Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Competencies in the Library Profession: From Theory to Practice

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Abstract:

The library profession is a mediating discipline, one that supports the research and development of multiple disciplines and that of the public good. Advances in technology, rapidly shifting demographics and other dynamics have resulted in our profession working to readily adapt to these challenging changes. Despite our efforts to date, minimal, the profession is behind in its efforts to address the foundational issues of racism and disparities in LIS research in and library services for multicultural communities. The incorporation of cultural competency standards throughout the field of library and information science would improve its climate for diversity, address the lack of diversity, and enhance retention as well as improve its service outcomes.

Key words: Cultural Competency, Diversity, LIS, Indigenous Knowledge, Multiculturalism

The concept of Indigenous Knowledge serves as a framework to illustrate how broadly relevant and easily the process of cultural competencies development can be adapted for integration throughout the profession. Additionally, a case study highlighting the University of Arizona (U of A) Library's experience with employing cultural competencies is offered as a basis for lessons learned and recommendations. The case illustrates how the U of A Library integrated cultural competencies into its practices as a means to improve recruitment and retention with the outcomes of improved relationship

development on campus and beyond, and stronger, more culturally relevant collections, services and user satisfaction.

Library and Information Science Profession and Cultural Diversity

As the demographics throughout the world shift dramatically with minority populations soon to be the majority in many locales, libraries must consider the implications of maintaining a library workforce that is still mostly reflective of the dominant culture, whatever that may be in a given setting. In fact, the concept of cultural diversity must extend beyond that of ethnicity to encompass issues of persons with disabilities, the socioeconomically and geographically disadvantaged, age diversity, and gay, lesbian bisexual, transgendered individuals, as well as other diversities that often intersect with one another in complex and meaningful ways.

U.S. census data projects that minorities who currently comprise one-third of the population will hold the majority by mid-century. Accordingly, the recent *ALA Diversity Counts* (2012) report found that despite intensive efforts, we have only increased the minority librarian workforce by a little over 1% in the last 10 years. While we are able to recruit a modest number of diverse students into library school programs and eventually into libraries, these numbers are not reflective U.S. demographics and the communities that libraries serve. There is no guarantee that once these minority students complete their professional preparation, and go through the recruitment and hiring processes that they will persist into the profession and thrive. The data suggests that we are losing almost as many minority librarians as we recruit into the profession through retirements and premature professional departure – a revolving door, which suggests organizational climate concerns (Hall, 2006). Libraries can only hire those who show up in the pools; this requires increased emphasis by LIS programs to diversify their student body. While it is desirable to ensure that the demographics within the profession are reflective of our communities, the shift in our professional practices needs to be swift and dramatic. Developing the LIS profession to be culturally competent will result in the entire LIS ecosystem sharing responsibility for the improvement of the climate for diversity.

Table 1.0 depicts racial demographics from the most recent U.S. Census, LIS Program Student Distribution, and Employed Librarians and Library Assistants.

Table 1.0

Race/ Ethnicity	US Demographics [1] 2010 - In millions*		US Demographics Projected - 2050 *		US Programs Student Enrollment [2] 2009	Librarians [3]		Library Assistants [3]	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	2000	2010	2000	2010
White (Non-Hispanic)	196.8	64%	203.3	45%	17,130	97,827	104,392	107,989	89,993
African American	38.9	13%	56.9	13%	1,384	5,244	6,160	13,658	11,419
American Indians/ Alaskan Natives	2.9	1%	5.6	1%	135	310	185	720	850
Asian/Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian	15.2	5%	34.4	8%	177	3,516	3,260	7,276	6,745
Two or more races	9.1	3%	15.2	4%		923	1,008	2,239	2,738
Hispanic	50.4	16%	132.8	29%	1,402	2,137	3,661	9,683	11,023

[1] 2010 United States Census
[2] 2010 Association for Library and Information Science Education. (2010). *Library and Information Science Education Statistics Report*
[3] 2010 American Library Association, *Diversity Counts*

This data also highlights that there is a potential pool of LIS program applicants that resides in the set of Library assistants who are far more racially diverse than their librarian counterparts. Developing pathways for this group to consider librarianship as a career should be a mutual goal of LIS program and libraries.

Librarians, LIS programs and information professionals must all change our practices to be responsive and effective to the world around us or we will no longer be considered a relevant profession by individuals we seek to recruit to the profession or by the communities with which we seek to work.

Cultural Competencies

> Cultural competencies are…"The ability to recognize the significance of culture in one's own life and in the lives of others and to come to know and respect diverse cultural backgrounds and characteristics through interaction with individuals from diverse linguistic, culture, and socioeconomic groups; and to fully integrate the culture of diverse groups into services, work, and institutions in order to enhance the lives of both those being served by the library profession and those engaged in service." (Overall, 2009, p. 189)

Increasingly, organizations are adopting competency-based measures to improve their hiring standards and training methodologies as well as their retention rates. While cultural competencies have been incorporated into the medical disciplines and the fields of Psychology and Social Work, they have been adopted by other disciplines and introduced more recently into the LIS profession. The utilization of cultural competencies by other service-related professions and disciplines is intended to improve the organizational climate and culture in a variety of settings, including delivering culturally relevant services for diverse communities.

Several articles on cultural or diversity competencies have been published in library literature over the last few years (Andrade & Rivera 2011; Dubois & Rothman, 2004; Kumasi & Hill, 2011, Kumasi & Hill, 2009; Helton, 2010; Mestre, 2010; Montiel-Overall, 2009). Some libraries have incorporated work competencies into their practice and even developed their own cultural diversity competencies. To successfully improve an organization's culture for diversity, it is essential that an institution is systematic in its adoption of these competencies. By the same token this requires a personal commitment on the part of students, faculty, and staff. "Acquiring this competence is a continuing and intentional process. This process begins with a rudimentary understanding of the concept of diversity competence. From there, a person needs to actively acknowledge the need to refine one's behavior to contribute to a climate supportive of diversity and then identify the means by which to do this." (Andrade & Rivera, 2011, p. 699)

In 2012, the Racial and Ethnic Diversity Committee of the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) released the document, _Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries_ based on the 2001 National Association of Social Workers _Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice_ which defines cultural competencies as:

> A congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that enable a person or group to work effectively in cross-cultural situations; the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each. (National Association of Social Workers, 2001, p. 12)

These standards, though geared toward academic and research libraries, are comprehensive and can serve as a basis for academic standards in LIS programs and as a programmatic foundation for all libraries. Adoption of these standards by all institutions choosing to implement cultural competencies in their practice would allow for critical analysis and adaptation to the varied environments in which they are used. Regular review of the utilization of these competencies would ensure continuous improvement of these competencies.

Indigenous Knowledge

For the purpose of this paper the term "indigenous" is defined by Te Ropu Whakahau (the professional association for Māori who work in libraries, archives and information services) for the First International Indigenous Librarians' Forum in Auckland in 1999 as "Those who have become minority peoples in their places of cultural origin" (Roy, 2011, p. 60).   The definition recognizes that some indigenous peoples such as Black Africans and one day the Māori, are in the demographic majority. The term "Indigenous Knowledge is another critical concept, and, for this context, is based on the definition used by the World Health Organization within a community development framework and defined as "the local knowledge – knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society… It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities." (Warren, 1991, p.1)

Sense-making, community narratives, and community development practices are often inextricably tied to cultural contexts and cultural identities. As a profession, we have a pressing need to insure our new and existing professionals reflect the cultural knowledge and experiences of those we serve in order to insure responsive and relevant collections, services and programs. When fully realized, having a culturally competent library staff results in excellent relationships between the library and community stakeholders, improved user satisfaction, and provides a dynamic and responsive work environment for library staff as well (Lowry & Hanges, 2009).

As we consider indigenous knowledge, it is important to remember that indigenous peoples are not part of the past but are part of living, evolving and vibrant communities. Their knowledge resides in many formats -- spoken word, physical artifacts, and other formats beyond print, electronic, and audiovisual. Within libraries, museums, and archives, the concept of indigenous knowledge traditionally has been considered primarily in the context of intellectual property including documents and other artifacts and preservation and perpetuation of language and culture. While this is one construct in which to consider indigenous knowledge, there are others that are equally, if not more critical to consider: those of knowledge and making meaning, difference and, more importantly, similarities.   Indigenous cultures are not homogenous--each is unique, thus the very definition of diversity. Ensuring that LIS curricula and libraries are meeting cultural diversity standards will assist burgeoning librarians and practicing professionals to develop a world view that interconnects with the concepts of indigenous knowledge and encompasses all variables of cultural diversity.

The Indigenous Matters Special Interest Group of IFLA has developed a set of goals to "affirm the knowledge & values of indigenous peoples in the age of Information." These goals are easily aligned to the ACRL cultural competency standards and exemplify the adaptability of these standards to be applied broadly. Table 2.0 illustrates the translation of the Forum goals to the Cultural Competency standards.

Table 2.0

Indigenous Matters (SIG) Forum Goals [1]	ACRL Cultural Competency Standard
1. The indigenous librarians of this forum recognize the importance of language in relation to cultural identify and will inspire progress within our professions, whilst advocating for self determination and control of indigenous knowledge.	Standard 1. Cultural Awareness of Self & Others Standard 6. Language Diversity
2. This forum proposes that international guidelines and protocols be developed to guide libraries, archives and other information providers to assure that culturally responsible practices for indigenous people are implemented in their environment, services, programme, collections and staffing.	Standard 2. Cross-cultural knowledge & skills Standard 3. Organizational & professional values Standard 4. Development of collections, programs, & services Standard 5. Service delivery Standard 7. Workforce diversity Standard 8. Organizational dynamics Standard 9. Cross-cultural leadership
3. We as indigenous librarians seek to form alliances with other international indigenous bodies committed to nurturing indigenous youth.	Standard 2. Cross-cultural knowledge & skills Standard 8. Organizational dynamics
4. We as indigenous librarians affirm our commitment to utilize our collective skills, values, and expertise in both cultural and professional spheres to strengthen indigenous youth.	Standard 5. Service delivery Standard 9. Cross-cultural leadership Standard 10. Professional education & continuous learning
5. As indigenous librarians, we state that the use of intellectual and cultural property in any medium, especially in light of the global instantaneous impact of the electronic environment, without the approval of all appropriate indigenous authorities is unacceptable.	Standard 2. Cross-cultural knowledge & skills Standard 3. Organizational & professional values Standard 4. Development of collections, programs, & services Standard 9. Cross-cultural leadership Standard 11. Research

[1] International Indigenous Librarians Forum (2001)

Likewise, it is possible to adapt these (or other) cultural competencies within libraries and LIS programs depending upon particular local, regional or national needs.

CULTURAL COMPETENCIES IN LIS PROGRAMS
LIS programs "must accept responsibility for populating the profession with a new generation of culturally competent librarians" (Wheeler, 2005, p. 184).

Since the early 1980's, the concept of multiculturalism in LIS curricula has been a concern. Despite the articulated need to diversify the academy, there has not been a substantial change in LIS curriculum or practice when it comes to this topic. Yet the world is increasingly more complex and calls for renewed vigor in addressing the homogenous nature of LIS programs around the world. This calls for a diversification of LIS graduate and doctoral student and faculty bodies through creative and holistic recruitment, admissions, and retention programs that include modifying the curriculum by shifting the dominant discourse to one that encompass all experiences (Kumasi & Hill, 2013) To that end, the U.S. Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) released a *Statement on Diversity* (2012) that states its commitment to "the active recruitment and equitable and full participation of members of all backgrounds, the promotion of diversity and all its benefits in library and information science education, research and service by its personal and institutional members and their full participation in the profession."

As we contemplate library practice, it is critical to recognize and employ a variety of micropractices that can contribute to a positive organizational climate for diversity at the grassroots level, as well as lead to more culturally relevant services and collections for our communities. Some LIS programs are helping to develop the skills of contextual inquiry in their students. This practice is similar to indigenous knowledge systems in that it incorporates local knowledge in structural or organizational assessment and analysis and utilizes it as a basis for potential interventions/solutions/strategies. Using contextual inquiry as a basis for research and student engagement would strengthen both the theoretical and foundational elements of any LIS program by fostering authentic interactions between people, and creating opportunities for service learning and the sharing of cultural practices and contexts. Jaeger (et al.) explain how a greater focus on diversity-related research has multiple benefits, "There are several important reasons to bring more focus to ongoing research about diversity, inclusion, and underrepresentation in LIS, as well as to encourage more work in this area. Consistent exposure to this area of research stands as a key means through which students in LIS programs can become ready to provide inclusive information services to the wide range of patrons they will encounter in their professional lives." (Jaeger et al., 2010, p. 179)

As persons consider their professional opportunities, they are more apt to choose a profession that reflects and values the issues with which they identify. LIS programs that incorporate cultural competency standards into the curricula and place an emphasis on research in areas of diversity and inclusion will foster the diversification of its LIS student body, LIS faculty, and subsequently in professional librarians and administrators.

Jaeger and Franklin (2007) describe this process as a "virtuous cycle" where "…recruiting is tied to representation among professionals and among LIS faculty, and the presence of diversity in the curriculum is related to the diversity of the faculty, while the diversity of the faculty is dependent on the diversity of doctoral students" (p. 21) This dynamic results in an organizational environment that is robust and fosters inquiry, where all persons are part of the scholarly process, and where professionals are trained to be responsive front-line experts able to eloquently and expertly assist their constituencies to find, access, and utilize information.

Cultural Competencies in Libraries

The importance of a culturally competent workforce cannot be emphasized enough. As Dewey and Keally (2008) wrote,

> The twenty-first century library must incorporate new methods of communication, collaboration, access to scholarship, and learning methodologies recognizing that understanding and advancing diversity in the broadest sense is critical to an individual's success throughout their life. Thus, recruitment of the brightest and most talented people to the ranks of academic librarianship is critical if we are to fulfill our mission in the current and future global society (p. 634).

This holds true for every kind of library, librarians and library staff, who are on the frontlines making an ever increasing mass of information available in multiple formats, to meet diverse user needs. One must wonder, how do we meet these challenges, how do we develop culturally competent organizations and individuals? The process does not begin or end in LIS programs; library organizations have an equal responsibility to continue this development.

Integrating Cultural Competency Standards into an organization – an example

The University of Arizona (U of A), located in Tucson, Arizona in the United States, is a Research I institution that has had record-breaking enrollment of minority students, primarily Hispanic/Latino, over the last five years. Like most Research I institutions, the faculty and administration composition do not reflect these demographics. The U of A Library works very closely with these culturally diverse students by providing culturally relevant programs and services in the library and on campus in locations such as the student cultural centers and other similar venues. The Library also collaborates with schools and colleges on campus to support the needs of the university. One example is a partnership with the School of Information and Research Library Services (SIRLS) to support the Knowledge River Program which is designed to recruit and train Native Americans and Latinos for a career in librarianship. Additionally, the U of A Library has invested in creating an organizational climate for diversity recognizing that this is not just an "altruistic value but is grounded in business practice as a means to meet customer needs." (Stoffle & Cullier, 2011, p. 136)

In 2003, the UA Library, responded to a mandate from the UA administration to all of the campus to implement climate assessments. The initiative entitled the UA Millennium Project was intended to enhance the development of an institutional culture "that fosters productivity, creativity, and academic excellence…." (University of Arizona, 2000, p.1). In response, the Library Dean created a committee, the Millennium Review Oversight Committee (MROC - the library's diversity committee) to develop and implement a climate survey and then assess and develop ways to improve the culture. The same survey was implemented again in 2007 along with a new climate assessment tool created by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) ClimateQUAL to gauge the Library's organizational culture. While overall the responses did not indicate issues of critical concern, but findings did show that there were low scores in two key areas: interpersonal justice and work unit conflict. Additionally, groups of individuals who did not associate themselves with the dominant culture (e.g. underrepresented minorities, religious minorities, and LGBT staff) indicated unsatisfactory responses to areas related to equitable application of procedures, interpersonal relations, and others. Based on the survey results, the MROC began a root-cause analysis of the negative survey responses and made recommendations for resolving the problems or perceptions. The suggestions were adopted and they ranged from working to improve communications between leadership and staff, making policies and procedures easily accessible and understandable and training senior management on library policy application to improve organizational equity, and ongoing training on diversity. The MROC also began a review of the Library's recruitment and retention policies in light of survey responses and changes in employment laws that stemmed from a recent court ruling against the use of race in recruitment and employment practices.

For several years the UA Library had been utilizing defined competencies as a basis for recruitment and retention of its workforce. Competencies are "characteristics that individuals have and use in appropriate, consistent ways in order to achieve desired performance. These characteristics include knowledge, skills, aspects of self-image, social motives, traits, throughout patterns, mind-sets, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Dubois and Rothwell, 2004, p. 16). After reviewing of the diversity competencies, MROC determined they needed to be better defined and include more detailed behavioral descriptions. [Note: The ACRL Cultural competencies had not yet been developed.] The committee revised the diversity competencies and developed both entry and mastery level competencies. Entry level diversity competencies were ones that all individuals throughout the organization should possess or exhibit the capacity to acquire. Mastery level diversity competencies were requirements for supervisors/managers to enable them to develop staff and successfully work and manage a diverse group of library employees. As MROC developed these competencies they recognized the interrelationship they had with other competency categories such as customer service, interpersonal skills, and collaboration.

Once the competencies were defined, the committee recommended to the Library Human Resources (LHR) department that the Library's definition of diversity and the competencies be integrated into the recruitment and hiring process. Collaborating with

the LHR department, the diversity definition was incorporated into all position postings and relevant diversity competencies were included in the position posting's list of preferred qualifications list ensuring that they were near the top of the list to emphasize importance. Sample qualifications include:

- The ability to integrate diverse and different viewpoints into problem solving and decision making; flexibility and adaptability to accommodate different needs;
- Demonstrated capability to create and maintain an environment where diverse colleagues feel safe, listened to and are treated fairly and equally in relationships and developing policy and process; and,
- The ability to actively seek to understand the perspectives of others and acknowledges the differences, complexities and opportunities in those backgrounds, cultures, values, and viewpoints even when he/she is not familiar or disagrees with them.

Incorporating competencies into the position descriptions was critical because the UA Library utilizes the posting criteria as a basis for candidate review and hiring decision-making. The next step was to develop candidate interview questions and questions for candidates' references to ascertain applicant's attitudes, behavior, and experience with diversity. A separate set of questions was developed for both classified staff and librarian searches and were created to be customized by the interviewers/search teams. Because of the subjective nature to the questions and related competencies an assessment tool that provided competency rubrics was also developed to help interviewers normalize their understanding of the candidates' competencies in this area. Once all of these tools were created, MROC developed guidelines for their use by LHR personnel and interviewers/ selection committees. Additionally, the LHR provided training on how to use these tools in their positions hiring workshops.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

To assist staff in developing the knowledge, skills, and abilities to foster a climate for diversity, the MROC created a workshop series designed to address the identified gaps based on the climate assessment analysis and related gaps in the existing cultural competencies. Library administration strongly encouraged staff to attend the workshops which resulted in over 50 percent staff attendance.. The objectives of the series were:

- To promote diversity competencies;
- To increase the staff's diversity awareness through continuous learning and dialog;
- Awareness of diversity issues and possible solutions; and
- Knowledge and tools to overcome issues that result in and from differences.

Each workshop was aligned with the relevant cultural competencies standard it was designed to address. Post-surveys were given to attendees to gauge their learning, and respondents indicated that the workshop(s), indeed, helped to develop them to develop competency with diversity. The series of workshops prompted conversations among staff about diversity.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW, MERIT AND PROMOTION PROCESSES

The UA Library annually engages in organizational strategic planning. Related to this, faculty and staff annually engage in goal setting and related performance assessment that inform the employee's merit and promotion. As a means to integrate the competencies into daily practice, MROC recommended that the diversity competencies be included in the performance assessment and the promotion process. This recommendation was not accepted because the competencies model was still under development. However, supervisors were asked to encourage their staff to consider including the goal of acquiring relevant/appropriate diversity competencies in their annual learning goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ACRL Cultural Competency Standards are comprehensive and can be easily be used as a basis for the development of a culturally competent organization. To build a foundation for this kind of work an institution must consider the following:
- Organizational leadership must initiate the process and identify the support (funding, staff, etc.) needed to accomplish the work
- Develop a definition of diversity and ensure that this value is reflected in the organization's mission and vision.
- Assess the organizational climate. In order to build trust in this process, it is very important that the assessment data be analyzed and interventions to address the issues raised are implemented in a timely fashion. There are a number of climate assessment tools available.
- Each individual must make a personal commitment to acquire cultural competencies appropriate to their own level of understanding and, also, what is needed within their organization.
- A staff training program that is aligned to the acquisition of cultural competencies is necessary to provide staff with reliable, high quality tools to learn how to be culturally responsive in their daily activities.

Within LIS Programs:
- Research and curricula should include diversity and related issues.
- Integration of the standards would be more successful if they were linked to promotion and tenure processes. This will require goal setting and the ability of the supervisor to assess the adoption and application of the diversity competencies in the employee's practice. To reduce subjectivity of this assessment a set of rubrics must be agreed upon.

CONCLUSION

> "…the application of diversity is…a central framework of twenty-first century library and information science practice. The very existence of libraries rests on our ability to create institutions and resource centers where would-be users see their information needs and themselves reflected." (Davis, Hall; 2007, pgs. 18-19)

Creating organizations that are diversity competent is not an altruistic wish but rather a business strategy to ensure our workforce reflects, represents and is responsive to the communities with whom we collaborate and serve.   This goal may seem daunting but can be less so through the implementation of expert tools, such as the Association of College and Research Libraries' Cultural Competency Standards.

Ally Krebs (2012), an Indigenous library scholar described the process needed to address a complicated situation related to the issues of Indigenous information practices, policies and procedures for accessing their knowledge that resides outside their communities. This, also, aptly describes what is necessary for our profession to become culturally competent. She explained that "…it will take time, respect, and patience from both sides of the divide. It will take open hearts and minds ready to search for win/win solutions located potentially outside the comfort zones of existing practice. It will take conversation, lots of it. It will take compromise, perhaps from those who have never needed to before. It will take a will toward consensus." (p. 189)

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