

Rynnelle Wiebe

School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada

Dinesh Rathi

School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, Canada

A Review of Library Associations Websites to Learn about Decolonizing Efforts (Paper)

Abstract:

CFLA-FCAB's Truth and Reconciliation Report and Recommendations (2017) has galvanized Canadian libraries and library associations to undertake initiatives to decolonize libraries. Similar efforts are happening internationally as libraries work toward reconciliation. This paper presents findings of an environmental scan and analysis of library association websites from Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. The findings demonstrate that library associations are taking a number of initiatives such as providing access to resources, initiating guidelines and policies, hosting events, offering financial support, and other initiatives.

1. Introduction

The Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA-FCAB) Truth and Reconciliation Committee delivered a Truth and Reconciliation Report and Recommendations in 2017 as part of their mandate to “promote initiatives in all types of libraries to advance reconciliation” (CFLA-FCAB 2017, 3). Since the release of the Report, Canadian libraries and library associations have responded to these Recommendations. While this represents a Canadian context, efforts toward decolonizing libraries are present internationally, offering the opportunity to learn from these initiatives. Reviewing library association websites is a useful way to understand how the community in general, represented through these associations, is responding to reconciliation. Library associations share relevant information and resources by and for member libraries and librarians, and establish standards or guidelines and other supports. This paper reviews how library associations from Canada, the United States (US), Australia, and New Zealand demonstrate a commitment to decolonization through publicly shared content on their websites.

2. Literature Review

As this paper explores reconciliation and decolonization within the framework of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, reconciliation will be understood as defined by the TRC of Canada (2015). According to the Commission, reconciliation is “about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (p.6), and it “requires that a new vision, based on a commitment to mutual respect, be developed” (p.VI). Decolonization is about “dismantling colonialist power in

all its forms” (Ashcroft et al. 2001 p.52) and it involves engaging with “imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels” (Smith 2012, p.58).

Library association websites are the subject of this research because of the role associations play in the LIS community. Associations demonstrate how libraries work toward change by setting standards to “[guide] toward the realization of ideals” (Masalinto, Prosperoso, Yap 2015, 2), setting goals, and planning future change (Obille 2007). Further, professional associations encourage actions and diffuse knowledge among members (Newell & Swan, 1995a), which can shape conversations around complex topics such as reconciliation and decolonization. For example, library associations may develop standards to support member libraries in setting goals or establishing levels of service, such as the ALA’s Core Competences as a standard of knowledge for MLIS graduates from ALA-accredited programs (American Library Association 2009). Specifically, associations like CFLA-FCAB through the Committee on Indigenous Matters, for example, are working towards providing guidance and direction to member libraries on moving toward decolonization and reconciliation.

Canadian scholars have discussed the Calls to Action and Report and Recommendations, and argued that it is important to bring change and work toward decolonization (Blair & Wong 2017; Edwards 2019; Smith 2017). Most of this research focuses on particular efforts or case studies in Canadian academic libraries (Laroque 2018), health libraries (Giustini 2017; Linton & Ducas 2017; Maestro & Chadwick 2017), and archives (Bak, Bradford, Loyer, & Walker 2017). These Canadian studies emphasize the importance of implementing the Calls to Action and share effective initiatives. Internationally, the 1995 Australia Library and Information Association’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services (ATSILIRN) has been the subject of various studies (Blackburn 2014; Garwood-Houng & Blackburn 2014; Janke & Iacovino 2012; Reyes-Escudero & Cox 2017; Thorpe & Byrne 2016; Thorpe & Galassi 2018). Additionally, Australia’s National Policy Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library Services and Collections provides guidance for both libraries and archives (Blackburn 2014; Janke & Iacovino 2012). While scholars study the effects of these Protocols and Frameworks, they often focus on libraries and case studies rather than associations.

Chilcott (2019) examines Australian and North American approaches to decolonizing archival language in order to adapt similar strategies in a UK context. Chilcott (2019) reviews Australia’s ATSILIRN Protocols, the State Records New South Wales (NSW) Protocols for Staff Working with Indigenous People, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Archive (ATSIDA) Protocols, and the United States’ Protocols for Native American Archival Materials. In a similar Canadian study, Maestro and Chadwick (2017) analyze Canadian Health Library websites for responses to TRC Calls to Action.

The above studies do not examine library association content but demonstrate the value of comparing decolonizing efforts both internationally and nationally and suggest that there is limited literature reviewing efforts of associations toward decolonization and reconciliation. As part of the CFLA Report and Recommendations, the Black Team developed a list of Public-Facing Statements, Policies, and Services, identifying efforts toward decolonization in Indigenous community libraries, academic libraries, public libraries, government and special libraries, and associations in Canada and internationally (CFLA-FCAB 2017, 13). This paper does similar work with a focus on library association websites with the purpose of comparison and learning.

3. Methodology

An environmental scan and analysis of library association websites was used in this project. A list of library associations in four countries, the United States (US), Canada, Australia and New Zealand, was compiled using a search engine. The finalized list had ninety-two association websites including associations of General Libraries, Health Libraries, Indigenous or Visible Minority Librarians, Law Libraries, Public Libraries, Research and Academic Libraries, School Libraries, Special Libraries/Librarians, Theological Libraries/Librarians, and Association Federations. The websites were both browsed and searched using relevant terms (e.g., Indigenous, Aboriginal, specific communities like Maori in New Zealand) to identify different types of content present on association websites related to decolonization. Each website's search function was used for this process; websites without a search function were searched using a search engine. Analysing websites through browsing and searching is an "unobtrusive" method that allows for effective qualitative analysis of themes and patterns found on the websites (Luo 2018, 237).

The relevant content identified through browsing and searching was collected and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Neuendorf, 2019), coding the information into categories. A single (primary) coder mainly completed the review of websites and thematic coding of the content, with an additional reviewer who reviewed both websites as flagged by the primary coder, and thematic categories and their labels as needed. Limitations of this research include the use of website content, which is often updated and changed, and is limited to what is made publicly available (Maestro & Chadwick 2017), the use of a single coder which has implications on the identification of and categories, and the variation in number and type of associations from each country.

4. Findings

An analysis of publicly accessible website content of library associations from the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand demonstrates that while library associations in each of these countries engage in decolonizing initiatives, not all websites demonstrated the association's efforts toward decolonization and reconciliation: fifty-one websites of the ninety-two analyzed had relevant content (55.4%). Additionally, associations use different strategies and share varying levels of content through their websites. For example, Australia and New Zealand library association websites include numerous policies, guidelines, protocols, or statements, but this kind of formal commitment is less evident on the US and Canada associations websites. Interestingly, the US associations tend to have more content from individuals, while Australian and New Zealand associations present content by the association itself and less content from individuals.

4.1 Types of Initiatives

After browsing and searching library associations' websites, the collected information was coded by themes, and categories were developed to better understand the types of initiatives discussed. These categories include Special Interest Groups (such as Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion groups), Commitments (including strategic plans), Formal Guidelines and Policies, Resource Lists, Informational Artifacts (such as news or blog posts), Events and Activities (such as conferences), Financial Support (such as scholarships), Training and Mentorship (including workshops and webinars), and Other. This categorization of initiatives present on library associations' websites demonstrates how associations tend to contribute to or promote reconciliation and decolonization

efforts among their members and for the public, based on the needs and roles of their members within the LIS community.

4.2 Associations in North America –The United States and Canada

Fifty library associations from the US were analyzed for their decolonization efforts; twenty-four websites contained decolonization or reconciliation content. Though ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) endorses the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials, most of the associations lacked formal statements, standards, or policies relating to decolonizing or reconciliation efforts set by the association. However, some websites have information about special interest groups or subcommittees that focus on Indigenous matters, such as the American Association of Law Libraries' Indigenous Peoples Law Group and Oklahoma Library Association's Tribal Libraries Committee. In the absence of formal commitments or statements, some websites included Indigenous or decolonizing resource lists (e.g., Wisconsin Library Association) or information artifacts such as articles, blog posts, or conference presentations related to decolonization efforts by individual librarians (e.g., ALA; Michigan Library Association; Oklahoma Library Association; Tennessee Library Association; Western Association of Map Libraries). One important association, the American Indian Library Association, is an affiliate of the ALA that focuses on improving library and information services on reserves, and sharing about Indigenous culture and information needs throughout the library community. Overall, most of the US library associations do not present public-facing formal guidelines or policies regarding efforts toward decolonization.

Nineteen Canadian library association websites were reviewed to learn about decolonizing efforts; thirteen demonstrated relevant content. Some associations made direct connections to the TRC's Calls to Action or the CFLA's Report and Recommendations, endorsing the Report (e.g., Library Association of Alberta) or including the report in a list of Indigenous or decolonizing resources (e.g., The Canadian Association for School Libraries; Ontario Library Association). Other associations also provide resource lists for decolonization or Truth and Reconciliation (e.g., CFLA; Ontario Library Association; Library Services for Saskatchewan Aboriginal Peoples Committee; Saskatchewan Library Association). The Ontario Library Association (n.d.) formalizes their commitment to decolonization as a strategic goal to "Support the First Nations" (para. 2.5). Similarly, the Nunavut Library Association (n.d.) includes Indigenous priorities in their Values, committing to providing services and materials in "Inuktitut, English and French" (para. 4). Like the US associations, a select few Canadian associations provide information on special interest groups (eg., the Canadian Association of Law Libraries' Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization Committee; Ontario Library Association's Indigenous Task Group, and; CFLA's Indigenous Matters Committee), or share information artifact such as articles and posts related to decolonization created by individuals (e.g., Nova Scotia Library Association's interview with Camille Callison about responding to TRC's Calls to Action).

4.3 Associations in Australasia – Australia and New Zealand

A total of nine Australian library association websites were reviewed, five of which had content regarding reconciliation and decolonization. The decolonizing content on these associations' websites greatly differs from the North American associations' websites. For example, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) website contains the most information, including Indigenous Matters initiatives, focus, engagement, and updates, as well as the Improving

Library Services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Report. Included in ALIA's guidelines are The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services; ALIA's Libraries and Information Services and Indigenous Peoples policy; and the Standards and Guidelines for Australian Public Libraries with Services for Indigenous Australians. Public Libraries Australia also includes resources related to reconciliation efforts such as their Building Indigenous Services & Collections in Libraries Masterclass. While few Australian associations have decolonizing information, the content differs from many of the North American associations, with reference to numerous formal guidelines, policies, or standards that direct decolonizing efforts in libraries in Australia.

Only two New Zealand library associations were reviewed, and both websites contained relevant information. Like Australian association websites, the content on these websites includes formal guidelines for decolonization. For example, the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) has a formal partnership with Te Rōpū Whakahaui, who represent Maori interests and advise LIANZA. LIANZA also has a Maori Subject Headings subcommittee that focuses on decolonization of subject headings. Also, both LIANZA and the School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (SLANZA) have statements regarding library services for Indigenous peoples (e.g., LIANZA's Library and Information Services to Pacific Peoples; SLANZA's Treaty of Waitangi Policy).

The remaining twelve websites were associated with more than one country, often based on geography. Seven websites included North American countries, one website included both Australia and New Zealand, and four websites served multiple countries in various regions, and were categorized as "International" associations.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of content related to decolonization and reconciliation on library association websites demonstrates that associations engage with calls to decolonize libraries in different ways. The categorization of the types of content associations publish on their websites allows other library associations and LIS professionals to learn methods of contributing to and promoting reconciliation and decolonization in their spheres of influence. Further investigation is required to identify reasons for differences in efforts among associations based on geography and association type, as well as the implications of these differences for member professionals and institutions. The review of multiple associations' websites from different countries provides an opportunity for us in Canada to learn from other countries' library associations' experiences, efforts and their practices which will help in addressing gaps in our approaches as we work toward reconciliation and decolonization today and tomorrow.

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