Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Impacts and Reflections on the Making Meaning Symposium for Small, Independent Libraries

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Résumé de l'article

This paper discusses how a small volunteer library changed after attending a symposium on Indigenous Librarianship and metadata. It provides an introduction to the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program Library, how it was formed, and the decision making process behind it. The paper goes on to summarize key points from speakers at the Making Meaning Symposium, and how they challenge the choices made by volunteers. The results have all been positive, and continue to shape discussions about how to best implement what was learned.

When we think we know, we think we own something, and we take away from what it represents. - Ambrose Cardinal, personal communication

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Impacts and Reflections on the Making Meaning Symposium for Small, Independent Libraries

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Abstract

This paper discusses how a small volunteer library changed after attending a symposium on Indigenous Librarianship and metadata. It provides an introduction to the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program Library, how it was formed, and the decision making process behind it. The paper goes on to summarize key points from speakers at the Making Meaning Symposium, and how they challenge the choices made by volunteers. The results have all been positive, and continue to shape discussions about how to best implement what was learned.

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Author Statement

When reading this document, it is important to note that I have specific backgrounds and biases that have likely affected this paper. Part of this is my heritage as a settler colonial in Drumheller, AB, Treaty 7 Territory, Métis Region 3. I currently live and work as a guest in

Amiskwaciwâskahikan, Treaty 6 Territory, Métis Region 4.

Wherever possible, those mentioned in the paper have been contacted and asked to provide the introductions that they would prefer for themselves. These introductions highlight the importance that land, family, and community has, which is no less important than academic credentials. For those I was unable to contact, I have provided an introduction based on their speaker biography from Making Meaning Symposium.

Ambrose Cardinal, who is quoted at the beginning of this paper, chose to introduce himself in his own words:

> Nipâhkwêsiminowin Pâhpimoteht nitsiyihkâson. I am a member of the Mètis Nation of Alberta but my ancestors and relatives come from the road allowances of what is now known as Prince Albert. Indigenous people within the fabrication of academia wear many hats as we simultaneously represent the nation in which we come from while jumping through the hoops of academia and existing in 'the politics of recognition.' I myself refer to myself as an Oskâpewis, a helper for the people. A helper to deflect the heavy burden of colonialism that effects my people on a daily basis. I do this in ceremony, I do this politically, I do this academically, I do this resiliently. I carry the prayers of my people in ceremony and through the work that I do. Êkosi mâka. (A. Cardinal, personal communication, August 14, 2018)

Introduction

Located at the University of Alberta, the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) "is a teacher education program working to improve the success of Aboriginal children" ("Aboriginal Teacher Education Program: About", 2018, para. 1). The ATEP Library is a small classroom lending library designed to

reflect Indigenous Ways of Knowing. It has given those working with it a chance to re-examine many of our relationships: relationships of materials, of metadata, and of "parent communities" and how libraries serve them.

The Making Meaning Symposium drastically improved those relationships. Held in February of 2018, the symposium brought together "Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples interested in Indigenous librarianship, community, and metadata" ("Making Meaning Symposium: Home", 2018, para. 1) to discuss the process of decolonizing libraries. By challenging decisions that were increasingly isolating ATEP Library from Indigenous communities, the Making Meaning Symposium affirmed that we must all engage in broader discussions surrounding the Indigenization of librarianship.

This document specifies three volunteer communities. Library volunteers are those with a background in library studies. Staff volunteers are those who work for ATEP in any capacity. Future volunteers are for those who will run ATEP Library in the years to come.

Before Making Meaning

While ATEP Library has a tentative start date of July 2017, this collaborative effort has its roots in conversations and interactions built over many years. ATEP staff have been receptive to questions from the University of Alberta Libraries (UAL) for a long time and met requests for support with passion. They are also enthusiastic about the library, advocating for us while challenging existing barriers to Indigenous Peoples in academic libraries.

When I was asked to create a display for National First Peoples Day in 2017, Debbie Feisst, Acting Library Head at H.T. Coutts Library and Metis Librarian from the Red River Settlement area (Winnipeg), was the one to suggest contacting ATEP. Because the display

would coincide with Canada 150, a celebration of the 150th anniversary of Canadian confederation, Feisst hinted that staff there might be able to provide some perspective on the concept of a Canadian national holiday—there are strong criticisms of the entire affair, including the fact that the celebration is happening at all (Marsh & Karabit, 2017).

Angela Wolfe, Associate Director of ATEP, did more than just provide perspective. She found articles, newspaper clippings, and helped select the posters we would display. She even volunteered her own time: helping to set up, arrange artwork, and providing resources from ATEP's student lounge.

Less than a month later Wolfe and Trish Collins, administrator for ATEP with a Bachelor of Arts in Native studies, decided to approach UAL with a project of their own. ATEP had accumulated a considerable variety of resources over the years, mostly in the form of donations and gifts. These could be useful for students of the program, but there was no way to circulate them or record which students had checked items out.

UAL agreed to help by providing library volunteers. They were Tanya Ball, Academic Librarian Resident and Métis Librarian from Winnipeg, Treaty 1 Territory, Feisst, and the author of this paper. Additional meetings were scheduled between ATEP and library volunteers, leading to consultations on what criteria were needed to ensure correct material handling.

System-Wide Collaboration

Wolfe and Collins wanted to develop a system that would mirror the best parts of a lending library while avoiding barriers for Indigenous patrons. This system included a need for revised subject headings, a system which would allow them to circulate materials, and cataloguing the collection. It also needed to be flexible on what counted as a patron in case whole cohorts of

students asked to borrow a section of the library for use in a community outside of Amiskwaciwâskahikan.

To meet these needs, ATEP Library realized it would need experts from other parts of the library system. Feisst suggested they connect with Sharon Farnel, chair of the Decolonizing Description Working Group (DDWG) and Metadata Coordinator for UAL. Ball also invited Sheila Laroque, Academic Librarian Resident and Métis Librarian from Saskatoon, Treaty 6 Territory, to share her experience working with metadata and decolonizing descriptions.

Laroque and Farnel were able to identify resources and provide direction for ATEP Library, like inviting Library and ATEP volunteers to participate in the Making Meaning Symposium. The DDWG was interested in seeing how the volunteers would utilize the research they had already been doing on a University-wide project, and what challenges or pitfalls we might discover along the way. Their help was critical for the project, providing valuable knowledge that Library volunteers missed.

Challenges

For ATEP Library to succeed, volunteers needed to find or create new solutions to long-standing issues with racism and current models of librarianship. The following is a broad generalization of the decisions made before attending the Making Meaning Symposium.

Relationships of Materials

The first challenge staff volunteers tackled was our classification schema. The 21 categories of the Library of Congress Classification system (LCC), and the 10 classes of the Dewey Decimal Classification System (DDC), are the two most prominent systems across Canada – they are also problematic, because of how "European partitions within the thinking space […] are not

generally present in such traditional systems" (Cherry & Mukunda, 2015, p. 550). Items would need to be shelved and housed beside resources in a way that made sense to ATEP and its community, preserving the relationship that materials should have to one another. While volunteer staff briefly considered updating LCC instead of a new system, findings from an extensive survey conducted between 2009 and 2011 were ample evidence that there was no consensus on how best to modify it, confirming the choice of an alternative (Lee, 2011).

The Brian Deer Cataloguing System (BDCS), created by A. Brian Deer, a Kahnawake librarian in the 1970's, was put forward by Laroque as a solution. Citing Swanson's (2015) article on work done for the Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute:

> It [BDCS] was not intended to be a universal solution for Indigenous materials; however, it has provided a foundation for other institutions to create their own tailored classification systems and for the possible development of a more universally used classification system (p. 571).

It also solved another major issue: racist descriptions. Instead of modifying settler colonial schema we would start with respect.

BDCS is not an adaptation of other cataloguing systems, but an arrangement that respected how Indigenous Ways of Knowing should be better represented. Unfortunately, it brought its own well documented trials. As Swanson (2015) said,

> We found that our challenges were similar to those who had adopted this system in the past. Lack of resources, notably case studies, a lack of dialogue between small libraries that use non-traditional classification systems, and practical guides to implementation, caused difficulty (pp. 575-576).

Relationships of Metadata

Discoverability became the central challenge for ATEP Library. Library volunteers were unable to find any practical resources that addressed Indigenous Worldviews without adapting the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCHS). Library volunteers, hoping to find something rooted in Indigenous Ways of Knowing like the BDCS, decided to continue searching for alternatives. This decision meant subject headings would not exist when items were ready to circulate, requiring a temporary remedy: Web 2.0 functionality.

Laroque, while running a comprehensive search for alternative subject headings, recommended an article on the formation of the National Research Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. In it were descriptions of a "participatory archive" in which community comments, stories, and contributed headings would be treated with equal weight to "professional" metadata (Lougheed, Moran, & Callison, 2015, p. 607-608). The need for Web 2.0 functionality became a critical requirement of the online public access catalogue (OPAC).

The OPAC needed to offer friendly, flexible support for users with little to no library experience. Omeka, Librika, Evergreen, Koha, and LibraryThing's TinyCat were all evaluated, as each offered free or low-cost opportunities for classroom libraries. While many provided Web 2.0 options and allowed for copy cataloguing, few of them were deemed easy to use. Both the front and back-end of these options needed to be designed with users in mind, while avoiding excessive references to MARC tags or library jargon.

After several discussions, Library volunteers selected TinyCat. TinyCat is an OPAC offered by the creators of LibraryThing, which began as a free, browser-based cataloging service for private individuals and small libraries. Its cataloguing system (LibraryThing) was user-friendly - although not without technical issues.

LibraryThing treats empty fields for subject headings and classification systems as auto-generating fields, surprising library volunteers who thought they had eliminated racist terminology. TinyCat's design and functions proved less demanding; the layout of records and how to manage the OPAC were clear to volunteers without library experience.

Relationships of Parent Communities

A final challenge for library volunteers was the longevity of the project— administrators and students in ATEP will operate and maintain the library exclusively, without support from UAL. Library volunteers looked at the Corley Smith Library in the Galapagos Islands and Illinois State University for guidance on future volunteers.

Corley Smith Library, when migrating to a new web-based OPAC, had been staffed almost entirely by local and international volunteers; while some had a background in library studies, few if any had catalogued since graduating. To ameliorate these concerns, Corley Smith Library built guides and recorded their workflows, which they revised with input from new staff (Taylor, Jacobi, & Foster, 2013). In 2007, Illinois State University developed a volunteer coordinator program, which focused on policies for how to train, retain, and evaluate staff performance (Schobernd, Tucker, & Wetzel, 2009).

Although ATEP Library would have a smaller future volunteer population then either library, they recognized a need for clear and consistent procedures. Library volunteers began creating guidelines for LibraryThing cataloguing, utilizing some of the language and techniques from Corley Smith Library. Other staff began discussing and drafting possible policies surrounding the library, using Illinois State University as a template for successful practice. Discussions about creating the role of volunteer

coordinator were considered but did not produce any results.

After Making Meaning

The Making Meaning Symposium influenced nearly all aspects of ATEP Library. It was both eye-opening and humbling to receive direction from professionals whose articles informed the ATEP Library, and from community members for whom racism and settler colonialism in the library has a direct, negative impact on library services. The following paragraphs discuss how the Symposium corrected many decisions by library volunteers who would have damaged our relationships with materials, metadata, and parent communities.

Relationships of Materials

While our choice of using BDCS fit the frame of many previous libraries, it was clear that adapting the cataloging system would require far more work then ATEP Library could manage alone. Kim Lawson, a member of the Heiltsuk Nation of Bella Bella BC, librarian at Xwi7xwa Library at UBC, and former Librarian/ Archivist at the Union of BC Indian Chiefs Resource Centre, MLIS, spoke on behalf of Xwi7xwa Library. She shared the challenges and opportunities that existed when changing or developing cataloguing systems. For Xwi7xwa Library it required building lifelong relationships with Elders and their communities, with the expectation that these lines of communication be maintained and welcomed by Xwi7xwa staff. Anything less would guarantee that the library becomes out of date, and no longer represent authentic Indigenous Ways of Knowing (K. Lawson, personal communication, February 8, 2018).

Library volunteers also learned our decision to eradicate all traces of racist or discriminatory classification systems was not ideal. Molly Swain, Metis from Calgary, and a master's student in the Faculty of Native Studies invited library staff to be aware that this would sweep a

long history of colonial violence out of sight, which is akin to censorship. She utilized racist terminology as a way to hunt for resources that challenged existing settler colonial structures (M. Swain, personal communication, February 9, 2018). In ATEP Library, that would become impossible under our current classification. Instead of removing these terms or allowing them to appear for everyone, Swain suggested that libraries consider technical solutions, which could mask specific results before they arise.

Deborah Lee, Indigenous Studies and Community Initiatives Librarian, provided some in-depth context for understanding the spirit of Indigenous Librarianship. She displayed how the University of Saskatchewan had made Indigenous worldviews part of not just the classification, but also the entire website. After consulting with local Elders and participants at five Indigenous academic gatherings, Lee was able to glean insight into the complexity of determining "preferred" terminology by a diverse representation of 50+ Indigenous community members (Lee, 2011).

These insights included discussions about essential components for designing a decolonized and culturally significant website and virtual library that Indigenous peoples are proud to call their own (i.e., the Indigenous Studies Portal) (D. Lee, personal communication, February 8, 2018). Until this point, volunteers had imagined ATEP Library as something which, under the surface, was Indigenized and appropriate, but there had been no discussion how the website or look of the physical collection might prove a barrier to users.

Relationships of Metadata

Jessie Loyer, Cree-Métis and a member of Michel Nation, also a librarian at Mount Royal University, made library volunteers aware that their lack of community engagement would also reflect in work surrounding subject headings. Pointing out that the "way we refer to

Indigenous Peoples has always been shifting" she argued that this needed to be an ongoing learning opportunity, not a problem (J. Loyer, personal communication, February 9, 2018). While ATEP Library had not yet found a source material for subject headings, some library volunteers had envisioned a single, finished work that would require little in the way of updating. If that happened, ATEP Library would become just as outdated as the systems we were seeking to avoid.

Dr. Chris Andersen, a Professor and the Dean of the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, called on library sciences to start anticipating "categories that did not yet exist" (C. Andersen, personal communication, February 9, 2018). Not only, as others had pointed out, were the terms likely to change, but the very concept of change required systems and policies that were ready for flexibility. No fixed, finished system was possible, and libraries that intended to decolonize and create spaces for the Indigenization of their resources would have to embrace a continual cycle of revision and change (C. Andersen, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

Relationships of Parent Communities

Gwichyà Gwich'in historian Crystal Gail Fraser revealed a flaw in the plans surrounding the ATEP Library regarding policies. It was more than just the cataloguing language that required community oversight, but also what materials could be displayed, and how the organization behaved internally. Fraser also pointed to the University of Alberta's adoption and promotion of "Pan-Indigenous" narratives and symbology, found on the University of Alberta's library website (C. Fraser, personal communication, February 8, 2018.) Without engaging those represented in ATEP library resources on its design and structure, volunteer staff ran the risk of failing to properly develop and display resources in a way that respected the differences between peoples.

While others reinforced that ATEP Library overlooked the challenges of engaging in communities, Camille Callison[1] opened the doors to collaboration between those in library studies as well. Using her previous work across Canada as examples, she invited Indigenous librarians and allies to join national action being done through the Canadian Federation of Library Associations Indigenous Matters Committee, regarding the decolonization and indigenization of information services. Collaborating meant more than local interactions, but work with governments and communities in areas outside of traditional library spaces (C. Callison, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

Without joining CFLA-FCAB IMC, ATEP Library would be unable to connect with communities across Canada effectively. It will also allow future volunteers to direct their activity in ways that are meaningful, avoiding having to duplicate work already done by those with more extensive resources and staff complements.

Moving Forward

After the Making Meaning Symposium, the following concerns are now high priorities for the ATEP Library:

- A lack of mechanisms for strong community voice and oversight in current design plans.
- How to best preserve racist or outdated terminology while minimizing harm to users.

- Evaluation of how the collection is accessed, with special consideration for website design that preserves material relationships throughout ATEP library.
- Flexible systems and policies regarding future developments.
- Staff engagement with larger metadata initiatives.

The ATEP Library still has a great deal to review after the Symposium. While finishing the initial cataloguing, library volunteers are reconsidering the relationships of materials, metadata, and parent communities so that these connections are valid and form the core of ATEP Library. In the words of the Symposium itself, "we cannot begin the process of 'decolonizing' our practices without bringing in our relatives and community partners" ("Making Meaning Symposium: Home", 2018, para. 2.)

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[1] Camille Callison is a member of the Tsesk iye (Crow) Clan of the Tahltan Nation and the Indigenous Services Librarian/Liaison Librarian for Anthropology, Native Studies & Social Work at the University of Manitoba. She holds a B.A. Anthropology, M.L.I.S. First Nations Concentration and is currently a PhD student in Anthropology. Camille is the Vice-Chair and Indigenous Representative of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB) where she is Chair of the Indigenous Matters Committee and a Copyright Committee member. She is a member of IFLA Indigenous Matters Standing Committee, the National Film Board (NFB) Indigenous Advisory Board and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO Sector Commission on Culture, Communications & Information and Vice-Chair, Canada Memory of the World Committee.

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