New Ways of Teaching Library Service to Immigrant Communities

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ABSTRACT

Outreach to immigrant communities is a long-standing aspect of United States (U.S.) library service. This area of library and information science (LIS) practice is vital given that immigration continues to dominate policy and public discourse. There is a need to advance U.S.-based LIS education so that new library professionals are aware of the sociopolitical implications of engagement with immigrant communities. We introduce a framework to guide instruction on best practices for outreach to immigrant communities within LIS courses. Then we describe how the framework will also inform a self-paced course to welcome immigrant populations into the LIS professions. By calling for deeper, humanizing pedagogy, this paper aligns with the 2020 ALISE Conference theme of "Transforming LIS Education in an Interconnected World." Though based on the U.S. context, the framework is applicable to other countries.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

information rights; specific populations; social justice

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

education programs/schools; pedagogy; inclusion; representation; specific populations: immigrants; library and information science

INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Census data, one in every seven people in the United States is an immigrant. The U.S. is currently home to the world's largest and most diverse composition of people, including approximately 19% of the worldwide 244 million immigrants. This amounts to 46 million newcomers originating from every nation in the world. Most Americans can trace their familial ties to other nations (Grieco, et. al, 2012).

Immigrants are essential library constituents. For more than a century, America's libraries have provided exclusive services to immigrants. Many of the programs that define libraries—from children's storytime to job-seeking courses—originally began as ways to support new members of their communities (Buck, 2006). This area of LIS practice is a source of professional pride. As Koerber (2018) writes, "As long as libraries have been 'free to all', as the front of the Boston Public Library proudly proclaims, they have provided some kind of service to newcomers to this country."

RATIONALE

Arguably, outreach to immigrant communities has gone unscrutinized in comparison to other areas of the LIS profession. Immigrant services aligns with the field's commitment to diversity and inclusion; yet, there is an ironic lack of diversity and inclusion in consideration of immigrants. Librarians grant disproportionate attention to some immigrants while overlooking others (Burke, 2008; Ndumu, 2020). We see this in the homogenization of descriptions of immigrants, as evident through the frequent conflation of the terms "immigrant" and "Hispanic" (that is, Spanish-speaking). Often, entire immigrant groups are ignored in LIS discourse, and even the ethnic variance among Spanish-speaking groups goes unmentioned. There is a need for training that acknowledges the vastness among new Americans, including:

- immigrants of color such as Asian, Black, or Latinx (from Latin America, regardless of language) diasporic groups
- those who are forcefully displaced such as refugees and asylees
- religious minorities, including Muslim immigrants
- those belonging to relatively new immigrant groups - for instance, Sub-Saharan Africans who, according to census data, currently comprise the fastest-growing immigrant group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)
- those who are of Hispanic, Francophone, or other linguistic heritages and for which English is a new language
- those who have not obtained authorized permanent residence such as TPS holders, DACA recipients, and undocumented immigrants

The range of immigrant types along with pre-migration information environments are rarely accounted for in LIS instruction, according to a canvas of available online LIS syllabi. In addition, content on library outreach to immigrants is mainly relegated to abbreviated units within foundational diversity courses.

This combination of unawareness, immigrant typecasting, and content brevity has culminated in predictable, prescriptive efforts - for example, English language education, citizenship preparation, and cultural programming. Though essential, these endeavors discount community members' capacities and the dynamic role of information in migration. There is little regard for members' lived experiences, particularly in light of the current tense sociopolitical landscape. Despite calls for works that introduce diasporic and contextual insight (Srinivasan & Pyati, 2007), there has been little connection to LIS education specifically in the U.S. context.

In response to these gaps, we present the H.E.A.R.T. Framework, a social justice oriented approach for advancing education for future LIS professionals. Library service to immigrants must connect to policy, push/pull migration dynamics, and social inclusion. Over the

next year, we will test the framework through a pilot project in partnership with the REFORMA Mid-Atlantic Chapter and Prince George's Public Library System. The partnership is intended to engage with immigrant adults who seek to apply their skills within the United States workforce. It provides a self-paced course for potential librarians that will be developed with the concepts of globalization, self-actualization, and inclusion in mind. The H.E.A.R.T. Framework along with new ways of recruiting to the workforce - such as the pilot project - can advance LIS education. Indeed, a humanizing educational approach can help move LIS training from one-size-fits-all functionalism—that is, "Deweyan pragmatism" (Buschman, 2017)—to a real-world, emancipatory praxis.

THE H.E.A.R.T. FRAMEWORK

The H.E.A.R.T. Framework is designed for LIS educators and aims to broaden students' understandings of immigrant integration to foster relevant and progressive services. We describe concepts and then provide examples of ready-to-use tools.

Humanitarianism

Learning content must first promote compassion toward immigrants without prompting pity or notions of deficiency, as discussed further along. There is an opportunity to make explicit the implied professional aim of combating hegemony, xenophobia, and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Humanitarianism must undergird LIS endeavors.

Mind the Five, for example, is a card game for training service providers such as librarians to be ethically conscious and culturally sensitive when engaging with immigrant communities. Developed by University of Washington and University of Oregon information researchers, the game is structured to promote sound privacy practice but can also be used to champion equality and demonstrate allyship in a low-stakes, casual setting.

Experience

Courses or units that focus on immigrants in libraries present an opportunity to introduce issues that impact communities. In addition to challenges, LIS educators should shed light on the richness and sovereignty of immigrant communities. In doing so, future librarians will be exposed to strengths- or asset-based narratives.

Immigrant Stories is a platform that helps recent immigrants and refugees create digital stories - or brief videos with images, text, and audio - about their personal experience. These digital stories are preserved through the IHRC Archives, the Minnesota Digital Library, and the Digital Public Library of America. Over 250 stories representing more than 50 different communities are now part of the Immigrant Stories Collection and the platform contains lesson plans for college educators. In addition, LIS educators can point students to the IFLA World Library Map to help them ascertain the library environments in countries of origin. Immigrants' pre-migration library access is rarely considered.

Acculturation

Acculturating to a new society is a long-term process that is directly linked to not only the availability of resources, but how they influence one's quality of life. There is often little

regard for affect or health outcomes in library service to immigrants. To strengthen students' awareness of how immigrant acculturation connects with physical and inner wellbeing, it is important to include learning content on the process of integration, acculturation, and social inclusion.

To demonstrate the consequences of acculturative stress and microaggressions, LIS educators can incorporate *Killing Me Softly,* a game designed by librarian Fobazi Ettarh. Even though it involves all facets of diversity and multiculturalism, the game encourages awareness of adjusting to a new culture.

Realism

Efforts that ignore the everyday impact of U.S. social stratification are ultimately inauthentic. Librarians can play a role in fostering dialogue on factors that prompt mass migration such as climate and labor migration, mass expulsion, armed conflict, "brain drain" (the exodus of educated, highly skilled groups) and more. Rather than profiling immigrants as digitally divided, technological ignorant, and information poor (Shen, 2013; Prensky, 2001; Childers & Post, 1975), LIS education must interrogate whether and why disparities exist. Legal, physical and ideological boundaries influence a newcomer's integration into their community. Librarians can help disrupt the marginalization, demagoguery, and disenfranchisement that immigrants often experience.

The Immigrant Experience is an interactive tool designed by the team at Experience Magazine. It highlights that every American immigrant from every era has a story — shaped by laws, demographics, economics, and racial attitudes. And to discourage the use of dehumanizing language such as "Illegal Aliens" which has yet to be eradicated from the Library of Congress Classification System, LIS educators can introduce students to the Glossary of Migration made possible through the United Nations International Organization for Migration.

Transnationalism

Immigration flows are inextricably linked to information networks. While LIS predominantly focuses on the lack of information access or skills, research substantiates that now more than ever migrants participate in and contribute to the information society prior to, upon, and after relocating (Nedelcu, 2012). Kok and Rogers (2017) refer to this as *transglocalization*. In the 21st century, immigrants are "digital subjects" or "e-actors" (Fortunati & Vincent, 2013) who have proven to be effective information users.

Educators can introduce students to smartphone applications such as Remitly and FindHello, which were designed with immigrant integration in mind. They can also highlight the journeys of information experts such as Ukranian-born Jan Koum who co-created WhatsApp in part for transnational users. Through the use of information technologies, diasporic identities are framed, families remain bonded, memories are chronicled, and life tools are organized.

APPLICATION: PILOT PROJECT

The H.E.A.R.T. framework will be tested through a related initiative: The *Integrating Immigrants into the LIS Workforce* one-year pilot project to introduce refugees and immigrants to the library professions. As acknowledged by Melanie Welch, project director in American

Library Association's Public Programs Office, it wasn't until 2019 that the field began developing best practices and a conversation around library services to new Americans. There still remains a gap in creating pathways for immigrants to enter the library professions. Through this self-paced mini-course, participants will be provided an orientation followed by a shadow experience within a public library. The project is a partnership between the REFORMA Education committee, the REFORMA Mid-Atlantic chapter, and the Prince George Public Library system to address the larger research question: *How can we welcome highly skilled immigrants into the library workforce?*

The concepts of humanitarianism, experience, acculturation, realism, and transnationalism will inform the development of the mini-course. Accordingly, the learning content will emphasize individual agency, self-determination, information potential, cultural richness, and globalization. Modules will introduce highly-skilled immigrants to 1) the library professions, 2) aspects of working in different types of libraries or information organizations, 3) opportunities for immersion, and 4) details on funding library education. The project will take place in Prince George County, Maryland which is recognized as a multicultural region with a growing immigrant community, particularly among El Salvadoran, Nigerian, and Ethiopian groups. To assist with the immersion exercise, Prince George County Public Library will provide a one-day shadowing for pilot participants. The researchers will then gather data and feedback on the pilot program with the hopes of scaling up and formalizing the initiative.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Immigrants are important library constituents. Whether K-12, public, or academic, libraries have historically served as educational and recreational spaces for those who re-establish their lives in the U.S. However, U.S. LIS education continues to be one-dimensional in its understanding of immigrants' information experiences. Relatedly, the library workforce offers narrow recommendations. We offer a social justice approach through the H.E.A.R.T. Framework. This technique can strengthen education for LIS professionals. The intended outcome is to transform outreach from cursory services to conscientiousness partnerships.

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