

Indigenous Libraries and Innovative Multicultural Services

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Abstract

Native peoples have survived over the centuries by adapting to new technologies, adopting materials and processes, and retaining their traditional lifeways. Similarly indigenous library services have developed to reflect the flexibility and variety of Native world views. This is a process that reflects how native peoples find fulfillment in their individual and professional lives, a process that follows the cycle of being, asking, seeking, making, having, sharing, and celebrating. This paper follows indigenous protocol, opening by honoring the indigenous owners of the land and introducing the author by identifying an indigenous nation, band, and clan. The article also highlights examples of how tribal libraries are successfully following the information seeking process. Tribal libraries are incorporating indigenous world view in their architecture, interior design, and in the design and provision of services. Indigenous librarians are coordinating their efforts regionally, statewide, nationally, and internationally. Key organizations include the American Indian Library Association, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Library and Information Network, and Te Ropu Whakahaui/Maori in Library and Information Management. Te Ropu Whakahaui illustrates how a national indigenous library organization can negotiate representation and services with the national library organization, in this case, LIANZA, the Library Information Association of New Zealand-Aotearoa. A national conference for tribal museums, libraries, and archives will take place in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma USA in October 2007. The next International Indigenous Librarians Forum will occur in February 2009 on the campus of the Wananga-O-Raukawa, one of three tribal colleges in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The forum provides opportunities for indigenous librarians to share information, make connections, and deliberate on issues of common interest. The paper closes with the traditional story of the prophecies of the Anishinabe people. The author is Anishinabe, a member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, and enrolled or listed as an official member of the White Earth Reservation, Minnesota, USA.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, New Zealand, United States.

1 Introduction: Innovation and indigenous worldview

Innovation means introducing something new or different. It is perceived from one's personal point of view, experience, and approach in conducting work. Indigenous peoples have

long demonstrated that they can adapt to change and adopt elements of other cultures while still retaining their lifeways. After contact with Europeans, Anishinabe women saw the floral patterns printed on cotton calico cloth. They interpreted these designs into their beadwork, decorating their clothing and implements with flowers and interwoven vines. Today, we find indigenous librarians providing services in response to tribal community needs that also reflect tribal culture and traditions. Libraries that serve Native peoples, especially those on tribal homelands, may provide services similar to those offered by other libraries—collections, information, access to and training in the use of technology, children's and young people's reading promotion, reader's advisory. These services may, however, reflect local culture—from building spaces for ceremony to posting signs in indigenous languages. As such, they may be innovative and unique.

Libraries within indigenous communities have a legacy of service linked through tradition and protocol, extending over time past, present and future. This paper provides a general description of some current library services and initiatives that illustrate how indigenous libraries are unique. It presents some challenges to future connections and identifies some opportunities that may ensure not only the survival of library services but also their continued development. This focus is largely based on tribal librarianship within the borders of the United States but also includes references to efforts that extend beyond the geographical boundaries of the United States into other tribal lands.

What is an indigenous view of the world? How do Native peoples find balance in their professional and personal lives, a balance that allows indigenous peoples to respect their pasts, acknowledge their individual differences, maintain community connections and succeed in the 21st century and beyond? Dr. Gregory Cajete is a Tewa Indian from the Pueblo of Santa Clara in New Mexico. In his book, [Look to the Mountain](#), he describes the indigenous cycle of life as a process. We can consider this process as a way to explore innovative library services for indigenous populations.

2 Being: Protocol and identity

While the circle of indigenous life is a series of interconnected processes, we might begin with the stage of being. It is here that indigenous peoples acknowledge their life histories. Being also refers to the protocol or etiquette of dealing with others and the world.

To begin with, I would like to recognize the indigenous owners of this land. We honor your life histories, the challenges that you have faced, your accomplishments, and your achievements.

Indigenous protocol also refers to self identity and how indigenous people introduce themselves to others. I am an Anishinabe woman, enrolled or an official member of the White Earth Reservation in northwestern Minnesota. The Anishinabe are sometimes referred to as the Ojibwe or the Chippewa. The White Earth Reservation is one of six Anishinabe bands or groups that are confederated as the Minnesota Chippewa tribe. My father was Mississippi Band and my mother is Pembina Band. My father was Makwa or bear clan and so I am also bear clan. Makwa are known for their strength and courage. Rather than serving as leaders, makwa served as defenders or warriors.

Librarians may start their process of developing innovative services by working with indigenous peoples to reflect local identity. The sense of being can pervade what librarians do and libraries offer. For example, being is acknowledged when structures are situated according to the indigenous concept of the cardinal directions and when text on signs and web content is offered in indigenous languages.

3 Asking

Asking may refer to the negotiations that we employ with ourselves and each other. Asking is intertwined with protocol. There are proper ways to ask. Librarians seeking input from tribal communities should follow the process of first making social contact, of meeting over food and in ceremony, and of addressing leadership while balancing individual needs and sometimes intertribal conflicts.

Native peoples' interactions with librarians are also reflective of their communication styles. Non-tribal members might consider American Indians soft spoken and shy. When meeting with tribal members, others might be surprised to learn that many are strong of opinion and possessing of strong senses of humor.

4 Seeking

What are Native librarians seeking? Like other librarians, they are in need of funding, resources, and continuous lifelong education. Seeking may also be framed by structure. Over the past ten years several structures have been developed to help frame the process of developing indigenous information services. These include:

(1) National and State Libraries Australia's National Policy Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Services and Collections;

(2) Protocols for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections;

(3) Guidelines for Respecting Cultural Knowledge;

(4) Culturally-Responsive Guidelines for Alaska Public Libraries; and

(5) Protocols for Native American Archival Materials.

5 Making

Tribal librarians are creating new services that reflect indigenous ways of life. They create spaces that reflect culture and are welcoming to indigenous peoples. On many tribal lands, the libraries carry indigenous names. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Auckland City Libraries is Tamaki Pataka Korero. The First Nations House of Learning on the campus of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada has the Xwi7xwa Library; Xwi7xwa is "echo" in the language of the Squamish nation.

Libraries serving indigenous peoples reflect their artistic sensibilities. The Whangarei Libraries/Wananga Whakatupu Maturanga in Aotearoa/New Zealand, feature carved poles or pou recognizing the different cultural groups of the community. Pou represent the Maori baskets of knowledge and the Celtic, Korean communities along with the 28th Maori Battalion A Company that served in World War II.

Making also refers to recruiting and educating indigenous peoples to develop indigenous services. Te Wananga-O-Raukawa, one of three tribal colleges in Aotearoa/New Zealand, offers a Maori-centered bachelor's degree in information management. Federal grants through the United States Institute of Museum and Library Services have funded scholarship programs for indigenous students to attend master's programs in information studies accredited by the American Library Association. The University of British Columbia's School of Library, Archival and Information Studies offers a First Nations concentration in its ALA accredited master's program.

And, making also refers to creating a workplace that is reception to indigenous patrons. Heritage Collections in the Auckland City Libraries/Tamaki Pataka Korero is staffed by Te Ropu Ratonga Maori, a Maori services team that specializes in services such as family history research

6 Having

Libraries, archives, and cultural heritage centers of all kinds house material culture of indigenous peoples. These resources result from gifting, directed collection development, digital library collaborations, and other unique circumstances. Tribal communities and organizations also house materials to assist in local documentary efforts and to be used by the general public. One noteworthy collection is the American Native Press Archive at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Digitization projects provide records, images, and text to document Native cultural property. Organizations and institutions involved in digital library efforts include the National Museum of the American Indian, USA, Haskell

Indian Nations University, Lawrence, Kansas, USA, and the Library of Congress, USA.

Libraries, publishers, and individuals are also developing resources on indigenous cultures. This includes Black Words (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers and Story Tellers) and the new Indigenous Studies Portal at the University of Saskatchewan Library in Saskatoon, Canada.

Indigenous librarians are also involved in providing assistance in describing holdings following cultural models. The Maori Subject Headings project in Aotearoa/New Zealand provides libraries with a means of providing access to materials in a way that reflects Maori thought. The more than 1000 subject terms incorporate traditional and contemporary views that Maori have of their people, of the mind, and of the spiritual life.

7 Sharing

Indigenous librarians seek each other out to share information, establish contacts, and deliberate. Regional, national, and even international organizations exist that further these communications.

Several state library associations within the United States, including New Mexico and Alaska, have units for indigenous library services. Tribal librarians in Arizona hold their own mini-conferences. LSSAP—Library Services for Saskatchewan Aboriginal Peoples—is a province-wide committee that shares information on how to best serve First Nations and Metis peoples in Canada. Librarians from the more than thirty tribal colleges in the United States and Canada meet at the Tribal College Librarians Professional Development Institute, held most years in Bozeman, Montana.

In Aotearoa, the national Maori library organization is Te Ropu Whakahau, Maori in Libraries and Information Management. In Australia it is ATSILIRN, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Library and Information Resource Network. In the United States, the national organization is the American Indian Library Association, one of five ethnic library associations affiliated with the American Library Association. The third national conference on tribal museums, libraries, and archives will take place in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in October 2007.

In Aotearoa/ New Zealand, Te Ropu Whakahau (Maori in Libraries and Information Management) has entered into a formal partnership with LIANZA, the Library Information Association of New Zealand-Aotearoa. Two Te Ropu Whakahau members serve on the LIANZA Council and Te Ropu works with LIANZA to ensure that a Maori perspective is incorporated in the general business of the national association.

Every two years since 1999, indigenous librarians gather at the International Indigenous Librarians Forum. The sixth

forum will be held at the Wananga o Raukawa in Otaki on the North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand. We ask you to help advertise this event and work toward supporting attendance by our indigenous colleagues around the world.

8 Celebrating

Libraries that serve indigenous peoples can create spaces for indigenous people to gather and create. In the State Library of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia is the kuril dhagun Indigenous Knowledge Centre. This space includes a fire pit where ceremonies can take place and where Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders and their guests can meet, share food, and celebrate.

9 Summary

Tribal libraries face a number of challenges, often including low financial support, limited resources, and geographic isolation. Libraries and librarians are often left out of grant-funded efforts, although their skills are needed at the community level. With all of these opportunities, tribal librarians are not always invited to the table, especially where critical, time-sensitive grant-funded initiatives are concerned. Tribal librarians have to be ever vigilant that their services are recognized so that they are included in programs that involve language recovery, cultural mapping, use of information technology, and cultural heritage.

The Anishinabe people are dreamers and predictors. Among their dreams and predictions are the Prophecies of the Seven Fires. Hundreds of years ago a large group of the people left their homeland areas on Turtle Island (North America) and moved east until they lived on the shores of salt water, the Atlantic Ocean. Over time, the people forgot about their homelands. And over time, seven prophets arose, predicting that the Anishinabe would return, through a sequence of seven moves, to the west and stop when they found food growing on water. Each move would guarantee the survival of the people; if they chose not to move, then they would not live.

The first move was precipitated by the sign of a cowrie shell, rising from the ocean and hovering over the salt water. An elder, the first prophet, dreamed the significance of this shell—which they called the grand megis—as a sign that it was time that the people return to their homelands. This was the Prophecy of the First Hearth Fire. Their second move or fire was prompted by the prediction that a young boy would help them recover their traditional lifeways; they continued to follow the rivers during their third move toward the land where food grew on water. The fourth prophet predicted the arrival of Europeans as people whose faces of death would be mistaken as the faces of brotherhood. The fifth fire was the prediction of the loss of traditional religious expression. The sixth prophet told of a time of great sadness and even greater loss of culture, including language erosion, disruption of traditional family life, economic strife, and health challenges. Today, the Anisihinabe are emerging from the sixth fire. The

seventh prophet predicted that a new people would emerge in the seventh fire. This new people, or Osh-ki-bi-ma-di-zeeg, have the potential to recover lost elements of the culture, if they make the right decisions. This right road of life would ignite a final fire of peace and brother/sisterhood. If they take the wrong road, then the result could be degradation of the natural resources and death to all peoples.

I predict that the tribal librarian's role in this impending age of the seventh fire is a critical one. It may be up to us to help ensure that our communities have the information to choose the right path. The library can provide the social space for tribal members lead the lighting of the eighth fire. Libraries—can help contribute to a sense of individual and group pride and identity. Libraries can serve as the pivotal connection between other community agencies—schools, homes, tribal governments, and the larger world.

References

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