

Te Paea Paringatai

Collective leadership and participation with indigenous matters

Redefining indigenous literacy

Let's say you work in a research or academic library that models traditional approaches to leadership, management, services and service delivery, and your library is interested in becoming a better workplace that attracted, retained, and developed indigenous staff, as well as transformed its service and service delivery to better include, involve, and implement indigenous language, culture, and ways of knowing. If it excelled at indigenous inclusion, how would people treat indigenous staff and students differently? What kinds of interactions would be visible in any new integrated service you developed? How would you reflect the local indigenous language and culture in your library? What kinds of new behaviors would be common? And what ingrained behaviors would be gone? If these questions raised concern or confusion, it may be that your academic or research library lacks the indigenous literacy required to make positive and sustainable transformation in this area; therefore, it is suggested that collective leadership and participation with indigenous matters will help address this.

Indigenous literacy

Promoting and supporting indigenous literacy is a key step in enhancing how academic and research libraries engage indigeneity. However, redefining *indigenous literacy* is a challenge when the phrase is most often associated with the identification and description of a deficit or below standard achievement in

literacy for indigenous learners. Turning the tables on this common assumption, we revisit and rewrite the definition of indigenous literacy as a measurement of an individual's knowledge, worldview and behavior, and their competency to responsibly, appropriately and effectively support, respect, participate, and engage with indigenous individuals, indigenous communities, or both. Terms such as *cultural responsiveness* or other levels of *cultural understanding*, be that intercultural, multicultural or bicultural, have in the past been used to promote bridging the "understanding" or "misunderstanding" gap between cultures; thus, persuading dominant cultures that there is value in this type of effort to demonstrate diversity and relevance to students and staff.

Applying the notion of indigenous literacy to academic and research libraries or their institutions, we might begin to understand where we might be placed or place ourselves on the indigenous literacy competency continuum. At one end, is indigenous illiterate, a starting point where an individual or institution has little to no competency, and at the other end is indigenous literate, where an

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individual or institution demonstrates in-depth understanding of indigenous matters and models effective practice. How do libraries know their indigenous literacy capability? Is there a standard questionnaire or test?

Measuring progress and best practices

In order to measure one's indigenous literacy capability, one can start by completing an environmental scan of one's workplace and then follow this by scanning one's personal practice with regard to inclusion and engagement of indigenous matters. Furthermore, answering the questions posed earlier assists to reveal the workplace climate. This holistic assessment should provide an immediate sense of strengths and weaknesses of a library environment (physical and digital), services, and engagement activities through an indigenous lens. It's important to remember that not all indigenous peoples think alike, not all indigenous peoples are at the same decolonisation or reconciliation stage; therefore, any attempt to address weaknesses or enhance strengths should be made in partnership with your local indigenous communities.

Being part of an advanced learning institution is both a responsibility and a privilege. Academic and research libraries are well-placed to demonstrate support for indigenous matters as they have a well-developed understanding of its importance in modern society. Around the globe, there is evidence of some great work undertaken by academic and research libraries. For example, at California State University-Fresno, the academic librarians developed student collaboration and community engagement programs to highlight and support issues concerning cultures of Native Americans, thus providing a learning and development opportunity for academic librarians by focusing on the local and global issues and challenges that affect Native Americans, particularly those students and faculty of Native American heritage on campus and in the community.¹ Another example, this time at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, academic librarians applied indigenous Pacific

research, pedagogical approaches, and methodologies for blended learning that supported indigenous Pacific student retention and success strategies.² Other academic and research libraries in Africa, Australia, Philippines, and Canada also promote outward facing services that support indigenous student success. In most of these institutions, they were also fortunate to have relevant indigenous expertise on staff, that is, a staff member who affiliates with local indigenous peoples, is involved with their tribal community, speaks the language, and understands customary protocol. In a few instances, the academic or research library employed a team of indigenous library professionals, numbering two-to-five people.

When we consider the efforts of some academic and research libraries, there is evidence that much of this investment is related to the demographic of the student body and faculty. Where a cohort of indigenous students, indigenous scholars, or an indigenous studies college exists, so too does the demand for library service provision. The reliance on demand to provide targeted indigenous services is problematic because an academic or research library has decided that resources are better placed elsewhere, and therefore is not prioritizing the inclusion of indigenous matters. The tribal college system in the United States delivers a whole institution approach to indigeneity, that is underpinned by indigenous core values, and emphasises local indigenous language and culture, indigenous knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing, as a basis for creative expression, and source of inspiration.³

Library and information science education: Curriculum and growing indigenous librarians

If we return briefly to the notions of responsibility and privilege in advanced learning institutions, within this premise is an obligation to have thought and praxis leadership with regards to indigenous matters, regardless of how large or small the current indigenous representation might be at the institution. A collective leadership approach across all

academic and research libraries to include, foster, and support aspirations of indigenous peoples in their pursuit of higher education or being employed within academic and research libraries, can have present and future mutual benefit. Benefits might include enhanced institutional reputation, agility to respond to demographic shifts, articulated client service value exchange, improved graduate success, effective pedagogy and/or increased numbers of new indigenous library professionals.

Library and information science (LIS) education continues to evolve, and the need to include indigenous matters in the curriculum, pedagogy, and student population cannot be overlooked. Kerry Smith, Gillian Hallam, and S. B. Ghosh,⁴ on behalf of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Education and Training Section, updated the “Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs—2012,” which adopted “Awareness of Indigenous Knowledge Paradigms” as eleventh core element in the LIS curriculum. This is an important decision, but equally important is the need to recruit and be inclusive of indigenous students.

New LIS professionals are slowly entering the field with more indigenous literacy than before. This transformation within academic and research libraries is a practical way to demonstrate commitment, knowledge, and understanding of indigenous matters. Developing indigenous literate libraries, by embedded knowledge and practice across all levels of the library, from senior management to librarians, support staff, and clients will understandably attract indigenous librarians. Retention of any team member is subject to a range of controlled and uncontrollable variables, and application of usual retention tools such as professional development, career pathways, rewards, and recognition, continue to be critical for job satisfaction. In addition to these tools, the concept of affiliation (genealogical connection or tribal connection) is often inferred by indigenous librarians among indigenous librarians. Affili-

ation is the opportunity to identify with other indigenous librarians or groups. This can be a group of indigenous community members, or indigenous librarians, either through work, community, national associations, or national indigenous associations. As indicated, these groups may or may not be directly related to library and information work which, if viewed from a western workplace perspective, a manager may disregard the affiliation opportunity. Often indigenous peoples will wear many different hats; however, regardless of which hat they are wearing, they will often be the indigenous contact you might need for a service, project, research or advisory panel at an academic or research library. This is understood by the indigenous librarian, and affiliation in this context may be likened to a coach or mentor.

Library associations: A matter of professionalization

Indigenous librarians and librarians, in general, had identified the need for a professional home for indigenous matters in LIS professional associations. This aspiration was realized in December 2008, with the formal establishment of the IFLA Special Interest Group (SIG) for Indigenous Matters. The SIG evolved out of IFLA Past President Alex Byrne’s Presidential Task Force on Indigenous Matters, a focus on library services for the traditional owners of the land. The SIG’s original charge was to consider the broad range of issues relating to indigenous peoples, indigenous knowledge and libraries, and information services. These included awareness of indigenous peoples and issues, content and perspectives, description and classification of materials, accessibility and use, handling of secret or sacred and offensive material, copying and repatriation of records, digitization and the Internet, intellectual property, governance and management, employment, and education and training for professional practice.

The IFLA Indigenous Matters Section transitioned from its special interest group status in 2016. Today, the charge of the section is to

support the provision of culturally responsive and effective services to indigenous communities throughout the world. Its main objectives are to promote international cooperation in the fields of library, culture, knowledge, and information services to indigenous communities that meet their intergenerational, community, cultural, and language needs, and to encourage indigenous leadership within the sector, exchange of experiences, education and training, and research in all aspects of this subject.

The section also seeks to connect, collaborate, and work in cooperation with other IFLA Sections; national indigenous library, culture, knowledge and information associations/groups; as well as the International Indigenous Librarians' Forum.⁵ This purpose highlights the intentional focus on collective leadership, and an invitation to actively participate, as each library has a role to play as co-collaborator. Other indigenous LIS professional associations or groups such as the American Indian Library Association (AILA); Indigenous Matters Committee, Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA); Australian Institute of Australian and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and Te Rōpū Whakakahau, Māori National Association for Culture, Knowledge, Information of New Zealand have an established presence in the sector, building on core strengths and driving inclusion.

A collective future engaging with indigenous matters

Academic and research libraries can look to professional associations where they are likely to find guidance and develop habits of continuous learning and improving their indigenous literacy. In doing that, they provide a model for other academic and research libraries, and library professionals, educators, and researchers. Once that begins to happen, it gains momentum, and is an additional valuable resource for championing and enabling better representation of indigenous matters within the sector, from education and research to practice. Academic and re-

search libraries engaged in collective leadership and participating in indigenous matters are producing change in outward learning, teaching, and research services, to internal recruitment, development, and retention of indigenous expertise and leadership. I hope this column triggers further thought leadership and discussion on this topic that might lead to co-created resources that are both meaningful and practical for academic and research libraries. I and the IFLA Indigenous Matters Section welcome your engagement and contributions.

Notes

1. Raymond Pun, Julie R. Moore, and Gretchen Higginbottom, "Supporting Native Voices, Cultures and Stories Through Multicultural Programming, and Community and Campus Engagement at Fresno State" (presentation, IFLA WLIC 2017, Wrocław, Poland, August 19-25, 2017), accessed April 6, 2018, <http://library.ifla.org/1658/1/169-pun-en.pdf>.

2. Judy T. McFall-McCaffery and Stephanie Cook, "Indigenous approaches at play in creating positive student outcomes in a tertiary institution" (presentation, IFLA WLIC 2016, Columbus, OH, August 13-19, 2016), accessed April 6, 2018, <http://library.ifla.org/1535/1/168-mccaffery-en.pdf>.

3. Sarah R. Kostelecky, David A. Hurley, Jolene Manus, and Paulita Aguilar, "Centering Indigenous Knowledge: Three Southwestern Tribal College and University Library Collections," *Collection Management* 42, no. 3-4 (2017): 180-95, doi:10.1080/01462679.2017.1327914.

4. Kerry Smith, Gillian Hallam and S. B. Ghosh. Guidelines for Professional Library/Information Educational Programs—2012 (IFLA Section on Education and Training, 2012), <https://www.ifla.org/publications/guidelines-for-professional-libraryinformation-educational-programs-2012>.

5. Indigenous Matters Section, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, "Indigenous Matters Section" last modified January 16, 2018, <https://www.ifla.org/indigenous-matters>. 