

Indigenous Literacy through Indigenous Cultural Heritage Materials and Resources

Cecilia L. Salvatore

Associate Professor, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois, United States

csalvatore@dom.edu



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Abstract:

Indigenous cultural heritage materials and resources can contribute to the development of information literacy, including new literacies, in a community. Indigenous materials and resources can play a significant role in building cooperation between the library and the community. This paper discusses ways that libraries and archives can develop local collections and special collections through indigenous cultural heritage materials and resources and how these collections can then be used by these libraries to engage their local community and develop information literacy. It describes the importance of appreciating diverse concepts of “collections” and indigenous cultural heritage; implementing diverse ways that indigenous cultural heritage resources can be documented and organized by librarians and indigenous experts in a collaborative fashion; understanding methods of accessing, displaying, and sharing indigenous resources and information; implementing strategies for preservation; and developing programming and increasing the appreciation of indigeneity by library staff and administration, as well as the general community. Examples are primarily drawn from concepts, processes, and artifacts of indigenous communities in the Pacific, such as the Chamorro community of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the various communities of the Federated States of Micronesia. Other examples are drawn from guidelines and protocols related to the Native Americans.

Keywords: Indigenous cultural heritage, CNMI, Micronesia, Native Americans, information literacy, new literacies

Introduction

Beyond developing library collections that benefit the educational, recreational, and informational needs of their communities, librarians are developing and maintaining special collections and local history or local studies collections and trying to maintain their institution's sustainability. For instance, academic librarians use their special collections for outreach, and public librarians use local studies collections and programs to foster community pride.¹ Indigenous cultural heritage materials and resources, as part of special collections and local studies and local history collections, can contribute to the development of information literacy, including new literacies, in a community. This paper discusses approaches to understanding the role of indigenous cultural heritage materials and resources in libraries, as well as archives, and in turn developing them to engage the local community and contribute to information literacy and new literacies. Approaches include appreciating diverse concepts of "collections" and indigenous cultural heritage; implementing diverse ways that indigenous cultural heritage resources can be documented and organized by librarians and indigenous experts in a collaborative fashion; understanding methods of accessing, displaying, and sharing indigenous resources and information; implementing strategies for preservation; and developing programming and increasing the appreciation of indigeneity by library staff and administration, as well as the general community. Indigenous materials and resources and cultural memory can play a significant role in building cooperation between the library and the community. Examples are drawn primarily from concepts, processes, and artifacts of indigenous communities in the Pacific Islands, such as the Chamorro community in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and the various communities of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Other examples are drawn from guidelines and protocols related to the Native Americans.

The CNMI and the FSM are widely scattered islands in the Pacific island group of Oceania. They are situated east of the Philippines and west of Hawaii. The Chamorro community is indigenous to Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). This paper focuses on the Chamorro community of the CNMI, a group of 14 islands with Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, the main islands. Ninety percent of the population resides on Saipan. Some of the islands are uninhabited. The islands had been ruled by Spain before World War I when the islands were awarded to Japan by the League of Nations. At the end of World War II, they (along with other islands in Micronesia, including the Caroline Islands) became territories of the United States. In 1978, they elected to become a United States commonwealth.²

The FSM are four island groups that along with the Palau island group, were formerly part of the Caroline Islands (Palau separated from the island groups when it chose independence from the United States, rather than a status of free association with the United States which the islands of the FSM chose). The Compact of Free Association with the United States, which was amended and renewed in 2004. The FSM is comprised of the island groups of Pohnpei, Chuuk, Kosrae, and Yap.³

¹ Harris, Valerie A., & Ann C. Weller. "Use of Special Collections as an Opportunity for Outreach in the Academic Library." *Journal of Library Administration* 52, ¾ (Apr-June 2012): 294-303; Bateman, Shirley. "Innovation in local studies collections and programs: how Melbourne Library Services is fostering community pride." *APLIS* 25 (March 2012): 12-18.

² *CIA World Fact Book*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cq.html>; Farrell, Don A. *History of the Northern Mariana Islands*. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Public School System, 1991.

³ *CIA World Fact Book*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/fm.html>

Special collections, local studies collections, local history collections

As academic library budgets, particularly budgets for books and materials, are dwindling, and librarians and library administrators are harvesting the benefit of sharing their resources as a consortium, special collections have become resources that give distinction to an individual academic library and differentiates it from other libraries. In a special report by OCLC, “special collections” is defined as “library and archival materials in any format (e.g., rare books, manuscripts, photographs, institutional archives) that are generally characterized by their artifactual or monetary value, physical format, uniqueness or rarity, and/or an institutional commitment to long-term preservation and access.”⁴

Public libraries are also looking at special collections, but many are primarily looking at local history and local studies collections. Small public libraries are not likely to have rare books and manuscripts. In addition, developing local history and local studies collections is naturally inherent to public libraries which work more with their surrounding diverse community. In Camden, NSW, for example, through the partnership of the Camden Library, Camden Museum, and the Camden Area Family History Society, a local studies room and an adjoining room for the Camden Area Family History Society, were added to the library with the goal of strengthening community identity and place.⁵ At the London Public Library in London, Ontario, Canada, the genealogical collection as well as the local history collection were developed and expanded.⁶

As indigenous communities, such as those in the Pacific Islands, tend to have had a dominant oral tradition, it is unlikely that they have rare books or manuscripts, especially rare books and manuscripts with monetary value. Indigenous communities, however, have resources that are tangible and intangible and are valuable for their unique contribution to cultural memory. More central to this paper, however, they are useful in the development of information literacy and new literacies, as I will discuss later.

Information literacy; new literacies

As defined by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in the United States, information literacy, broadly defined, is the set of abilities that are required for individuals to “recognize when information is needed and to have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.”⁷ Advancing information technology has fueled an information-intense environment in which there is great proliferation of information and of information that is unfiltered and unmediated. Individuals are able to access much information on their own. More than that, individuals are able to create data that turn into information quickly and easily and they are able to give wide access to that information. Individuals must be able to retrieve and evaluate information that is reliable and authentic. They must be able to understand ethical, privacy and confidentiality, and copyright

⁴ Dooley, Jackie M. and Katherine Luce. *Taking our pulse: The OCLC Research survey of Special collections and archives*. <http://www.oclc.org/research/publications/library/2010/2010-11.pdf>

⁵ Oliver, Jo. “A practical partnership: library, museum and family history society cooperation in Camden NSW.” *Aplis* 24, 4 (December 2011): 167-171.

⁶ McClelland, Arthur G.W. “Routes to Roots: Acquiring Genealogical and Local History Materials in a Large Canadian Public Library.” *The Acquisition Librarian* 31/32 (2004): 67-76.

⁷ American Library Association. *Presidential Committee on Information Literacy. Final Report*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1989).

issues that come with the information they access. And they must be able to understand what happens to the information they create and disseminate.

Librarians have been at the forefront of developing information literacy in individuals and communities in the new information environment. They see teaching information literacy as teaching the individual to become equipped in searching and using information on his or her own time. In 2000, the ACRL adopted the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, which “provides a framework for assessing the information literate individuals.”⁸ In February 2015, it filed the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, which focused on “interconnected core concepts, with flexible options for implementation, rather than on a set of standards, learning outcomes, or any prescriptive enumeration skills.”⁹

To be sure, advancing information technology has fueled more than the need for information literacy; it has also fueled the need for new literacies, such as visual literacy, digital literacy, and new media literacy. These new literacies require skills that enable an individual to understand the broad implications of visual information, digital information, and information that is derived from new media. Thus, if a librarian wishes to participate in the development of visual literacy, for example, he or she must understand the concepts, principles, and theories that shed light on how visual information or material is accessed, analyzed, used, and reused. Other literacies include transliteracy, metaliteracy, and multimodal literacy. For the purposes of this paper, however, we will not expand into these latter areas. What is central to the discussion in this paper is that indigenous resources and collections have a fruitful role in the development of literacy and new literacies in various communities.

Indigenous Cultural Heritage and the Library

Appreciating diverse concepts of “collections” and indigenous cultural heritage

The diversity of indigenous cultural heritage provides various opportunities for librarians to develop information literacy tools, programming, and services. It is important to point out that librarians must look at this diversity and hence think outside of the mainstream view of library collections and materials. To be sure, these resources are more than the rare books and manuscripts found in an academic special collection; they are more than the genealogical collection or the “history” collection found in a public library. They are materials that are, in a very real sense, deeply ingrained in the culture and cultural heritage of the community. Indigenous cultural heritage resources and collections are not just tangible; they are also intangible.

⁸ ACRL. *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*.
<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency#ildef>

⁹ ACRL. *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*.
<http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>

In *The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO cites seven forms of intangible cultural heritage. They are: 1) oral traditions, 2) performing arts, 3) social practices, 4) rituals, 5) festive events, 6) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and 7) traditional craftsmanship knowledge and techniques as forms of intangible cultural heritage.¹⁰ In the CNMI, the oral tradition of using a *techa* (loosely translated from the Chamorro language as the person who leads the prayers in the rosary or, the *lisayo*) qualifies as intangible cultural heritage. It is intangible because even though the *techa* is reciting a prayer that has been written down and is presumably recited by other *techas*, its impact emerges from the process and activity of reciting, and the disposition of the reciter while reciting. It is

“...the style of prayerful recitation, which is often characterized by high-pitched nasal, virtually monotonous vocalizations, and a fairly rapid but steady pace that the congregation must follow in order to respond appropriately. What is heard is almost musical interchange between the *techa* and the congregation as she solemnly leads the prayers phrase by phrase, and the people reply in turn. A skilled *techa* is able to keep this rhythm while successfully directing the others through a meaningful experience of prayer.”¹¹

As part of my dissertation research, I conducted an ethnographic study of the Chamorro community, focusing on discourse. I found that the *techa*'s inclination to direct a meaningful experience of prayer through the rapid and strong recitation of the rosary was not tangible. When I articulated to an elder member of the community that the *techa* was reciting the rosary very rapidly and that her “call” was overlapping the “response” from the participants, she replied, “oh, but it is good that she is fast.”¹² Not everyone can be classified as a *techa*. One has to gain acceptance as one through an unarticulated process of socialization.

In the FSM, the indigenous celestial navigation skills which rely on the star paths, reference and phantom islands, etc., and which are handed down from generation to generation through apprenticeships are “knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe” and are intangible cultural heritage that must be safeguarded. These skills have bemused and have been studied by various scholars. The cognition scholar, Edwin Hutchins describes Micronesian navigation as follows: “For every course from one island to another, a third island (over the horizon and out of sight of the first two) is taken as a reference for the expression of the distance traveled...this system of expressing distance in terms of the changing bearing of a reference island is called *etak*.”¹³ In the Micronesian navigation system, “there are no universal units of direction, position, distance, or rate, no analog-to-digital conversions, and no digital computations. Instead, there are many special-purpose units and an elegant way of ‘seeing’ the world in which internal structure is superimposed on external structure to compose a computational image device. By constructing this image, the Micronesian navigator performs navigation computations in his ‘mind’s eye’.”¹⁴

¹⁰ UNESCO. *The Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*.
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/santiago/culture/intangible-heritage/convention-intangible-cultural-heritage/>

¹¹ Tolentino, Dominica. “Techa: Traditional Prayer Leader.” In *Guampedia*.
<http://www.guampedia.com/techa-traditional-prayer-leader/>

¹² Salvatore, Cecilia. *Community, Institution, and Identity in the Chamorro Speech Community: An Ethnographic Study of How They Shape Information-seeking Discourse in the Library*. Unpublished dissertation. 2000.

¹³ Hutchins, Edwin. *Cognition in the Wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996. P. 70.

¹⁴ Hutchins, P 93.

In addition to the seven intangible cultural heritage designated by UNESCO, other indigenous cultural heritage include what I refer to as cultural components. At the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University, I developed a class titled, *Cultural Heritage Resources and Services*, in which I discuss various cultural heritage components that I believe professionals working in library and cultural institutions should pay more attention to. I developed these cultural heritage components based on my analyses of the literature on cultural heritage, the discourse on the management of cultural heritage resources, and my own work assessing the state of cultural heritage resources in the Chamorro community of the CNMI as part of the Institute of Museum and Library Services' "Connecting to Collections" Planning Grant Program.¹⁵ These components include: *Rituals; Foodways; Performance, music, and dance; Art; Storytelling; Language; Festivals; Land, space, landscape (including memorials); Folklore; and Folklife*

All these components, in some form or another, comprise the cultural heritage of a community. They also comprise the cultural heritage of indigenous communities. And when librarians recognize and appreciate them, they recognize and appreciate the diverse nature, form, and structure of cultural heritage and the diverse opportunities for documentation, organization, access provision, and displaying, exhibiting, and sharing of information that would be used for developing information literacy. These components also provide opportunities for development of diverse programming and diverse preservation strategies.

Diverse and collaborative ways of documenting and organizing indigenous cultural heritage resources

As librarians, we are used to managing and providing access to tangible resources – books and manuscripts, journals, serials, film, audio recordings, etc. And with advancing information technology we now work with websites, blogs, and similar resources. As stated earlier, indigenous communities tend to have a dominant oral tradition. Some indigenous cultural heritage, therefore, are not represented in published, tangible form. This provides an opportunity for librarians to be creative in their collaboration with indigenous communities to document and organize their cultural heritage and organize them.

In the United States, guidelines and standards for managing indigenous cultural heritage materials and collections include *NAGPRA* or *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act*. *NAGPRA* provides legal guidelines for the "treatment, repatriation, and disposition of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony, referred to collectively in the statutes as cultural items, with which they can show a relationship of lineal descent or cultural affiliation."¹⁶ As the CNMI is a commonwealth of the United States, it, too, follows *NAGPRA* guidelines.

Another guideline is the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, which were developed by a group of librarians, archivists, museum curators, researchers, scholars, Native American elders, etc.¹⁷ While it failed to gain the endorsement of the American Library Association and the Society of American Archivists, it lists ways that indigenous communities want their archival materials to be treated. For example, it stresses the

¹⁵ As part of the federally-funded (U.S.) C2C Planning Grant awarded to the CNMI in 2010, I provided my consulting services to the CNMI and assessed the state of the cultural heritage resources on these islands.

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Interior. National Park Service. *National NAGPRA*. <http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/>

¹⁷ *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*. <http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>

importance of building relationships of mutual respect, so that when librarians and archivists document Native American heritage, they understand that “some documentary collections may need to be kept together based on content, rather than segregated by format as often occurs in archival facilities.” It asks librarians to respect cultural norms related to culturally-sensitive materials. Both *NAGPRA* and the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* provide a framework for developing information literacy. To be sure, they make explicit the ethical and cultural issues related to information on and about a culture.

In my *Cultural Heritage Resources and Services* class, students learn about community assessment in terms of cultural heritage. Along with looking at existing data, students learn about conducting their own primary assessment through an ethnographic study of the community, paying attention not just to the *etic* (views and perceptions of the researcher), but to the *emic* (views and perceptions of the person or community being studied), as well. They pay attention to the *emic* and *etic* in how culture is illustrated, demonstrated, and reified in the cultural heritage components discussed earlier. Through community assessments in terms of cultural heritage (and assessing communities in their natural settings), the students are able to identify what else in the community, or in the indigenous community, needs to be documented, and they do this making sure that they do not overlook the various cultural heritage components listed earlier.

The cultural heritage components of land and space, foodways, etc. can be made explicit in creative diverse and multimedia formats. Thus, documenting them provides an opportunity for the development of new literacies. They present opportunities for individuals to use diverse tools and media technology to document cultural heritage.

A tool that my students have worked with in the *Cultural Heritage Resources and Services* class is *HistoryPin*.¹⁸ Through this tool, students can map events, buildings, history, etc. on an online map with archival images, recordings, etc. What’s more, a member of an indigenous community can add further, rich information by providing his or story regarding the events, building, history, etc., which had not been previously recorded. Later, this map can be made available to users who, with a click on a “pin” on the map, view an image, listen to a recording, etc.

Understanding methods of accessing, displaying, and sharing indigenous resources and information

As noted earlier, the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* describes how Native American archival materials should be treated and handled, particularly by librarians and archivists. It suggests the need to “consult with culturally affiliated community representatives to identify those materials that are culturally sensitive and develop procedures for access to and use of those resources” and emphasizes that “for Native American communities the public release of or access to specialized information or knowledge – gathered with and without informed consent – cause irreparable harm. Instances abound of misrepresentation and exploitation of sacred and secret information.”

In the Yap island group in the FSM, *faluw* is the men’s house which women are forbidden from entering as they please. To understand methods for handling indigenous materials is to

¹⁸ See <https://www.historypin.org/>

create an exhibit or tell the story of the Yapese culture in the proper context. And if a librarian or archivist is given materials for display from a researcher who had access to the *faluw*, understanding how to handle indigenous materials is to respect gender-based rules and norms regarding cultural materials and negotiating these with traditional, Western notions of public access.

It is important to remember the dominant oral tradition of indigenous communities and the lack of recorded and printed material and information from members of the communities themselves. As librarians make existing materials accessible, as they display and share them, are they also paying particular attention to the notion that these existing materials do not provide the full context of being a member of that community or being indigenous in that community? How would the story of the *techa* be told?

There are several books that tell the story of the CNMI and of the island groups in the FSM that were published years ago. They were, for the most part, told from the outsider perspective. Recently, however, members of the indigenous communities, are beginning to tell their own story. And many are telling it using modern information technology. If a librarian wants to make accessible stories or create an exhibit about these communities, will she also pay attention to the stories told by members in these communities even if they are told on a blog or a website?

Developing programming and increasing the appreciation of indigeneity

When libraries develop outreach programming, they demonstrate their relevance and contribute to maintaining their sustainability. Effective programming is inevitably a result of collaboration between the library and the community. A librarian must learn about her library's community and – hence collaborate with her community – when preparing and developing programming. A librarian who orders books and journals does not consistently check to see how often the materials circulate or how they are used, except to gather daily or monthly circulation statistics. On the other hand she expects to assess the success of programming as soon as it is implemented. In the United States, the American Library Association has compiled online resources that would be useful in developing programming.¹⁹ Resources include program models. Under “literature/literacy,” program models include “local author day,” teaching sign language through story time, and staged readings of plays.

Indigenous cultural heritage resources and the appreciation of these resources and of indigeneity itself provide a framework for library programming that is particularly meaningful in the modern, complex society. For example, the cultural component of land and space has a central place in the lives of members of the indigenous community. This emerged in my analysis of the state of cultural heritage resources in the CNMI, which I mentioned earlier. In the CNMI, the square footage of the house, the number of bedrooms and bathrooms in that house, and the amenities that come with it are not as important as the land on which that house stands. Has it been passed down from generation to generation? Do the rest of the people in the community know whose land it belongs to? Has it been reverently referred to as a geographic space when providing travel directions? And as the CNMI is a United States commonwealth, can the people succeed in fighting against military testing on at least one of the islands?²⁰

¹⁹ <http://www.programminglibrarian.org/>

²⁰ See for example:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/29/pagan-island-marines-military_n_7342168.html

Land and space, and islands themselves, provide a framework for programming on social justice issues, such as political social justice and environment social justice. They provide a framework for programming on fragile land and coastal resources and the debate on climate change. A librarian enriches the opportunity to develop information literacy when she provides access to information regarding marginalized communities, access to the subaltern perspective, and to the pressing issues that they regularly confront in their lives. This, in turn, fuels critical thinking about the dissemination of and access to information.

Implementing strategies for preservation

Resources such as the *IFLA Principles for the Care and Handling of Library Materials*²¹ are valuable for developing and implementing strategies for the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage resources and sources. For the preservation of materials in tropical climates such as those in the CNMI and the FSM, the August 2011 issue of IFLA's *International Preservation News* is very valuable. However, it is not enough to know general environmental specifications, such as temperature and relative humidity, and the right tools, such as the tool for mending books, when developing preservation strategies, particularly for indigenous materials. For instance, librarians should concur with the indigenous community to identify which materials have priority for preservation. Furthermore, they must ensure that members of the community understand the implications of implementing a preservation strategy, such as the implications of scanning restricted materials. Who would scan a restricted material? And will the image of the material be saved on to hard drive or in the cloud?

It is important to point out the need for digital curation, as well, as a strategy for the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage materials. Indigenous communities like other communities are affected by information technology and born-digital media and information. Communities that are responsible for the proliferation of born-digital records and information should make indigenous communities aware of what happens to these records particularly when they involve them. They must make these communities aware of issues related to the curation of born-digital materials such as the complex lifecycle of a record and the authenticity and reliability of a record as it moves through the digital sphere and is accessed, altered, used, and reused by different parties. In the modern information society and economy, indigenous cultural heritage and indigenous communities are a fruitful locus in understanding how information is located, evaluated, and used effectively, and perhaps more importantly who controls the dissemination of information.

²¹ <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/pac/ipi/ipi1-en.pdf>