



**Indigenous Cultural Models in Information Literacy Delivery Including Programmes for Māori and Pasifika Students at New Zealand Universities**

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**Abstract:**

*Our paper examines several opportunities for incorporating Native cultural values and experiences into the information literacy instruction, including aspects of communication and awareness of different learning styles or acknowledgement of differing underlying cultural systems. By incorporating Native lifeways and cultural values into the existing information literacy structure set out in key professional documents, librarians can better serve the needs of Native community learners. Standards, outcomes, and assessment need to take into account cultural expectations and values when working with local and Native populations. Specific examples are drawn from the Navajo (Diné), Anishinabe, and Māori.*

**Introduction: Overview of Standards documents**

According to Eisenberg (2008), information literacy “. . . is the set of skills and knowledge that allows us to find, evaluate, and use the information we need, as well as to filter out the information we don’t need.” Librarians are guided in the information literacy

process by professional documents such as those developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries. These include:

- Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, 2000
- Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians, 2001
- Guidelines for Instruction Programs in Academic Libraries, 2003
- Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy that Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline, 2003
- Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators, 2007
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These standards are based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Education Objectives, specifically "Lower Order" and "Higher Order" thinking skills (ACRL 2000). For some Native groups, including the Navajo (Diné), this concept of a linear trajectory of lower order to higher order knowledge is not compatible with traditional knowledge systems. In his work with Aboriginal Australians and tertiary education in the Northern Territory, Gale (2000) found that knowledge is social constructed, emerging from various social, political, linguistic, and cultural contexts (104). In addition, while the goal of information literacy is to enable "learners to master content and extend their investigations, become more self-directed, and assume greater control over their own learning" (ACRL 2000), Indigenous worldview values contributions to community rather than to individualized achievement. Thus, different systems of knowledge and epistemologies will privilege types and sources of knowledge. Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge may be undervalued in the library instruction ethos because of its social construction, though it may be equally valued alongside universal knowledge, or what may be considered Truth (Gale 2000, 105).

Our paper examines several opportunities for incorporating Native cultural values and experiences into the information literacy instruction, including aspects of communication and awareness of different learning styles or acknowledgement of differing underlying cultural systems. By incorporating Native lifeways and cultural values into the existing information literacy structure set out in key professional documents, librarians can better serve the needs of Native community learners. Standards, outcomes, and assessment need to take into account cultural expectations and values when working with local and Native populations.

### **Information Literacy and Navajo values**

*Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*—Navajo philosophy—is the core component of the Navajo education system (Braithwaite 1997, 220). It is a "recursive and ongoing process of living through understanding one's place, oneself, and one's relationship to the environment" (Beatty 2007, 50). There are four natural processes underlying this philosophy: *Nitsáhákees* (thinking), *Nahat'á* (planning), *Liná* (living), and *Siihasin* (assurance). Beatty (2007, 59) maps these processes to ACRL's five standards of information literacy (2000):

- *Nitsáhákees* relates to Standard 1: "the information literate student defines and articulates the need for information"
- *Nahat'á* relates to Standard 2: "the information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently"
- *Liná* relates to Standard 4: "the information literate student...uses information effectively"

- *Siihasin* relates to Standard 5: “the information literate student understands many of the ethical, legal, and socio-economic issues surrounding information” and also to Standard 3: “the information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system”

- The relationship between Navajo knowledge and society and culture is reciprocal and emergent. Navajo culture is also physically situated within the homeland of the four sacred mountains (Yazzie-Mintz 2000, 17). A 1975 National Indian Education Association (NIEA) report described a school/community library as welcoming space and the metaphor of the *hogan* (traditional Navajo house) and the Diné woman’s ceremonial basket is prevalent in describing Navajo educational institutions (Beatty 2007; Braithwaite 1997; Yazzie-Mintz 2000).

Early studies include observation and quantitative assessment of a perceived verbal/non-verbal dichotomy between Navajo and non-Navajo children (Guilmet 1978; John 1972). Some research has propagated that these different learning styles is biologically based (see special issue of *Journal of American Indian Education*, 1989). This work has obvious racist overtones as it proposes visual competencies for the former and verbal competencies for the latter. Even the 1975 NIEA report theorized that Navajo are more likely to be visual, not verbal, learners and communicators and they advocated the library include more audio/visual material and equipment (Genia et al. 1975, Appendix D). McCarty et al. refutes this work by stating that Navajo performance of knowledge acquisition is rooted in out-of-school learning and experiences and cultural expressions (1991, 44).

In working with Navajo learners, these cultural and social values must be valued and made part of the information exchange process. Outside school, learning is often inductive: multiple observations lead the learner to understanding knowledge and the world. The individual does not convey or receive knowledge passively but must actively seek and acquire it (51). Information exchange and learning is a responsibility shared by both the teacher and the student (Beatty 2007, 53-54). For the Navajo, knowledge is not perceived on a linear trajectory, but a “spiraling body” of ideas, information, and concepts that are connected and integrated with each other. What is most essential to acquiring higher knowledge is the use of *k’é* or good interpersonal relationships to share and develop understanding of supportive knowledge for the benefit of the community (McCarty 2000, 51). Incorporating this pattern of learning and inquiry into educational instruction (including information literacy) not only enhances the acquisition of Navajo knowledge, but also Western knowledge (50). Beatty states that both Diné and Western knowledge are necessary for the Navajo learner to obtain a complete education (2007, 50). The apparent non-verbal learning style of Navajo learners is thus based not in biological differences, but socio-cultural experiences. Active learning in educational settings, and the promotion of information literacy, may be enhanced by incorporating these socio-cultural processes in pedagogical strategies.

Navajo cultural and social values are important not only in the practice of information literacy, but also in the assessment of the outcomes. Internal accountability involves accountability to both the living and ancestors and is essential for self-determination (Tibbetts et al. 2000, 127). This accountability recognizes knowledge and learning as relational, historically based, physically situated, and culturally appropriate. Information literacy thus involves not just learning content but how knowledge connects one to their community and

creates a sense of responsibility for the community and knowledge of future generations. The assessment of standards in learning will likewise be bound by cultural values and ways of knowing.

While the ACRL proscribes broad outcomes and metrics for the assessment of information literacy (2000), this external accountability must be balanced with the cultural need for internal accountability. With information literacy grounded within the context of *Sa'ah Naaghái Bik'eh Hózhóón*, outcomes are not limited to acquisition of information, or even the ability to seek information, but how knowledge may perpetuate identity, culture, and the community (Tibbetts et al. 2000, 128). These outcomes may not always be quantitatively assessed, but evaluated in terms of cultural ways of knowing, including observation and competency of performance.

### **Information Literacy and Anishinabe Values**

The Anishinabe homeland in the upper Midwest Great Lakes regions in Canada and in northern Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Canada is a half-continent away from the southwestern desert of the Navajo/Dine. The Anishinabe (“spontaneous people”) are also known as the Ojibwe, Chippewa, or Salteaux. Like other American Indian tribes, the view of the Anishinabe worldview is also circular and interdependent (Peacock and Wisuri, 2006).

Traditionally, children of this woodland tribe are born into a clan system that provides communities with balanced support through leadership, learning, sustenance, medicine, justice, and defense. Each clan—loon, crane, fish, bear, martin, deer, and bird—is associated with a *dodem* or animal whose characteristics provide clan members with direction and strength (Benton-Banai, 1988). Clan affiliation is associated with skills and responsibilities. For example, mukwa or bear clan members are responsible for community justice and serve as mediators and problem solvers and, in more contemporary times, as members of the police force or as judges. Aligning oneself with one’s clan identify is “to know one’s role, know the expectations of the community, have confidence in it, and obtain both the acceptance and appreciation of one’s place in society is a crucial passage to adulthood that has been missing for many years with many people” (McBride, 2003).

In addition to clan identity, Ojibwe are associated with traditional values identified as “attitudes toward sharing, other centered, harmony with nature, circular time, non-interference, extended family, patience, and non-confrontation”( Coggins, Williams, and Radin, 1997). Translating these values into an educational model, such as An American Indian Child Behavior Check List, indicates that an Ojibwe student demonstrating traditional values “shows a sense of responsibility to class and school; liked by others; is dependable; shows respect for others; can take a joke; initiatives new activities or ideas” (Coggins, Williams, and Radin, 1997).

Other traditional Ojibwe values can impact educational achievement. A study of Ojibwe parents of young students found that students did better when their mothers supported the traditional values of “sharing, other centeredness, harmony with nature, non-interference, patience, and focus on extended family” (Coggins, Williams, and Radin, 1997). A study of students attending schools on three reservations in the U.S. Midwest found that students’ “enculturation” (or connection with traditional culture) affected their school success. In this case, enculturation was seen in three expressions: “(1) involvement in traditional activities;

(2) identification with American Indian culture; and (3) involvement in and importance of traditional spirituality” (Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, and LaFromboise, 2001).

Anishinabe communities are reclaiming their clan identities through community healing processes. Participants in one such activity among the Saulte Sainte Marie Tribe of Chippewa found that “one of the strongest positive features ... were the teachings and activities around the reclamation of clan identity, clan inventory, camaraderie among clans (similar to the feeling of “making relatives”), and acknowledgement of contributions to the community by the clans” (McBride, 2003).

Developing library instruction curriculum in line with indigenous values can support student learning and success. These programs also support community healing by reinforcing traditional lifeways over the oppressive western pedagogy that libraries are often seen to represent. Such programs incorporate the successful features of traditional Native education that allows for observation and participation, assimilation of content as well as learning through experience (Cajete, 1999). Library instruction can recognize traditional clan systems by providing opportunities for students to learn through their clan strength—and demonstrate their clan attributes through group activities such as model building.

### **Information literacy and Maori University Students**

Archaeological evidence indicates that Maori migrated to New Zealand from Eastern Polynesian origins from 800 AD onwards. Maori means ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’ in te reo Maori (Maori language). Maori like most other indigenous peoples identify themselves with the land, forests, waterways and other environmental elements. The main units of social organisation are whanau (family), hapu (sub-tribe) and Iwi (tribe). A hapu consists of several whanau and an iwi will include many hapu. Although the collective term of Māori is used as a catch all, Māori identity is firmly structured around the smaller social units.

Māori comprise 15%<sup>1</sup> of New Zealand’s population. This percentage is predicted to grow to 30% by 2051<sup>2</sup>, with Māori children expected to make up a one-third of the overall population in the 0-14 age group.

There is very little literature available on Māori information literacy, what is available focuses largely on Māori use or non-use of libraries. These studies by Auckland City Libraries (1995, 2002), MacDonald (1993), Szekely (1997), and Simpson (2005) have largely been based on research centred on developing the capacity of libraries to cater for Māori information needs and to identify reasons why Māori don’t use libraries. Common themes emerging from this literature focus on the feeling that Maori are intimidated and do not feel welcome in libraries, low use of libraries by Maori families has meant that libraries are seen as irrelevant, low levels of achievement in education, lack of dedicated Maori staff. These factors ultimately influence the attitudes of Maori students that choose to study at university level and provide a major challenge for librarians wanting to assist students to develop information literacy skills.

Massey University is the largest provider of university education to Maori students in New Zealand. Approximately 3000 Maori students are enrolled with just over 600 of these

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<sup>1</sup> 640,000 in number. New Zealand’s population is about 4,100,000

<sup>2</sup> Statistics New Zealand. *New Zealand Now Maori*. Wellington: Department of Statistics, 1998, pp 15-17

studying at the postgraduate level including 75 at doctoral level. Massey University delivers academic programs to students internally and through distance education, two-thirds of our Maori students choose to study as a distance student. This provides an extra challenge for the library as many of these students may never set foot on a physical campus so face to face delivery of information literacy programs is not always an option. Another complicating factor is that New Zealand has a policy of special admission to universities and other forms of post-secondary education; this means that individuals aged 20 and over can enrol in academic programs without having to have matriculated. As a result this provides individuals with a second chance at education. Due to Massey University's distance education programs a large proportion of mature aged students are enrolled, with the average age of Massey's Maori students being 32 years and not having had any formal education since leaving school. In many cases this requires considerable support to be provided so these students have the necessary academic skills to have a chance of succeeding in their studies.

Faced with these challenges, Massey University Library established a Maori liaison team consisting of librarians of Maori descent. The primary role of these librarians is to liaise with academic staff and other Maori support services staff so that appropriate programs are in place to ensure that Maori students succeed in their academic endeavours. For the library staff this has focused on developing information literacy offerings. Rather than wait for Maori students to come to the library, the Maori staff have ensured that they make contact with staff and students out on campus. Attending hui (meetings), powhiri (welcomes), poroporoaki (farewells), orientations and celebratory events where students are likely to be found is an integral strategy, as Maori values place a huge emphasis on *kanohi kitea* (a face seen). By liaising with students in their communities it is possible to develop a relationship that will assist in encouraging Maori students to visit the library, which will be the first step to getting them to attend information literacy offerings. The Maori library staff have also placed an emphasis on developing relationships with staff responsible for delivering courses and programs that have large numbers of Maori students enrolled in them. This has resulted in information literacy offerings being developed specifically for these courses. A key factor has been to make these connections with the academic long-term and to use them as a model that can assist in influencing other academics to make similar arrangements.

In developing these relationships with staff and students, Maori staff use Maori values to assist them. These values include *whakawhanaungatanga* (building connections), *mana* (prestige), *whakapapa* (legitimacy), *tautokotanga* (support), *manaakitanga* (hospitality) and *tau-utuutu* (reciprocity). Integrating these values into the programs offered ensure that Maori students learn information literacy skills in an environment that embraces *tikanga Maori* (Maori cultural practices). A brief explanation of each of these values follows.

*Whakawhanaungatanga*

This value stresses the need in Maori settings for people to make connections. These connections lead to ongoing relationships. These relationships may be through common descent from *whanau*, *hapu* or *iwi*, knowing someone in common, a connection through a sporting, cultural or school affiliation. Through establishing these relationships individuals are more likely to feel more comfortable in approaching staff or fellow students for assistance.

## Mana

As previously indicated mana translates as prestige, the aim of this value is to ensure that the students emerge with their pride intact or some cases further enhanced. As the students will have varying levels of ability it is important that information literacy skills programs are designed to suit the needs and skill levels of the learners. This can require some additional support being provided by either library staff working with students on a one on one basis or through pairing up the more able students with the less able.

## Tautokotanga

This value involves ensuring that the right support mechanisms are in place to ensure that the student succeeds. The support mechanisms mentioned in the previous value are an important part of this, but it is also about ensuring that connections are made with other staff and services that can assist students in their study goals. A further aspect of this is to ensure that students know how to contact library staff for further assistance. Students unable to make it to campus courses are supported through the use of phone, email and web technologies, including on-line tutorials.

## Manaakitanga

This value involves creating an environment that Maori students feel comfortable in. This can include ensuring they know how to find their way around the library, that Maori cultural customs are followed when they attend information literacy offerings, including providing food and drinks. If library staff are conducting their sessions outside the library then they are frequently invited to dine with the course participants. This is another chance for the staff to build relationships with the staff and students.

## Tau-utuutu

Library staff are recognised by Maori staff and students for their expertise and the contribution they make to the teaching and learning nexus. In response students and staff find ways they can make a contribution to the librarians. This may be in the form of offering information or connections to aspects of tikanga Maori or a tribal issue. Other forms include an invitation to participate in hui or their course, or to attend their celebratory events. The whakawhanaungatanga aspect can be an important part of the reciprocity process as it may mean that useful connections can be called on at a point in the future.

## Conclusion

This article outlines the potential of culturally based library instruction approaches to serve Native community needs. Such a process would provide students with opportunities to reflect on the influence of their cultures on learning. How can such approaches be encouraged?

Meeting the information literacy needs of Maori staff and students remains a major challenge. Through the development of targeted services delivered in a framework based on tikanga Maori values, library staff have managed to create an environment that provides a culturally relevant learning experience. Through liaison with academic staff responsible for courses and programs, these information literacy offerings have made a major contribution to the academic success of students. To ensure ongoing success, it is important that Maori library staff continue to participate in the academic and cultural lives of each cohort of new

students. For the students unable to make it to an on-campus course, it is essential that other support mechanisms are put into place through the use of technology, but regardless the relationships need to continue to be developed using the whakawhanaungatanga value.

LIANZA, the Library and Information Association of New Zealand/Aotearoa, hosts a national professional registration program for librarians. Part of the process involves librarians documenting their competency in eleven BOK (body of knowledge) areas, the last of which is Indigenous Knowledge Paradigms or “Awareness of indigenous knowledge paradigms, which in the New Zealand context refers to Māori, demonstrated by the ability to:

- Understand importance, diversity and structure of Māori knowledge frameworks (mātauranga Māori)
- Show awareness of the influence that tikanga and te reo Māori assumes in the development of Māori knowledge constructs and principles (concepts)
- Recognise the importance of kaupapa Māori methodologies in researching the needs of Māori clients” (LIANZA, 2011).
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The development of this registration scheme and the inauguration of the IFLA Special Interest Group (SIG) on Indigenous Matters in 2008 provides further evidence that the time is right for IFLA to incorporate indigenous cultural competence into an evolving IFLA body of knowledge. Such a proposal was brought forward to IFLA’s Professional Committee and we await information on how to bring this concept forward to the larger IFLA community.

## Resources

- Association of College and Research Libraries. "Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators." Association of College and Research Libraries, 2007.
- Association of College & Research Libraries. "Characteristics of Programs of Information Literacy That Illustrate Best Practices: A Guideline." Association of College & Research Libraries, 2003.
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