Introducing “Awareness of Indigenous Knowledge Paradigms”

IFLA Core Elements

Dr Spencer Lilley
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Summary  This short discussion paper provides an overview of how New Zealand has incorporated awareness of Māori knowledge paradigms into the library and information studies curriculum. The status and definition of indigeneity is provided and reasons for the importance of indigenous knowledge is briefly described. Finally, a list is provided that suggests some indigenous values and themes that might be incorporated into IFLA’s adoption of this element into the library and information management curriculum.

Introduction

In 2007, the New Zealand library & information profession introduced a professional registration scheme. The scheme provides a framework of professional standards of competency in the body of knowledge and ethics required for professional library and information work. This body of knowledge is based on the core elements identified in the IFLA Education and Training Section’s Guidelines for Professional Library / Information Educational Programmes. (IFLA1,2003)

and include

1. The Information Environment, Information Policy and Ethics, the History of the Field
2. Information Generation, Communication and Use
3. Assessing Information Needs and Designing Responsive Services
4. The Information Transfer Process
5. Organization, Retrieval, Preservation and Conservation of Information
6. Research, Analysis and Interpretation of Information
7. Applications of Information and Communication Technologies to Library and Information Products and Services
8. Information Resource Management and Knowledge Management
9. Management of Information Agencies
10. Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation of Outcomes of Information and Library Use

The New Zealand framework (LIANZA2, 2008) contains an additional element which recognises the value of indigenous knowledge paradigms which in the New Zealand context refers to Māori knowledge systems. This element is described as follows:

11. Awareness of indigenous knowledge paradigms, which in the New Zealand context refers to Māori.

The key features of this particular element are as follows. (A full description of the features is provided as an appendix to this report).

1 IFLA is the International Federation of Library Associations
2 LIANZA is the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa
• Understand importance, diversity and structure of Māori knowledge frameworks (mātauranga Māori)
• Show awareness of the influence that tikanga (cultural practices) and te reo Māori (Māori language) assumes in the development of Māori knowledge constructs and principles (concepts)
• Recognise the importance of kaupapa Māori (Māori research) methodologies in researching the needs of Māori clients

At the 2010 IFLA Conference in Goteborg, LIANZA and Te Rōpū Whakahau (Māori in libraries & information management Inc.) recommended that IFLA incorporate knowledge of indigenous knowledge paradigms into its core elements document. This was followed up at the 2011 Conference in San Juan. By endorsing the validity of indigenous knowledge paradigms as part of the library and information management curriculum, IFLA will be signalling that indigenous knowledge is an integral and legitimate component of the body of knowledge that library and information professionals must incorporate into the services and resources offered in their institutions.

Definitions of indigenous peoples

There is no single definition of indigenous peoples, however one of the more simplistic definitions and the one used by the International Indigenous Librarians’ Forum is “those who have become minority peoples in their place of cultural origin”. This definition however could be also be labelled as exclusive as it would exclude indigenous peoples located in many parts of the world including Asia, Africa and the Southern part of the American continent. Although the United Nations has never formally provided a definition of indigenous peoples, they have provided the following as a working definition (United Nations, 2004)

“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system.”

The introduction of indigenous knowledge paradigms into the IFLA core elements will provide library and information professionals with invaluable insights into alternative knowledge structures. Common traits of indigenous knowledge structures are that they are holistic in nature, orally focused and embedded in the natural environment. They represent an alternate view of the world which is largely based on the responsibilities of indigenous peoples to be caretakers of land and other natural resources. Although indigenous peoples account for 350 million of the world’s population, this only equates to 6% of the total population. Indigenous peoples can be found in at least 72 countries.

Demand for access to indigenous knowledge has increased dramatically over the last 20 years upon the realisation that traditional practices and remedies have health benefits in the developed world. A key part of recognising indigenous knowledge is the need to protect cultural and intellectual property rights as traditional knowledge associated with health remedies have become ‘hot property’ for large pharmaceutical companies. Knowledge about the land, sea and waterways is particularly important as the relationship between indigenous peoples and the natural environment has been on-going and continuous. This has allowed indigenous peoples to sustain, nurture and conserve the resources in a manner that acknowledges and respects the contribution the environment makes to our everyday lives.

As indigenous populations, culture, customs and languages are under constant threat of extinction, it is important that our profession increases its knowledge about the structure, content and value of indigenous knowledge so that we can assist in preserving this knowledge for future generations to come.

**Indigenous librarianship**

In 1999, the first International Indigenous Librarians’ Forum was held in Auckland, New Zealand. This was the first gathering of indigenous librarians from different nations to take place. Since this initial gathering, the Forum has met every two years in a range of indigenous nations in Sweden, Canada, United States of America, Australia, Norway and New Zealand (2009 Forum). The 2013 Forum will once again be held in the United States. Since the establishment of the Forum, each meeting has resulted in the release of documents, including, manifestos, position statements or policies. These can be viewed at [https://sites.google.com/site/indigenouslibrariansforum/outcomes](https://sites.google.com/site/indigenouslibrariansforum/outcomes)

Indigenous librarianship was given further impetus when the Indigenous Matters Special Interest Group was formed as part of IFLA’s Library Services to Multicultural Populations Section in 2009. As part of the IFLA structure, the Indigenous SIG is able to influence policy and promote indigenous library and information issues on a truly global level. One of the SIG’s strengths is its membership, which is open to anyone that supports initiatives and collaboration in library and information services for indigenous people and is therefore very inclusive. The SIG has formed taskforces to investigate critical issues for indigenous librarianship. One of the first taskforces to report back is the group that looked at developmental issues and key questions. Their report is available at [http://www.ifla.org/files/indigenous-matters/publications/task-force.pdf](http://www.ifla.org/files/indigenous-matters/publications/task-force.pdf)
Where to next?

As the concept of indigenous knowledge paradigms will be new to many IFLA members, the following example has been prepared to illustrate how it could be incorporated into the curriculum. It is followed by an explanation of how the New Zealand version has been adopted and implemented by the profession and the library information educational programmes.

This issue has been under consideration for the past two years and although the Education and Training Section has approved in principle the addition of it as an extra element, and the Professional Committee has pledged their support, there has been a need for the Section to consult other chapters, sections, caucuses and committees within the IFLA structure. It is hoped that this consultation will result in a final decision being made in 2012 or 2013.

Suggested new core element for IFLA:

Awareness of Indigenous Knowledge Paradigms

The Scope includes:

- Understanding the importance, diversity or structure of indigenous knowledge
- the influence that indigenous processes, philosophies and language is intrinsic in indigenous knowledge frameworks
- the importance of using indigenous research methodologies when investigating the information resources and services delivery needs of indigenous clients

These characteristics will be further informed by values. It is important to note that although there are some commonalities between indigenous peoples, there is also a high degree of diversity as well. Therefore, each indigenous community will have its own value and themes (expressed in their own language from their own cultural constructs). However common core values and themes across indigenous peoples include:

Heritage:

These include the prized and sacred possessions of their particular people (clan, tribe, nation) that have been passed from one generation to another and contribute to an understanding of the social and cultural origins and significance of the knowledge of these peoples.

Guardianship:

This recognises the role that indigenous people have in preserving traditional knowledge structures and cultural practices for the generations yet to come

Legitimacy:
This acknowledges the relationship between an indigenous people and the natural environment they care for. Legitimacy is recognised through continuous occupation and the common ancestry that the land and people share. In an information management context, legitimacy provides a structure for determining who can access indigenous information without compromising traditional protocols.

Innovation:

Through creativity, versatility and adaptability indigenous peoples have ensured their survival. The same principles need to be exercised by library and information agencies to ensure that indigenous people are able to access the information resources and services that meet their educational, social, cultural and information needs.

Respect

This value recognises that the beliefs, cultural practices and the information needs of indigenous peoples are understood cared for, protected and respected by library and information management agencies and their staff

Language

The role that indigenous languages have in providing integrity to knowledge structures are recognised and that library and information management agencies actively promote the use and preservation of indigenous languages in their services and resources

Appendix One

An example from New Zealand / Aotearoa

This element is incorporated into the curricula that are taught through the three institutions that provide professional qualifications in library and information studies. In addition, all professionally registered library and information professionals must revalidate their membership of this scheme every three years. As such, one of the requirements is that they show in a professional journal that they are competent in all eleven core elements of the Body of Knowledge. Each revalidation journal is then audited by a member of the Profession Registration Board to ensure that a member is compliant with all elements.

Some examples of the type of professional learning opportunities and activities that qualify for inclusion in a member’s journal follow the description of the Māori values and themes that constitute the content of the indigenous knowledge core element.
Awareness of indigenous knowledge paradigms, which in the New Zealand context refers to Māori

The Scope includes:

- Understanding the importance, diversity or structure of Māori knowledge (mātauranga Māori)
- the influence that Māori processes, philosophies and language (kaupapa, tikanga and te reo Māori) is intrinsic in Māori knowledge frameworks
- the importance of Māori research methodologies when assisting Māori clients with their information needs

Bok 11 is guided by kaupapa Māori values such as:

- Taonga (Treasure, property; prized and protected as sacred possessions of the tribe)
  Understanding the place of taonga tuku iho (the prized and sacred possessions of the tribe that are handed down from one generation to the next) in contributing to the survival of Māori as a people.

- Whakatupu mātauranga (Creating knowledge, and new knowledge)
  Affirming creative activity (commonly referred to as ‘research’) to enhance the information and recreational needs of clients

- Manaakitanga (Mana-enhancing behaviour towards each other, where mana is equated with influence, prestige, power)
  Committing to giving care and respect to clients, the organisation, and the taonga that they hold

- Te Reo Māori
  Understanding that Te Reo Māori is vital to the identity and survival of Māori as a people
  Recognising that competence in Te Reo Māori has intrinsic value to the client, organisation and staff

- Whakapapa (Tacit and explicit knowledge frameworks)
  Recognising whakapapa is the backbone of Māori society
  Recognising whakapapa represents the growth of knowledge
  Recognising all things are connected, both animate and inanimate
  Recognising collections (as in libraries) have direct links to an original source
  Recognising whakapapa is the layering towards both the future and the past

- Kaitiakitanga (Preserving, maintaining and protecting all knowledge)
  Practising at all times the ‘five-way test for eligibility to be a recipient of restricted knowledge’.
The five-way test consists of:
Receiving the information with the utmost accuracy
Storing the information with integrity beyond doubt
Retrieving the information without amendment
Applying appropriate judgement in the use of the information
Passing on the information appropriately.

• Rangatiratanga (Acknowledging the attributes of others)
  Demonstrating the ability to lead and unite people
  Demonstrating the ability to recognise the potential of others

Examples of learning and professional development opportunities

• Attending the Mātauranga Māori within New Zealand Libraries workshop – rangatiratanga, kaitiakitanga
• Using the correct pronunciation of local Māori words, e.g. names, geographical locations, iwi – te reo, rangatiratanga, whakapapa
• Identifying local marae, hapū and iwi – whakapapa, te reo, rangitiratanga
• Reading an article to understand what a Māori repository is – whakatupu mātauranga
• Reading an article about a Māori knowledge framework e.g. Te Wheke, Whare Tapa Whā - whakapapa
• Introducing bilingual signage in consultation with local iwi – te reo, kotahitanga, rangatiratanga
• Introducing a Māori name for the library – manaakitanga, rangatiratanga
• Understanding marae protocols – whakapapa, te reo, rangatiratanga
• Participating in a whakatau / pōwhiri – Manaakitanga, mihimihī, te reo
• Learning the LIANZA waiata – te reo, rangatiratanga, Manaakitanga
• Introducing your presentation with a mihi - te reo, rangatiratanga, Manaakitanga
• Using te reo on a daily basis e.g. greeting, farewell, emails, letters – te reo, Manaakitanga, rangatiratanga
• Implementing culturally appropriate protocols - rangatiratanga

References


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