# How big is the leap between our ideals and our reality?

## Questioning library approaches to, and restriction of, indigenous collections.

**A paper submitted by Troy Tuhou for the Asia-Pacific Library and Information Conference.**

## Abstract

This paper was submitted to help initiate a discussion and reflective thought on how committed we are to accessibility. In this case the issues are discussed in relation to a desire for restrictions by Māori and other indigenous peoples.

How different from our ideals is the reality and practice of our profession especially when it involves indigenous knowledge?

This paper is relevant as it aims to help the members of our profession to take that "one small step" towards a realisation that Māori and other indigenous peoples' ideas of knowledge and its guardianship are not dissimilar to our own library practices. It is hoped that the reader will make a "giant leap" to a better understanding of the importance for consultation with Māori and indigenous peoples when embarking on projects which give unrestricted access to their knowledge.

# Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to initiate a dialogue and encourage reflective thought on how committed we are as a profession to the notion of accessibility. To determine this, we will explore the notion of a library "ideal" by looking at some of the foundational documents of a number of library organisations, national, regional and international. A number of other sources will also be considered. With an indication of what our ideal might look like, a comparison can then be made between that ideal and our daily practice. A systematic approach was utilised to select a number of international libraries whose websites were then explored to gather information on membership and any other criteria necessary for people to gain access to their resources.

From this point of reference we can then contemplate our attitudes and ideas regarding the desire of Māori and other indigenous peoples to restrict access to materials and objects about them or acquired from them. Having established an understanding of these different themes, we can then move to our conclusion and look at some strategies and simple actions that we can use as tools when encountering matters such as these in our libraries. Please reflect on the following questions as you read this paper:

- How many times have we questioned our Māori and indigenous colleagues about the desire of their people to restrict access to material?

- How many of your indigenous colleagues have been asked to justify the desire of their people for these restrictions?

# Background

The original concept for this paper came about due to an experience I had in an interview situation. In that interview I was asked whether, as a Māori, I felt there was a conflict between the library ideal and the Māori desire for restriction of materials. In this context, the ideal related to me was "free, open access to information and resources". The look of confusion my answer elicited from the interview panel took me aback, and as is customary in an interview situation I further explained the reasoning behind my response. My response to the interview panel was: "No, there is no conflict between the library profession's ideal and the restrictions that Māori want". My experience in lending services had led me to the conclusion that what Māori wanted was already aligned with our current practice.

Lending is the public face of most libraries and at the time of the interview I had worked in lending for five years. Over that time I learned what and where the closed and restricted collections were, what criteria ensured access to the materials in them and that there were theses in our collection with embargoes. It was also necessary for me to have a working knowledge of our membership policies and regulations, which I used regularly when informing patrons why they were being denied access to a resource. Therefore, to my mind the membership criteria, library policy and regulations aligned our daily practice with requests from Māori for restrictions.

Nonetheless my interview experience elicited a realisation that there is often a disconnect between our ideal and reality and that we are blinded to contradictions in our daily practice by that ideal.

# The Library Ideal

To establish what this library ideal looks like a number of statements, regulations and policies from our national, regional and international library associations were explored, and a number of other sources were also consulted.

The Library and Information Association, New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) is one of two professional associations with relevance in Aotearoa. It has a number of statements on its website; of particular importance to this paper is part 6 of the statement on access to information:

> "Libraries, and particularly public libraries, are prime agencies for the dissemination of information. Librarians have a duty to acquire, organise, and provide access to information freely to the communities they serve. The basic aim of library services is the acquisition, organisation, and circulation of information. Librarians have a duty to fulfill this aim, particularly as it relates to the collection, organisation, and circulation of information…" (LIANZA, 2002)

In similar fashion, the Principle of the Statement on Free Access to Information asserted by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is worded:

> "Freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if individuals have unrestricted access to information and ideas." (ALIA, 2015)

In its strategic plan for 2016 ─ 2021, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) elevates freedom of access to its first core value and states:

"The principles of freedom of access to information, ideas and works of imagination embodied in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (IFLA, 2017)

However, to highlight the disconnect between the idea and reality, both the LIANZA and the ALIA statements include conflicting information that either modifies or places limitations on these primary statements. This includes requiring a demonstrable commitment to the institution's responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi, and an individual's rights to privacy and protection from misuse and exploitation of information (LIANZA, 2002).

In his article "Librarianship and political values: Neutrality or commitment", Blanke (1989, p.40) suggests that a fundamental ideal of librarianship is "free and equal access to information". Furthermore, Rubin (2016) in chapter 10 of *Foundations of library and information science*, lists seven values each separated into different sections. He postulates in the first value, Services, in a section discussing the need to protect free access to knowledge: "… that the knowledge of the world's cultures must freely be transmitted to all ..." (p.538).

These foundation documents and statements, together with the values and ideals as suggested by both Rubin and Blanke, help determine our definition for a library ideal, which this paper proposes to be: Free, unhindered access to information in all its forms, for all people.

## Our Practice

With an approximation of what our ideal is, we can now examine what we do in our daily practice. Initially, we will look at the membership policies, regulations and guidelines at several libraries. Following this examination into membership, we will then look at these libraries' websites to determine what closed or restricted collections they have and what criteria needs to be fulfilled to gain access to the resources within those collections.

An idea of what we do in our day-to-day practice is contained in Table 1. Libraries were selected from the *Directory of OCLC members* using the first and last library listed of the first country in each letter from A to M. Information on membership policy, regulations and special collections were identified from each library's website. Also noted were the necessary criteria to access special collections, if any were found.

Table 1.  OCLC: Membership criteria and special collections of selected libraries.

| Country | OCLC symbol | Library | Website | Membership to borrow and access | special collections | Access criteria for special collections |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Afghanistan | AFACK | Afghanistan Center at Kabul University | http://acku.edu.af/library/ | No membership criteria found on website | Entire Collection is a special collection | Registration to use reading rooms and resource centres |
| | KAPLY | Polytechnic University Kabul | https://kpu.edu.af/en/search-api?search_api_views_fulltext=maslow&x=0&y=0 | Unknown: Needs password | NA | NA |
| Bahamas | BACAR | Carmichael Road Library | https://bahamaslibraries.org/index.php/bahamaspubliclibraries/new-providence-libraries/573-carmichael-public-library-in-new-providence | Yes | NA | NA |
| | COBAS | Univeristy of Bahamas | http://www.ub.edu.bs/page/1/?s=library | Yes | Yes | Use only in Special Collections area, closed access area |
| Cameroon | CMAJP | African Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics | http://imhotep-journal.org/index.php/imhotep | Open access journal NA | NA | NA |
| | CMUCD | Univeriste Catholique De Douala | No library located on website | NA | NA | NA |
| Denmark | D9Z | Aalborg Seminarium Biblioteket | https://www.ucnbib.dk/en/page/about-ucn-library | Students and staff for borrowing. Public use of books in library only | NA | NA |
| | D$V | Viborg Sygehus Fagbiblioteket | http://www.hospitalsenhedmidt.dk/forskning/fagbiblioteket/ | Staff and students of the hospital | NA | NA |
| Ecuador | ECAAI | Alliance Academy International | No library located on website | NA | NA | NA |
| | ECVBC | Victoria Bilingual Christian Academy | No library located on website | NA | NA | NA |
| Fiji | FJNUL | Fiji National University Library | http://www.fnu.ac.fj/library/ | Staff and students | Yes | Not specified |
| | NZSUU | University of the South Pacific | https://www.usp.ac.fj/index.php?id=lib_hme | Staff and students | Yes | USP Library card (Staff and student) |
| Gaza | | No libraries listed | | | | |
| Honduras | HNBWP | Biblioteca Wison Popenoe | https://www.zamorano.edu/biblioteca/?page_id=123 | Staff and Students | Unknown | NA |
| | HNUTC | Universidad Tecnologica Centroamericana | http://www.unitec.edu/bcrai | No membership criteria found on website | Unknown | NA |
| Iceland | ISAKR | Akranes Public Library | http://bokasafn.akranes.is/ | Paid membership | Yes, however the service appears to be more than a library and incorporates archives and museum | NA |
| | ISBOK | Vestmannaeyjar Public Library | http://safnahus.vestmannaeyjar.is/ | See above | See above | NA |
| Jamaica | JMADJ | Anglican Diocese of Jamaica | No library located on website | Unknown | NA | NA |
| | JMVTD | Vocational Training Development Institute | http://heart.mlasolutions.com/oasis/catalog/(S(3an15u454zx2cpzbwdzhk455))/default.aspx?installation=vtdi | Students and staff | NA | NA |
| Kazakhstan | KZGO | CRDFL Global Kazakhstan Office | No library located on website | NA | NA | NA |
| | KZKMO | West Kazakhstan Marat Ospanov State Medical University | https://zkgmu.kz/en/library/about-the-library | Staff and Students | Unknown | NA |
| Latvia | LAPOL | Academy of Police | No institutional website found | NA | NA | NA |
| | VIDZE | Vidzeme University College | http://va.lv/en/students-and-employees/library/about-library | Membership card necessary, part of an integrated City and regional university library scheme | Unknown | NA |
| Macau | MOCMA | City University of Macau | http://www.cityu.edu.mo/library/ | Staff and students | Unknown | NA |
| | MOMAC | Macau University of Science & Technology | http://lib.must.edu.mo/en | Staff and students | Unknown | NA |

Out of 24 libraries, 14 were found to have membership criteria available on their website. This does not mean that the remaining 10 had no membership, rather that the researcher had difficulty obtaining this data or it was not available online. The table still shows that access restrictions are embedded in the structure of different libraries, be it membership criteria or regulations and policy. Limitations are imposed by many libraries on the use of the resources of which they are guardians.

In the case of special collections, these restrictions tighten further still. An example of the additional permissions required to access materials or items from these special collections is The University of Auckland Paterson Collection, which is limited to post graduate students from one discipline, and even then only with the express permission of the head of the department. Let us also remember that tertiary libraries also have research deposited by students every year. Depending on the subject matter and the type of research, an embargo may be imposed with specific instructions regarding access permission and how it is granted. It will also include a timeframe stating how long the material must be restricted from public access.

This notion of restriction not only applies to our physical collections but also to the virtual spaces of our libraries. These are included in our agreements and contracts with the various vendors and publishers who provide our online databases, and therefore access to thousands if not millions of online journals, books, and other materials is affected.

All of the libraries surveyed were part of a wider organisation such as a university, a museum, or a city or district council. We are also a part of a wider society – locally, regionally and internationally – and must abide by all and any legislation from these quarters. Therefore, in terms of access, it is the wider institutions who determine the

membership criteria for even our primary stakeholders, whether they be the enrolled students and staff members for an educational institution, or the ratepayers and residents of the public library system. We have a shared understanding of the necessity for membership; it is a way of ensuring that our primary stakeholders have access to limited materials and resources and a way for us to uphold our legal and contractual obligations.

## Why do indigenous people want restrictions?

Now that we have discussed our ideal and looked at our practice, we can see the obvious disparity between our ideal of free unhindered access to information in all its forms, for all people as proposed by this paper and our daily practice. The purpose of this exercise was not to discourage us from having an ideal, but to encourage us all to think critically and start a dialogue about what we believe and what we do, so that we can move forward into a space of better understanding.

To improve our understanding even more we will look at some of the reasons that Māori and other indigenous peoples want these restrictions. In the headings used in the section titled "Issues at the interface of indigenous knowledge and libraries", Oxborrow, Goulding, & Lilley (2017) provide a good foundation for us to employ. For example:

1. Cataloguing and classification

    Western classification systems have difficulty with many indigenous concepts; this has ongoing implications of discoverability and access at the user level especially if the user is indigenous.

2. Misrepresentation of indigenous peoples and cultures in literature

   Our collections have a great deal of material authored by non-indigenous people about Māori and other indigenous communities. The issue with this is that the author is viewing and describing what they see through the lens of their own culture.

3. Repatriation and digital repatriation

   Within the collections of many of our libraries, there are materials containing indigenous knowledge; at times, this material was obtained without the indigenous culture's awareness or consent.

4. Access and restriction of access

   They mention here our library ideal and show how it fails to recognise the knowledge storage and transmission systems of indigenous cultures, where in some instances information may be restricted to a certain group, e.g., a certain family, or those with particular status within the community.

These issues are not mutually exclusive and are highly likely to be found with at least one of the others. A possible reason for the strong relationship and interplay between these issues are the cultural ideals and beliefs on which most of our libraries are founded, namely, a western cultural model. Libraries and the institutions that host them are not neutral bodies. We have a foundation in a culture foreign to Māori and other indigenous peoples, with concepts, ideas and practices that are alien and sometimes abhorrent to them.

## Questions

At the beginning of this paper, you were asked to consider two questions:

- How many times have we questioned our Māori and indigenous colleagues about the desire of their people to restrict access to material?

- How many of your indigenous colleagues have been asked to justify the desire of their people for these restrictions?

If you are not a Māori or indigenous person have you ever asked or thought something similar to question one? After reading this paper and reflecting on its content, it is hoped that you will no longer ask this question and instead be a champion for your indigenous colleagues who are asked it in your presence.

If you are Māori or an indigenous person, have you ever found yourself in a situation like that in question two, justifying a desire for restrictions? It is hoped that this paper has given you some ideas of how to respond in future.

## Actions

To conclude this paper we will look at some actions you can use when you encounter situations where our ideal and practice diverge. Here are a number of easily achievable actions, which you can perform as you will, and continue throughout your careers:

1. Reading this paper is an action that has hopefully led you to an understanding of the disconnect between our ideals and our day-to-day practice.

2. Attend the paper session this paper is written for. Here you can further engage with, and reflect upon, the content.

3. Reading further material; there are a number of researchers and librarians who are writing about indigenous library matters, some of these may be found in the bibliography of this paper.

4. Recognition and understanding that our libraries and our institutions are not neutral or objective and that they are culture bound.

5. Initiate a discussion, either formal or informal, about the content of this paper and or other papers that you choose to read.

## Conclusion

An ideal is defined by the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "Conceived or regarded as perfect or supremely excellent in its kind; answering to one's highest conception". I posit that our ideal is a worthy goal, and that we need only amend it to allow for cultural diversity. This amendment of our ideal is another action to be added to our list of actions, especially when accomplished with frank and open dialogue between our colleagues, indigenous and non-indigenous alike.

All librarians and libraries play an important role in helping to shape what we do, how we manage the demands of our stakeholders and our relationships with our communities while at the same time allowing for the restrictions requested by indigenous peoples who have resources and information housed within our collections. We can also influence our own library policy, by initiating a review of old policies and creating new ones that ensure consultation with, and give value to, the opinions and participation of indigenous peoples.

For Māori and indigenous library professionals, you now have an answer for those colleagues who are caught up in our library deal but have forgotten our practice. We

can simply answer: "Indigenous people are not asking for anything special, they're asking for something that the library already does."

Non-indigenous library professionals, you too can use this reply. However its use for you is more likely to be as a response to a statement made by one of your non-indigenous colleagues rather than a direct question. It is important to remember that many of you were in a comparable situation asking similar questions. It has been my observation that these questions and attitudes are rarely born out of malice but are an indication that the questioner is entrenched in the ideal and blinded to our daily practice when trying to understand the desire of indigenous peoples to restrict information. May this "one small step" empower you to take a "giant leap" into a heightened awareness of the differences between our ideal and our reality.

## Bibliography

Australian Library and Information Association. (2015). *Statement on free access to information.* Retrieved from https://www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-standards-and-guidelines/statement-free-access-information

Blanke, H. T. (1989). Librarianship and political values: Neutrality or commitment? *Library Journal, 114(*12), 39-43.

Christen, K., Jackson, J., Kelty, C., McPherson, T., Dietrich, C., Dourish, P., … Leopold, R. (2012). Does information really want to be free? Indigenous knowledge systems and the question of openness. *International Journal of Communication*, *6*, 2870–2893. Retrieved from http://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/issue/view/8

De Souza, P., Edmonds, F., Mcquire, S., Evans, M., Chenhall, R., & Contact, R. C. (2016). *Aboriginal knowledge, digital technologies and cultural collections: Policy, protocols, practice.* Retrieved from http://networkedsociety.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/2146091/Aboriginal-Knowledge-MNSI-RP4-2016.pdf

Garwood-Houng, A. (2005). Protocols: Meeting the challenges of indigenous information needs. *Australian Academic & Research Libraries*, *36*(2), 143–151. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048623.2005.10721254

Garwood-Houng, A., & Blackburn, F. (2014). The ATSILIRN Protocols: A twenty-first century guide to appropriate library services for and about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. *The Australian Library Journal*, *63*(1), 4–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2014.890018

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. (2017). *IFLA Strategic Plan 2016 — 2021*. Retrieved from https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/gb/strategic-plan/2016-2021.pdf

Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa. (2002). *Access to information.* Retrieved from https://lianza.org.nz/sites/default/files/LIANZA Statement - Access to Information.pdf

Nakata, M. (2002). Indigenous knowledge and the cultural interface: Underlying issues at the intersection of knowledge and information systems. *IFLA Journal*, *28*(5–6), 281–291. https://doi.org/10.1177/034003520202800513

Nakata, M., Byrne, A., Nakata, V., & Gardiner, G. (2005). Indigenous knowledge, the

library and information service sector, and protocols. *Australian Academic &*

*Research Libraries*, *36*(2), 7–21.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00048623.2005.10721244

Oxborrow, K., Goulding, A., & Lilley, S. (2017). The interface between indigenous

knowledge and libraries: The need for non-Māori librarians to make sense of

mātauranga Māori in their professional lives. Retrieved from

http://www.informationr.net/ir/22-4/rails/rails1619.html

Oxford English Dictionary. (n.d.). *ideal*. Retrieved 1 May, 2018, from

http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/view/Entry/90958?redirectedFrom=ideal#

eid

Rubin, E. (2016). *Foundations of library and information science* (4th ed.). Retrieved

from https://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Whaanga, H., Bainbridge, D., Anderson, M., Scrivener, K., Cader, P., Roa, T., &

Keegan, T. T. (2015). He Matapihi Mā Mua, Mō Muri: The ethics, processes,

and procedures associated with the gigitization of indigenous knowledge—The

Pei Jones Collection. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, *53*(5–6), 520–547.

https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2015.1009670