Chapter 14

Exploring the Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Into Public Library Services With an Inclusive Intent Using a Critical Theory Lens

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ABSTRACT

Despite legislative and regulatory frameworks that have paved the way for transformation and inclusivity of public libraries in South Africa, there seems to be little or no integration of indigenous knowledge (IK). The exclusion of IK from public library services has potential to counteract efforts towards the provision of inclusive services. This chapter demonstrates how critical theory was used as a lens in a multiple case study that explored the integration of indigenous knowledge (IK) into services of public libraries in South Africa. Looking at the articulation of IK, services that are provided to ensure inclusivity, and issues that impact on IK integration in public libraries, semi-structured interviews were conducted from purposefully selected heads of provincial library services in South Africa. Thematic analysis was used. Using critical theory to frame the analysis, findings indicate understanding of aspects of IK including its oral nature. A paucity of engagement with IK as an aspect of inclusive service provision was noted.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Like many other African countries, South Africa was subjected to colonialism resulting in the marginalisation of indigenous communities. Things were to take a turn for worse when the Nationalist Party came into power and introduced apartheid (also known as separate development) in 1948. The ideal of apartheid was based on the notion that for communities to grow and freely participate in their religious,

cultural, linguistic and other practices they need to be separated (Prah, 2007). In pursuit of the ideal of apartheid people of South Africa were racially divided into Whites, Coloureds, Indians and Blacks. Service provision (including provision of library services) was also determined along racial lines resulting in poor or non-existent services to Blacks who were the worst affected by discriminatory policies (Mostert, 1999; Nassimbeni, 2014; Owens, 2002; Rodrigues, 2006; Witbooi, 2007).

One of the many changes introduced after the first democratic elections of 1994 was the establishment of new geographical demarcations. Nine, new racially integrated provinces replaced the initial four which were occupied by Whites. Each of the nine provinces differ immensely in terms of population numbers, poverty levels, wealth distribution and service provision requirements. Each province is mandated to provide library services as per Schedule 5 of the *Constitution* (Republic of South Africa, 1996)

As a young democracy, South Africa is a country that has to deal with historical marginalisation of a large section of society. The library and information services sector is also faced with challenges pertaining to transformation and inclusivity. As such, legislative and regulatory policies and frameworks were developed to guide inclusivity and transformation. Some of the legislative and policy frameworks that impact on libraries are briefly discussed.

Legislative Frameworks and Policies and Public Libraries

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* (Republic of South Africa, 1996) guarantees everyone the right to use their language and to participate in the cultural activities of their choice. Additionally, the *Constitution* has put into place machinery such as the Human Rights Commission and the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious, and Linguistic Communities (Republic of South Africa, 1996). These institutions are independent and tasked with ensuring that human rights are respected and protected.

In addressing the issue of human rights, the democratic government of South Africa recognised that social transformation was essential. To this effect, the *White Paper on Transforming the Public Service*, or, *Batho Pele White Paper* (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1997) was adopted by parliament. The framework is based on eight principles which were intended to guide the transformation process. The principles of the *Batho Pele White Paper* (Department of Public Service and Administration, 1997) were a beacon of hope for South Africans who envisaged a public service that puts them at the centre of service provision.

Another significant step taken by the democratic dispensation to transform society was the recognition and appreciation of the multicultural and multilingual nature of South Africans especially in view of their historical marginalisation during the apartheid era. In addressing multilingualism, the *National Language Policy Framework* (Department of Arts and Culture, 2002) was instituted as a guiding instrument in line with Section 6 of the *Constitution* (Republic of South Africa, 1996) which argues for the development, promotion, respect and tolerance of South Africa's linguistic diversity. The policy states that equitable use of languages will enhance participation by communities whose languages were previously marginalised, and help in the recognition of knowledge and expertise in these communities. It is therefore reasonable to expect public entities, including libraries to align their services to this policy.

The *Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Policy* (Department of Science and Technology, 2004) was adopted with the aim of promoting the recognition and appreciation of indigenous knowledge systems of various communities of South Africa. The *IKS Policy* was intended to be:

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