins et de leur expérience. Cet article présente les résultats obtenus dans trois groupes de discussion qui ont eu lieu avec un total de quatorze personnes différentes installées au Canada au cours des dix dernières années en provenance de pays en Asie, en Amérique centrale et en Afrique. Les groupes de discussion ont constaté que les participants appréciaient le réseau des bibliothèques, mais qu'ils étaient loin d'être au courant de la gamme des services offerts dans les bibliothèques.

Mots-clés : immigration, fréquentation des bibliothèques, relations avec la collectivité

Introduction

Modern Canada has been shaped by successive waves of immigration, beginning with the first French settlers in 1604 and continuing to the present day, when each year our society welcomes approximately a quarter of a million immigrants from every corner of the globe. This intake has resulted in a population where nearly one out of every five people was born in another country; at current immigration rates, that figure is projected to increase to between 25% and 28% of the population by 2032 ([Statistics Canada 2011](#)). At the same time, the proportion of allophones (individuals whose mother tongue is neither English nor French) is increasing rapidly ([Statistics Canada 2011](#)).

The effects of this demographic transition are felt most strongly in cities, as almost 95% of immigrants to Canada, and 96% of those to the United States, live in urban centres ([Teixeira, Li, and Kobayashi 2012](#)). In recognition of this fact, the federal and provincial governments are increasingly shifting responsibilities for newcomer services to municipal organizations, including public libraries. This policy shift presents administrators and librarians with an opportunity to expand on their traditional role in serving newcomers.

Aims of the study

Despite this history of service, there exists little research in the field of library and information science that considers the perspective of recent immigrants themselves, and no such studies done in the Canadian context. While authors who write on the topic of newcomer services may be knowledgeable and experienced, and perhaps even are immigrants themselves, these factors are not substitutes for obtaining data from members of the target population—newcomers who access library services in Canada. The present study helps fill that need by investigating the library use of recent allophone immigrants who moved from a country in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. The specific aims of the study were

- To learn more about the experience of visiting a public library for the first time as a newcomer to Canada;
- To explore the library use habits of the target group, including browsing, attendance at programs, and familiarity with online resources;
- To discover which aspects of the library and its services are particularly appreciated by newcomers; and
- To identify possible areas of improvement to library services for newcomers.

Literature review

The term *settlement* describes the process by which immigrants and other newcomers adapt to life in their new country. Although it is generally agreed that this process is a continuing evolution that lasts for years, there are many different ways to understand the continuum from immigration to settlement to integration. A popular definition devised by a Toronto settlement worker divides settlement into three stages: immediate needs during the period following

immigrants' arrival; a middle or intermediate stage in which immigrants begin to use "Canadian systems and institutions," for example, to gain foreign credential recognition; and the long-term or final stage, in which immigrants seek to "become equal participants in Canada's economic, cultural, social and political life" (Mwarigha 2002, 9).

The settlement stages are particularly important in the context of information-seeking behaviour. Caidi and Allard explore this topic in the context of social inclusion, theorizing that "the ways in which newcomers and immigrant communities locate and access content in forms that are understandable and usable to them is essential to their integration into society" (2005, 314). In other words, the degree of success an immigrant has in finding information in her new country affects how successful she will be in achieving the final settlement stage. While Caidi and Allard's (2005) article did not delve in-depth into the role of libraries, Fisher, Durrance, and Hinton (2004) explicitly studied this phenomenon using the concept of an "information ground," which is a focused social environment in which people share everyday information. The authors found that a successful introduction to the Queens Borough Public Library allowed immigrants to develop a rich information ground which provided long-term support for their information needs. Although these articles show that public libraries have a place in the information-seeking behaviour of immigrants, they do not provide detailed guidance on how libraries can best position themselves to do so.

A related research avenue attempts to understand the role of the public library in supporting newcomers. Two such Canadian studies combined library staff interviews with analysis of library policies. Paola Picco (2008) evaluated the commitment of the Montreal Public Library system to immigrants, while Quirke (2006) compared the Toronto and Windsor public systems to gain an understanding of issues related to the delivery of programs for newcomers to Canada. As in many library systems, Montreal, Toronto, and Windsor provided a variety of services and programs in keeping with the *International Federation of Library Associations'* (2009) recommendation that libraries should act as learning, cultural, and information centres. The authors of both studies concluded that the library systems have a strong commitment to serving recent immigrants and that the administrators are aware of specific challenges related to this group of library users.

While the previously discussed articles rely heavily on academic works and interviews with library staff, others have sought the perspective of immigrants themselves. Atlestam, Brunnström, and Myhre (2011) conducted a study in Sweden using focus groups and circulation statistics to investigate how different immigrants searched for materials in the library and how they felt about the collection. They discovered a distinct preference for browsing over using the catalogue or consulting a staff member and found that multilingual collections were insufficient for the needs of their users. In a similar vein, Audunson, Essmat, and Aabø (2011) interviewed nine female immigrants from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan in their native languages. These women reported that the library was very important immediately after their arrival when they had few social

contacts and limited opportunities to go outside their homes as a result of cultural restrictions on the movement of women.

In addition to these research topics, many more practitioner-based works have been written to share the experiences of library professionals who work with immigrant populations. Some librarians have shared successful programs undertaken in their libraries. For example, [Jang \(2004\)](#) describes successful programs offered in four large Canadian cities, while [Kong \(2013\)](#) and [Frostick \(2009\)](#) report on programs which took place in the United States. These articles are so specific to the context for which they were written that it is difficult to generalize the findings to other situations. Such studies emphasize the need for more general research into immigrant perspectives on library use.

Methodology

Scope

The focus of this research was to investigate the awareness, perception, and use of public library services by individuals who had recently moved to Canada from a country in Africa, Asia, or Latin America. In addition, the participants needed to speak a first language other than English. The decision to employ the phrasing “moved to Canada” was a deliberate choice to develop an inclusive definition which encompassed more than the narrow category of “immigrants.” The phrasing chosen includes diverse types of migrants who have moved to Canada on a permanent or semi-permanent basis, such as refugees, international students, immigrant-class arrivals, and temporary foreign workers.

The project took place in a medium-sized Ontario city with between 500,000 and 1,000,000 residents in which 18% of city residents are immigrants ([Statistics Canada 2006](#)).

Procedures

In February 2013 three focus groups were conducted with a total of 14 participants. While interviews and focus groups are both common data collection methods in library and information science research, focus groups were chosen for this project for two reasons: first, the environment of the focus groups helped to mitigate the differences in background and life experiences which existed between the researcher and the participants ([Morgan 1997](#)). Second, it allowed participants to discuss questions with each other and collectively find the best way to express the response. This was an important advantage given that all of the participants spoke English as a second language. Each group discussion lasted 45–60 minutes. The researcher used the following eight general questions to lead the discussion in each group:

1. What is a library?
2. When you think of the public library, what is the first idea/term/word that comes to mind?
3. When and why did you first visit the [library in this city]?

4. What do you usually do when you go to the public library?
5. Some of you get books from the library. How do you decide what to take off the shelf?
6. What do you like about the public library?
7. What don't you like about the public library?
8. What kinds of people use the public library?

Although the same content was covered in all the discussion groups, the phrasing of the questions varied slightly depending on the level of English comprehension in the group. All the discussions and conversations were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using an inductive content analysis approach which allowed coding categories to emerge naturally from the participants' conversation. In addition to the transcripts, the researcher administered a brief questionnaire before each focus group to obtain demographic and library use information.

Participant profiles

The three groups were divided by the participants' region of origin. The first group was attended by four individuals from eastern Asia (China and South Korea), the second group by four participants from the Middle East and Central Asia (Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iran) and one woman from a country in Central Africa, while the last group was attended by five individuals from Mexico.

Eleven women and three men took part in the focus groups. The length of residency in Canada ranged from less than six months to more than six years, although a full half of the participants arrived between two and four years ago. All participants were between the ages of 20 and 49. Ten were frequent library users who visited at least a few times a month, while the remaining four were infrequent users who reported visiting a library "a couple" times per year.

In terms of income, several respondents fell below the Government of Canada's low-income cut-off line. As the threshold for this measurement varies from \$14,000 to \$38,000 depending on family size (Statistics Canada 2009), it is impossible to determine precisely how many belong in this category because the questionnaire asked for the household income without also asking for the number of household members. The majority of participants were in the \$20,000 to \$40,000 income bracket; one was in the \$40,000 to \$60,000 income bracket; three declined to answer this question. The members of the focus groups were all below the provincial median after-tax income, which is \$62,228 (Statistics Canada 2010). The demographic information is summarized in table 1.

Results and discussion

Analysis of the transcripts revealed that the topics of conversation could be grouped into five different categories: first visit to a library in Canada, collections, library use, awareness of programs and services, and impression of library staff. Each of the five categories is elaborated on below.

Table 1: Summary of key demographic information

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Country of origin	China (3) South Korea (1)	Turkey (1) Iran (2) Afghanistan (1) Central Africa (1)	Mexico (5)
Age	40–49 (4)	20–29 (2) 30–39 (1) 40–49 (1)	20–29 (1) 30–39 (3) 40–49 (1)
Sex	Male (1) Female (3)	Male (1) Female (4)	Male (1) Female (4)
Annual household income	\$20,000–\$39,000 (2) \$40,000–\$59,000 (1) No response (1)	Less than \$20,000 (1) \$20,000–\$39,000 (3) No response (1)	Less than \$20,000 (2) \$20,000–\$39,000 (2) No response (1)

First visit

Various reasons were provided to explain the factors which prompted the first visit to a public library in the city. The most common method of learning about the public library was through a referral. The three specific types of contacts mentioned were family and friends in Canada, native-born acquaintances, and English as a second language (ESL) instructors. Based on the recommendations from these sources, the participants went to the library in search of multilingual collections, Internet access, ESL resources, and books. Two had alternative forms of introduction to the library system. The first of these two had found a recommendation on the Internet during pre-arrival research which described the library system as “advanced” and as a good resource for newcomers (P4). The final participant was brought to a library for the first time by an acquaintance who was a library settlement worker.

Two of the participants had used a Canadian university library before their first visit to a Canadian public library. Despite their experience in these larger facilities, they both enthusiastically recalled their initial impressions in the public system. One of these women remembered, “When I first visited a public library . . . it was *amazing* for me because it was the first time for me to see a place for the children in the library . . . I was like ‘wow, oh my God!’” (P9). She felt that the children’s section offered her son an opportunity she had lacked as a child.

When asked to remember their feelings upon entering a public library for the first time, many participants stated that they were impressed but also felt overwhelmed. These feelings were more pronounced in individuals who went to the library with the intention of finding materials to borrow as compared to those who were motivated by the prospect of free Internet access. This appeared to be related to the volume of resources available in the library, but also to a feeling of helplessness in navigating within the branch, resulting in a situation in which those who could communicate with staff reported more positive first visits than those who could not. For example, one woman who had gone to the library to find French books for her child stated, “I find [the public library] really

amazing, but at the same time with a lot of things you need to figure out. At first you need a lot of help to . . . figure out how you can use the library here; it's not easy to do it on your own" (P5). In the end, she asked a librarian for assistance in finding the books. This contrasts with the first visit by a Korean woman. She went to a branch to search for Korean language books but left empty-handed because she could not find them by browsing and felt unable to communicate with staff given her limited English vocabulary.

Half of the participants were introduced to the city's public library system through the recommendation of a personal contact. This demonstrates that residents of the city recognize the library as a valuable resource for newcomers in terms of offering technological services, language-learning support, and free access to books and other materials. It is encouraging to note that several of the referrals were made by immigrants who were more established in the city and had presumably found the library to be a valuable resource in their own settlement experience. However, it also suggests that a significant number of immigrants may be similarly unfamiliar with the institution of the public library. This conjecture is based on the fact that, upon arrival, 10 of the 14 participants were unaware of the role of public libraries in Canada. Since the focus groups included only users of the library, it is not possible to know how many recent arrivals are unaware of the settlement support available to them. This is a potential area for future research.

Collections

It was clear from the discussion that immigrants view collections as the primary service provided by libraries. Most of the participants reported using the multilingual collections to read, listen to, or watch materials in their first language. There was also a high reported use of the ESL and, to a lesser extent, French as a second language (FSL) resources. Those immigrants with school-age children mentioned using the library to find resources to support their Canadian schooling and their heritage language development. Only one participant said that she borrowed English language books for pleasure (P10).

The two collections mentioned most frequently were multilingual and ESL/FSL resources. Despite the high self-reported usage, when asked for suggestions on how to improve library services, multilingual collections were the area where participants directed the focus of their critiques. Specifically, concern was expressed regarding the currency of the collection, and questions were raised about the way in which the library decides which languages to include.

Those speaking on this topic in the first group were careful to stress how much they appreciate the Chinese collection, but they also made clear that they used materials because of their availability, rather than because the collection was filled with items that were especially interesting to them. All three Mandarin speakers agreed that there were not many new books and that it seemed that some parts of the collection were based on donations, saying, "[It's like] someone Chinese did a donation of their books . . . so the first year you can read all

the books and the second year you don't have new [ones]" (P4). The idea that immigrants both appreciate multilingual collections and are unhappy with the quantity and quality of offerings is supported by related research carried out in Sweden, Canada, and Australia (Atlestam, Brunnström, and Myhre 2011; Dali 2004; To 1995).

Speakers of languages which are not currently represented in the library's holdings expressed interest in the criteria for inclusion in the world languages collection. In particular, one man stated that while he could understand Persian (Farsi), which the library does collect, he would greatly prefer to read or view materials in Turkish, because he feels the Turkish perspective is more "accurate" (P7). This appeared to be at least in part due to nationalistic sentiment, which poses an issue for collections because the selection and maintenance of multilingual collections are sufficiently difficult without adding a political dimension to the process.

During the course of the discussion about the multilingual collection, a woman became interested in knowing if there were any resources available for two African languages. It appeared that she had not previously considered the library a place to search for this type of material, and she was not sure how to go about finding them. This implies that although her interest existed previously, she saw the library as focusing on the dominant languages.

Library use

The library use habits of the immigrants in the focus groups evolved significantly during their time in Canada. In particular, the use of the Internet at the library was considered to be important upon arrival, above all to maintain contact with family and friends at home. One Mexican participant explained that she "was very excited to know that there was Internet access and I could actually use [MSN] messenger . . . I could talk to my family, which was very, very heart-warming" (P12). Over time the need for Internet access at the library declined as the immigrants became more established in Canada and purchased a home Internet connection. Books, DVDs, CDs, magazines, and conversation groups were all described as current reasons to visit the library. In addition, one participant had borrowed e-books through the library.

It has been established that library use patterns evolve with length of residency (Caidi, Allard, and Quirke 2010; Burke 2008). Since the question route did not specifically ask about changes in use, little information was gleaned on this topic. However, even without a direct query it was clear that the participants experienced a transition from using the Internet at the library to having Internet access at home. Participants explained that the library was the primary Internet resource only upon arrival, since it was considered more "comfortable" and "very easy, convenient to stay at home" (P1). For the participants, at the beginning of their residency in Canada they were able to access the Internet only at the library. Although this need was not lasting, it represents a decidedly important resource for a population which has had little time to develop alternative

information-seeking techniques in their new information context (Caidi, Allard, and Quirke 2010).

Almost all participants who regularly borrowed library materials used the online public access catalogue (OPAC) both from home and at the library to find titles of interest. After they identified a desired item, the most common ways to physically locate the materials at the library were to make a request, so that a library staff member would pull the items from the shelf, or to ask a staff member to help find the item using the call number. All participants, including those who regularly used an academic library, found it difficult to find items by themselves, especially items classified using Dewey Decimal call numbers. More specifically, two participants revealed that they feel unable to locate items with Dewey call numbers which have more than two digits following the decimal point.

Willingness to use the library OPAC appeared to depend on two factors: expertise with technology and comfort with using the English language interface. Most of the participants who used the online catalogue to find items had also used it to request materials from other areas of the city to be delivered at a nearby branch. The request system was especially appreciated by users of the multilingual collection. Although the OPAC incorporates search limiters on the search results page and social networking features, only one person expressed familiarity with these elements.

The relatively high degree of comfort in using the OPAC contrasts with other research on the topic. The immigrants who participated in both To's (1995) and Atlestam, Brunnström, and Myhre's (2011) studies reported that they preferred to browse the shelf instead of searching via the computer. In the Canadian environment, 14 Japanese women in a recent study told researchers that it is difficult to search for Japanese language materials in the Toronto Public Library OPAC because of issues with search limiters and the cataloguing of non-Latin scripts (Nomura and Caidi 2013). With regard to To's research with Chinese language readers, it is reasonable to suspect that over the past 18 years the average computer knowledge of new immigrants has increased significantly, leading to greater comfort with Internet searching. It is less easy to understand the finding in the context of the Canadian and Swedish research which took place in 2013 and 2011 respectively.

While the high reported use of the OPAC was encouraging, it was also clear that no distinction was made between the online catalogue and the library website. This confusion is likely caused partly by the structure of the library's online presence; the catalogue and website are so well integrated that it is possible on each page to switch back and forth between the OPAC and different sections of the website. A second cause of the confusion is probably a lack of understanding of the library catalogue. This type of difficulty has been well documented with other OPACs, both in the past, when users were unfamiliar with computers in general, and in the present-day, when users accustomed to Google struggle to understand the more rigid search options in library catalogues (Waller 2010).

The confusion over the website-catalogue distinction appeared to be less of an obstacle for finding library materials than for accessing other services. This is

particularly true of programs. Information about programs is made available on the website and also via printed advertisements in nearby branches and relevant organizations like schools and community centres. However, physical advertisements are typically limited in their reach. If a patron lives in another part of the city from a branch offering a special program, he or she is likely to miss the event when relying solely on physical ads instead of the website.

Awareness of programs and services offered

In terms of the awareness of programs and services offered, the participants reported high usage of those services and items which are most obvious in the library and most associated with library use. In other words, the collections and the heavily advertised conversation groups were used by nearly all the participants; there was almost no awareness of the availability of specialized services for immigrants or of online databases

For programs, awareness was low in terms of both the general offerings and those created specifically for newcomers. Only one participant reported attending any of the general programs. While the library system offers several programs designed specifically for newcomers (e.g., citizenship test preparation, English tutoring, information sessions on settlement topics), there was little interest in these offerings on the part of the study participants. This appeared to be partially caused by the way the participants view the library; it was widely agreed that a library is a place to borrow books and, sometimes, audiovisual materials. In addition, some saw it as a place of knowledge resources where it is possible to find answers to questions. Their perspective on library services did not include a role in continuing education.

Two examples from the discussion help illustrate this point. Participants in two different groups shared their experiences of receiving assistance from library staff. In the first focus group, a woman explained how, on one occasion, she went to ask for advice on the procedure for new voters (P1). In another group, a man told how he asked a librarian for help writing an English language résumé (P11). In both cases, the question was viewed as a lack of knowledge on a specific topic which could be answered by a trained knowledge worker (the librarian). Although the library provided the solution to the problem in both cases, the idea of attending a library program related to citizenship or employment was never considered.

Of the programs available at the library, use of conversation groups proved to be the lone exception to this trend. Many participants continued to attend conversation groups even after several years of residency. One woman who had been living in Canada for more than six years stated that “for me, learning English is my life-job . . . Not only for the English . . . language, but the English culture [as well]” (P1). She saw the library resources, including English conversation groups, as an important asset in this quest.

Even though there was low recognition of programs currently offered, the participants were eager to suggest two ideas for new additions. While a few had

investigated attending book club programs, they felt that the selected books were too long for English language learners:

Participant 1: For the reading club, their books I think [are] only for the Canadians . . .

Participant 3: Not for me!

Participant 1: Not for us, no.

The language used is particularly interesting since the first participant had indicated earlier in the discussion that she had already obtained Canadian citizenship. Her suggestion was to have a separate book club which would select books that were sufficiently short for a second language learner to be able to read them in a month. Two other participants independently stated that they would appreciate some information literacy training on how to use the catalogue and website.

The library offers many services that have been developed to respond to the needs of specific user groups, such as newcomers, job seekers, and users with disabilities. Services relevant to the focus group participants include parenting support, one-on-one employment consultations, support from a library settlement worker, and a section on the website which explains library services and policies in nine world languages. No one had knowingly used any of the available services or even knew of their existence. Despite the amount of services on offer, the common experience was a complete lack of awareness of their availability.

One important service which deserves extra consideration is the presence of library settlement workers (LSWs). At the time of the research the library system had been part of the Ontario Library Settlement Partnerships for five years. This program placed LSWs in library branches to give one-on-one settlement information and referral, lead group information sessions, and engage in community outreach. In addition to offering individualized service, the LSWs in the city were all able to speak at least one other language in addition to English. Since the language barrier is frequently mentioned in the context of serving newcomers, this should have been a great advantage for the city and for recently arrived immigrants.

However, the discussion on this topic pointed to a disconcerting lack of awareness among the immigrants in the groups. In the first place, none of the participants had heard the term *library settlement worker* or were aware of the services they provide. This by itself is unfortunate but not a cause for alarm given the small sample size. More concerning is the fact that at least four participants had been in contact with an LSW without understanding their role. In fact, three participants stated that they had seen LSWs in action leading tours in Chinese but incorrectly understood the tour leaders to be community volunteers rather than a service provided through the library. One further participant had actually received an individual tour from a Kurdish-speaking LSW. Since the LSW was an acquaintance, the participant thought the friend was being helpful and did not understand that she was employed to assist newcomers. These experiences imply that even when the LSWs are active and visible in branches, their role can still be easily misunderstood by onlookers.

Relation with library staff

Impressions of library staff varied depending on the personal experiences of the participants. In most cases, the opinion of staff was made based on a small number of encounters, either positive or negative. A few of the participants shared stories of librarians going above and beyond normal expectations to assist their users. For instance, one woman (P2) told the group about the time she wanted to do some Canadian-style cooking for a party. When her first attempt to bake a cake failed because she could not understand the language in the cookbook, a staff member took the time to write out the recipe in simple English and explain the baking terminology. An opposite view of library staff was presented by a member of the Mexican group (P12). She travelled to three different libraries searching for Spanish language children's books. Rather than offering to determine which libraries offered the desired materials, the staff simply told her that no such items were available at their branch.

While it is to be expected that immigrants, like any other library users, will have both positive and negative interactions with staff, it is also apparent that newcomers are likely to have more complex needs than long-time users. Some examples of these needs include general difficulty understanding public library organization because of limited experience with libraries, difficulty communicating in English or French, and a lack of social networks, which causes newcomers to rely more heavily on library staff for assistance with questions not normally handled by that institution.

Implications

The 14 recent immigrants who took part in this study expressed a sincere appreciation for the library services they had used. In particular, the ability to contact family and friends at home for free using the Internet was important soon after their arrival. English language learning resources and multilingual collections were also cited as valued services which retained their relevance at least six years after arrival. However, the discussion also revealed that many of the available programs and services designed for newcomers were unused. The implications from these results can be summarized in the following four points:

1. The library can be an intimidating place to newcomers

Some immigrants arrive in Canada never having visited a lending library—public, school, academic, or otherwise. In these cases, the first experience using a public library in Canada is significant because they are learning about an institution they have no experience with or expectations for. In this context, it is important that their first visit is successful, or they may form a negative impression based on one experience.

Libraries in Ontario have demonstrated their recognition of this challenge through their support of the Library Settlement Partnerships described above. However, these types of introductory programs can benefit newcomers only if they are made aware that this resource is available to them. The results of this study hint at the large challenges faced by libraries in this domain as even the

participants who had seen an LSW in the library were unaware of the program or of the services being offered.

For libraries which do not have specific newcomer-targeted resources in place, the most important way to mitigate the anxiety of a first visit is to be welcoming, friendly, and patient.

2. The category of immigrants is a heterogeneous group

This statement should be understood to reflect the diversity of backgrounds and of library-related needs which are present within the category of immigrants. Many texts, including this one, discuss immigrants as a group. While this is necessary in research when this aspect is the unit of analysis, it is important to remember that the immigrant population is as diverse as the general population, if not more so. This was demonstrated in the discussion about the first library visit. Many participants had used public libraries in their home countries which bore little resemblance to the Canadian system. Others had not used a library at all. Alongside this diversity of prior experience, numerous motivations were given for the initial visit, including Internet access, the world languages collection, information about the city, and children's books. These experiences remind us that being an immigrant is only one facet of the whole individual. A person may simultaneously be a parent, entrepreneur, voter, leisure reader, and student and may have library-related needs associated with all of these aspects. As with other patrons, the best way to determine an information need is to listen carefully to the request and ask clarifying questions when needed.

3. Programming beyond conversation groups

Typical programs for immigrants include settlement-themed workshops, cultural events, and language classes. In addition to these, libraries might consider recreational programming which is marketed to immigrant groups but is not linked to any specific cultural or ethnic group. A suggestion which emerged from the discussion was the development of a book club for short, easy-to-read adult books which would permit second language learners to finish the reading in a month and contribute to the discussion.

4. Support for speakers of minority languages

Multilingual collections were one of the top motivations which led the participants in this study to visit the library. While budgetary, cataloguing, and spatial constraints prevent libraries from having a full collection in all the languages spoken by their patrons, it might be possible to assist these users in other ways. Some possibilities include having a page on the website which provides links to language learning resources, advertising inter-library loan services, and holding cultural events with a focus on supporting minority languages.

Conclusion

The present study has contributed to the existing body of literature which demonstrates that public libraries are an important source of information and

support to immigrants throughout the various stages of settlement. The 14 participants in the three focus groups expressed appreciation, and even admiration, for public libraries in the city. This analysis of their experiences with the public library furnishes insight into the ways that immigrants utilize the collections, programs, and services at their public library system. It is hoped that the recommendations provided in this paper will help public libraries in Ontario and beyond to provide the best possible services to newcomers.

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