Kim L. Ranger

Engaging with Indigenous practices

Inclusive pedagogy

How do relational liaising and practicing empathetic instruction intersect with anti-racist practice and counteracting systemic biases as a librarian? How does positionality impact teaching and creating asynchronous library subject guides? Through a 33-year career, I have learned how to live my values holistically while practicing human-centered librarianship and engaging with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.

I approached this article through academic and pedagogical perspectives, trying to remain human-centered. I acknowledge that there are people with deep lived experiences reading this, and I honor their experiences. I hope this article will help us to transform our teaching and learning, understand how we affect others, and make our daily lives better. I accept that all inaccuracies and misunderstandings are my own. This article is part of giving back by paying it forward.

Identity

As I began this article, I considered what aspects of my identity influenced the content. The greeting below serves as an exploration of my positionality in the style of Native people introducing themselves to an audience, although mine is lengthier than I've heard.

Greetings, my name is Kim L. Ranger. I am white, of western European ancestry: Dutch, German, English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh. My ancestors were born in Michigan as early as 1849 and in America as early as 1647, but all have been settlers; my first language is English. Unusually, my early education included Black history, beginning in second grade. My classmates were Asian, African American, and had various abilities. I had Native American neighbors and family. My mom and teachers taught empathy—to think about other peoples' perspectives, to be kind, to respect people for their individual gifts, and to stand up for others—the beginnings of my activism in general and anti-racism in particular. Mostly able-bodied, 59 years old, I am biologically female but characterize my gender as nonbinary or androgynous. I prefer she/her pronouns, identify as lesbian, and am married to a woman. Having experienced bias around gender and sexual orientation all my life, I have been all the more determined to treat others with respect and kindness.

I have a bachelor's degree in anthropology/sociology with a Spanish minor, and a master of information and library studies. I earn a middle-class income and work at a white-collar job as an academic librarian. I was a member of the Religious Society of Friends—more commonly known as Quakers. These characteristics have influenced every part of my

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professional life, leading me to seek understanding other people and their cultures in both academic and spiritual ways.

Relational liaising

As a librarian, I began to study teaching and learning, student-focused information literacy via Christine Bruce's writings,[1] and human-centered design in the mid-1990s. Andrew Whitworth got me thinking about different community norms in his 2014 book *Radical information Literacy*,[2] which led me to consider how I can help students think through societal prejudices about authority in information sources and power in the publishing industry. Working with Bruce and her colleagues during my sabbatical in 2017 led me to coin the idea of relational liaising as a "paradigm of collaboration to expand the relationship between instructors, student learning, and the world of information through . . . building content."[3]

For years I wondered what it would mean to adapt Indigenous ways of teaching and learning as a librarian. When I began editing a library subject guide on Native Americans several years ago,[4] I read resources by and listened to Michigan Anishinaabeg teachers. I participated in a summer learning circle about Indigenous teaching and learning: we learned new vocabulary, such as "decolonization," meaning to de-center colonial ways of knowing and being, and "settlers," indicating all peoples whose ancestors are not Indigenous to a place (see Linda Tuhiwai Smith's writings, for example).[5] I tried to apply my learning to the guide to "build bridges to the learners."[6]

I discovered some best practices for instructional design for Indigenous learners are creating relationship and interconnection, acknowledging that lived experience and wisdom are as important as scholarly knowledge, making the context clear, and emphasizing practical outcomes of learning. Teachers and learners should try to form a collaborative, empathetic rapport that fosters finding deep meaning and creating a transformation in self-understanding.[7] These values mirror my own values of "validating students as whole people with curiosities and fascinations . . . helping them experience relational meaning making, sharing power and information."[8]

Audiences for the guide include Native and non-Native learners and teachers. In redesigning it, I introduced it with, "This guide's purposes are to help you learn more about peoples of the Americas while using information and provide resources for doing research. For those who are 'white' please see the Education tab, box on Resources for settlers." A disclaimer, "Kim Ranger (Euro-American) is of western European ancestry," makes it clear that I am not Indigenous myself.

I included a box that lists Sovereign Tribal Nations new sites to indicate that librarians can advocate for primary sources from first-hand experiences—challenging academic notions of authority, like art that pushes back against the establishment.

On the Michigan tab, in the Tribes and Bands box, text indicates that I used the tribes' own language and spelling. For the box Michigan People of the Three Fires' Works in the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Libraries, I researched the authors' affiliations. For example, *Manoomin: The Story of Wild Rice in Michigan* by Barbara J. Barton (contributions by Anishinaabeg), tells readers that Barton is a settler but much of the material is from people of Michigan Tribal Nations. As librarians, we can provide sources that can help learners shift their perspectives.

For the Articles/Databases tab, in the Search Tips box, I try to help users understand that "while we prefer terms like 'Tribal Nations' or 'Sovereign Nations,' we acknowledge that the following terms are commonly used in sources of information. Try combinations like the following search with your other topic keywords:

> ('native americans' or indian or indigenous or 'first nations' or aborigin*) NOT (india OR indiana* OR australia*)."

Describing the American Indian Experience database, I point out that while it "features more than 150 volumes of scholarship and reference content, most [of it is] from settler viewpoints."

We can challenge the notions of authority and citations and provide alternatives.[9] A colleague pointed me to the NorQuest College Library in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, which has noted that the "formal APA and MLA styles do not have a format for the oral teachings of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers." To solve that, they "developed citation styles in the spirit of wahkôhtowin and reconciliation."[10]

Land acknowledgements

Part of my continuing education in 2021 included a land acknowledgement workshop at GVSU by Andrea Riley Mukavetz. I learned that before creating a land acknowledgement, it's important to give back to the Indigenous communities with which one liaises, and to give thanks. This constitutes reciprocity. Therefore, I acknowledge the Indigenous peoples who have shared their knowledge with me: my childhood neighbors, my stepmother and one of my brothers-in-law, college professors, colleagues, and local Anishinaabeg.

It is valuable to give land acknowledgements because colonialists seized territory that was already inhabited by highly developed, civilized, and sovereign nations and forced their removal. The "settlers" created assimilation policies that sanctioned genocide, torture, kidnapping, eliminating languages, religious conversion, etc. After drafting a few land acknowledgements, I realized that each one could be unique to the creator and specific to an event, a site, or an email signature block. What follows is a brief and fairly generic example: I grew up, live, and work in the territories of the Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. I affirm the sovereignty of tribal nations in the Americas and around the world, their experiences and histories, and their continuing traditions. I am a settler of western European ancestry, responsible for building better relationships with Indigenous peoples, the environment, and the spirit that sustains us.

Positionality

More recently, as part of learning more about diversity, inclusion, equity, access, and antiracism, I've pondered what aspects of my identity are relevant for students in my library instruction sessions. What should I reveal, in order to establish trust and some connection with students, whom I usually see only once?

On May 18, 2022, I led an online workshop called "Engaging Identity and Positionality in Designing Library Subject Guides: The Landscape of Sovereign Tribal Nations and LGBTQ+ Peoples" at the Michigan Academic Library Association annual conference. The goals were to discuss identity self-inventories, characterize positive universal design principles

for indigenizing and queering subject guides for inclusive and equitable access, and for participants to be able to analyze their own asynchronous instructional materials (e.g., subject guides) to redesign them. I was influenced by the notion of positionality in scholarship, in which authors acknowledge their various identities, the sociocultural context of the people in the study, and how those factors affect the research. I created a self-inventory and used it in this and other workshops.

I asked participants what kinds of things they saw that were different from their own guides and what kinds of changes they might make in the future. I encouraged them to learn the history of words, be gentle with everyone, as we are all learning, to do research and read primary sources, and to collaborate with the populations represented in a guide to get feedback. They responded,

> "I never thought about identifying myself (I'm a cis-gendered female, white, European ancestry). That might be a good idea—since I do not know everything that might be useful in the guide."

> "I really appreciated your differentiating the viewpoints in the sources included in your guide (such as American Indian Experience having a settler perspective). Or including information on what content is unique, noteworthy in the resource."

> "Self-identification really helps students/other employees who may access these libguides understand whether or not the individual is of Indigenous ancestry, as it's not something you can tell from just looking at someone (plenty of Indigenous folks are white presenting)."

Post-pandemic teaching

In the fall of 2022, a colleague reported that our students seemed anxious and unprepared for university and to interact with the library. I took that and worked hard to be more approachable in the classroom and build students' confidence, to be more inclusive. For example, relative to the previously mentioned instructional design best practices for Indigenous learners, I acknowledged the ways I identify, asked students about their experiences with the library and what they'd like to know about me or the library, stated objectives for the course and class period specifically, asked how they were feeling during an activity, praised their efforts, emphasized how they could interact with me and the library as a whole, and helped them laugh. They filled out a reflection on how their research question or topic changed as they examined the information, and how their views changed while completing their assignments.

Students seemed to appreciate my efforts. However, it takes courage to disclose hidden characteristics and be vulnerable to the students and instructors, so I am selective about when I do so. While my goal is to counteract systemic biases as a librarian and activist through relational liaising, I don't always have the emotional energy to divulge facets of my identity. One easy technique is using the label nonbinary along with my preference for she/her pronouns. I only have an hour or two with students, but sometimes I see them more than once and hope that these principles are reinforced by repetition and through the learning objects.

Conclusion

As I continue to learn to live my values professionally, I've come to understand how Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning are similar to my Celtic ancestors' traditions. In adapting these practices, I hope I acknowledge the teachings without appropriating them. In teaching empathetically, I want to be perceived as human, approachable, a co-learner. Toward these ends I endeavor to model kindness and respect, to demonstrate that we are interconnected, and emphasize that learners' lived experience and wisdom are important.

Notes

1. For example, Christine Bruce, *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy* (Blackwood, South Australia: Auslib Press, 1997); *Informed Learning* (Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2008).
2. Andrew Whitworth, *Radical Information Literacy: Reclaiming the Political Heart of the IL Movement* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Chandos, 2014).
3. Kim L. Ranger, "Relational Liaising to Integrate Informed Learning into the Disciplinary Classroom," in *Informed Learning Applications: Insights from Research and Practice* (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2019), 72–79, https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/library_books/20/.
4. Kim Ranger, "Native Americans," last updated April 27, 2023, https://libguides.gvsu.edu/natamericans.
5. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin, New Zealand: University of Otago Press Zed Books, 1999); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang, eds., *Indigenous and Decolonizing Studies in Education: Mapping the Long View* (London: Routledge, 2019).
6. Ranger, "Relational," 73.
7. Gregory A. Cajete, "Envisioning Indigenous Education: Applying Insights from Indigenous Views of Teaching and Learning," in *The Handbook of Indigenous Education*, ed. Elizabeth Ann McKinley and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2019), 823–45.
8. Ranger, "Relational," 75.
9. Whitworth, *Radical*.
10. "APA 7th Edition," NorQuest College Library, last updated October 24, 2023, https://libguides.norquest.ca/apa#IK.