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Jennifer Soutter
University of Windsor

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Hiring Indigenous Labour in Libraries: A Potential Framework?

Jennifer Soutter
Leddy Library, University of Windsor

Proposal

ALA-accredited librarians are oriented to work with and in Western Knowledge Systems specific to Canada and/or the United States. So…

- who is entitled to work with/in Traditional Knowledge Systems;
- how do we identify them; and
- how do they get incorporated respectfully into libraries?

This work posits a structure to start discussion and conversations around these issues and solicit feedback to allow us to work towards an informed framework for incorporating Indigenous information specialists into various libraries.

Learning Objectives:

- Contrast the philosophies, values, or principles that differ between Western Knowledge Systems and Indigenous Peoples' Traditional Knowledge Systems.
- Identify and explain weaknesses and/or two strengths of the proposal for hiring Indigenous workers.
- Identify barriers you would face in implementing an Indigenous recognition and hiring framework within your type of library (and please identify type of library) and explain how they are barriers.

Presented at the 2022 OLA Superconference.

For References: see spreadsheet at shorturl.at/otzR9

Why this framework?

Reconciliation involves Indigenizing our respective workplaces. This work is the responsibility of settlers in libraries and should not solely be left up to our Indigenous colleagues.

Settler librarians need to start conversations that lead to respecting Indigenous Knowledge Systems and unearthing new ideas on how we might hire Indigenous persons in respectful ways, for Indigenous persons to represent their own knowledge systems. This may begin with inclusion in our physical spaces, but does not have to end there. This will likely be a staged process with the intent of achieving some level of independence from Western Knowledge Systems. So where should we start?

Definitions

Librarian is "a keeper or custodian of a library" and librarianship is "the office or work of a librarian"[1]. In this definition this work is not applied to those working outside libraries. should these Indigenous workers working in Traditional Knowledge Systems within (and outside) the confines of a library be called librarians?)

ALA accreditation [2] : standards exist for the accreditation of programs to prepare library and information professionals in the philosophy, principles, ethics, and the "essential character of the field"

ALA mission [3]: "To provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all."

Elders "are important Knowledge Keepers and also help ensure cultural continuity."[4]

Indigenous Knowledge Holders: "encompass generations of knowledge embedded within the cultural and epistemological worldview of Indigenous communities that span generations."[5]

Indigenous-focussed positions are positions that do not necessarily require training in WKS ALA-accredited librarianship in order to operate within the position. They require working knowledge of a TKS.

Knowledge systems involved

Western Knowledge Systems (WKS)…

"comprises of the social norms, ethical values, traditional customs (such as beliefs) and specific artefacts and technologies as shared within the Western sphere of influence. In other words,…refers to the content and context of knowledge systems driven by the values and cultures of Western civilisations."[6]

- Information as a commodity, ownership independent of authority;
- Responsibility re: use focusses on the individual;
- Benefits tend to accrue to individuals;
- Providing answers to learners;
- Theories about content/ideas tested via experiment and functional use;
- Focus on text and classroom learning;
- Focus on the object.

Training for ALA-accreditation was developed within and exists within WKS and perpetuates this system:

- In LIS, information continues to be considered by many to be neutral, but it is coming to be understood that production/ application/ use is no longer neutral;
- Focus on categorizing, controlling all information (silos, ability to divide/ assign to discrete units) within only one acceptable system, the WKS system.

Traditional Knowledge Systems (TKS)…

TKS are comprised of the social norms, ethical values, traditional customs (such as beliefs) and specific artefacts and technologies as shared within the Indigenous sphere of influence. In other words, … refers to the content and context of knowledge systems driven by the values and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

- Information is there to support the community, with authority embedded in members such as Elders and Knowledge Keepers;
- Responsibility is community-based;
- Benefits accruing are community-centred;
- Storytelling focus with persons on journey to learn answers for themselves;
- Learning rooted in the environment of different lands;
- Focus on being on the land to learn;
- Focus on action;
- Practices of sustainability, equitable, peace-building; evolving and fluid.[7]

- Information is never neutral;
- Information reflects the lands on which it has arisen and there are multiple TKS', so an acceptance of multiple systems with different foci.

Fundamental Hiring Framework

Role	Knowledge system	Eligible Persons	Certifications
Indigenous-focussed	TKS	Indigenous persons with or without ALA accreditation	Recognition or recommendation from an Indigenous community; ALA-accreditation not required
not Indigenous-focussed	WKS	Persons who are ALA-accredited	ALA-accreditation
mix of the two roles	Works with both systems	Indigenous persons with ALA-accreditation	Both certifications

More questions than answers

What evaluation criteria? What other systems around hiring, renewal, promotion?

Needs to be worked out locally?

Will ALA-accredited Librarians accept that TKS are independent of WKS?

If yes, what are the implications?

Processes to verify suitability of candidates? Verification their communities, Elders, or Knowledge Keepers consider them qualified?

What do Indigenous communities want to see? Their own "libraries", "librarians", systems?

How do we find out?

Potential Outcomes

- More input and conversations on implications and strategies;
- Use feedback to inform potential changes, locally and LIS-wide;
- Use the feedback to inform a survey and/or or paper.

Gut responses? Constructive feedback? Reading suggestions? Please go here to crowdsource ideas, flesh out thoughts:

shorturl.at/otzR9