

CFLA-FCAB Truth and Reconciliation Efforts

Interview with Camille Callison

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kirstyn seanor: Hello, listeners. I'm kirstyn seanor and this episode of "So What?" I'm joined by Camille Callison to discuss some of the ongoing indigenization projects of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, Fédération Canadienne des associations de bibliothèques. Camille, to get us started would you be so kind as to tell us a bit about yourself?

Camille Callison:

I'm from the Tsesk'iyá clan or Crow clan of the Tahltan Nation located in northern BC and it goes up into the Yukon and down into Alaska. We're the people of the Stikine River which is Canada's Grand Canyon and the second largest canyon in North America. So I'm honoured to be here today and also currently a guest in Treaty 1 territory, living in Winnipeg and working at the University of Manitoba as the indigenous services library and liaison librarian for anthropology, native studies and social work and probably the reason why I'm here today is because I was the chair of the truth and reconciliation committee of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations and I'm currently the chair of the indigenous matters committee of CFLA-FCAB. Most of the reason why I'm talking to you today is about a report that we did a few years ago. Forty-five members of our committee worked very hard to create the truth and reconciliation report and to give ten recommendations to professionals working in library archives and cultural memory institutions to work more effectively and respectfully with indigenous people in Canada.

kirstyn: Thank you for that fantastic introduction. Next, if you could please summarize the work that the truth and reconciliation committee was doing such as how it came about or an overview of the ten recommendations that you came up with.

Camille: Basically, when we formed the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, we talked about trying to form an association of associations, so much in the same model as IFLAB, the international

federation of associations. And when I came up around the table, I was actually president of Manitoba Library Association when this work started, came up around the table about having a francophone representative and I mentioned and it was endorsed by Sandra Sing and everyone else at the table. We had all talked about having an indigenous representative. So somebody who is indigenous from Canada. So First Nations, Métis or Inuit representative to the board. And at that point, the founding of a national association for indigenous people and librarianship hadn't occurred and we're still working on that right now. In the interim, after I finished my term as president of the Manitoba Library Association, they asked me to stay on as the indigenous representative.

So at our first meeting, first CFLA-FCAB which was in June 2016, one of the three priorities would be truth and reconciliation because the truth and reconciliation commission had delivered their report and their calls to action and we wanted to see how we as librarians could answer that calls to action. We were notably not in the TRC calls to action. We weren't noted in them and so we felt that we had an important role to be able to play as far as supporting the calls to action and as well creating change to make our institutions much more warm and welcoming to indigenous people and to respectfully house indigenous knowledge in our libraries, archives and cultural memory institutions.

So the interim board was made up of ten people who decided that we should have our own committee to be able to make recommendations to the incoming permanent board. The interim board was in place from June 2016 until February 1st, 2017. In that summer, we brought together a terms of reference for the truth and reconciliation committee which talked about engaging with existing committees from CFLA-FCAB membership which was comprised of all of the provincial and territorial associations, CARL and CULC, and we had talked about trying to work within their group. So some of the provinces already had well established indigenous groups or First Nations groups or people working with indigenous communities across the country and some provinces and territories didn't. So we wanted to be able to make recommendations that everyone would be able to engage with.

We wanted to be able to support the formation of a national association dedicated to indigenous people within library archives and cultural memory institutions. We wanted to review the guidelines of best practices that we had already had in place as they pertain to library services in Canada and so part of that was the policies that Canadian Library Association had already endorsed and put into place. And then we wanted to recommend a long term structure and direction to the incoming board to address indigenous issues and matters related to indigenous people including the formation of a permanent committee and programming following that inaugural board meeting in February 2017 when we would have an elected board.

So that was really where that happened and we finally finished that in August of 2016 and then we put out the call early August to be able to

bring people in, have the membership, appoint people that could make recommendations on their behalf. We ended up with this incredible team of people from across the country and what we decided to do was to pull together the teams.

I had to figure out as the chair how I would arrange the people and what direction we would take and so I had gone and traditionally asked the two elders at the University of Manitoba. Elder Norman Meade and Elder Marlene Kayseas agreed to advise me in this process and so we created the medicine wheel and we talked about how we could use that and adapt it because even though I don't personally come from a medicine wheel community where we use that as a teaching model, we would use something more like theatre connected relationships between people and our land and water and our – and language, it would portray in a little bit different way when we talk about it, but the medicine wheel is really important for many reasons, but I think one of the biggest things about the medicine wheel is that it visually represents things in a way that nonindigenous people can understand.

So that was really important to be able to move forward and at the beginning it was really hard to actually get people to sign onto it until I talked about the fact that we needed to have indigenous and nonindigenous people because as we walk along this path towards reconciliation in Canada it's not indigenous people always doing the heavy lifting, but it needs to have indigenous and nonindigenous people walking beside each other. When I ask people to come and to walk along that path with us, I always say that I won't ask you to walk behind me. And I ask you not to walk in front of me, but I ask you to walk beside me on that path towards reconciliation and to creating a Canada that's much more respectful and equitable for all people including indigenous people.

So I really wanted to be able to make sure that we could make the recommendations and what came out of this really meaningful for both indigenous people and nonindigenous people and remembering that we are talking to professionals. We weren't talking to communities or giving them advice or recommendation. We were talking to other people who are professionals in this area and most of those people are not indigenous and so we're really trying to make it so that people who aren't indigenous were able to understand where we were coming from.

So it came about that we had 14 and with the four recommendations or four things in our mandate, we were able to divide them into the four teams and so the black team compiled best practices what already existed in Canada to work with indigenous people. The white team provided a gap analysis and it looked at the truth and reconciliation calls to action and prioritize them. First of all, they pulled out things that we can do in library archives, in museums, and then they talked about how we can implement them. The yellow team looked at existing relationships and developed a contact database as well as laid the groundwork for some of our work towards forming this national association for indigenous people.

The name that we've talked about is national indigenous knowledge and language alliance. So we're hoping that that will fill the void until we actually can have a meeting and then the membership can decide what they would like to call it.

The red team was really about envisioning a future and how we can work respectfully with indigenous people related to indigenous knowledge and decolonization of space, access classification, work with indigenous knowledge protection and the copyright act and how we can work with outreach and service within our areas. And the biggest key for all of this is that we wanted to give people recommendations and advice to be able to create relationships with indigenous community that's in their area. So where their library and archive or cultural memory institution is located and they have indigenous knowledge holding stuff. So for example, you might be in Ontario but you might have a huge collection of northwest coast and so if you have people there that those would be those traditional knowledge holders.

So that was really the thing. We came up with 83 pages and then how did we make that so that people could buy into it and look at it. So what we did is we came up with ten overarching recommendations pulled out from the work that had been done, and then within the report was more granular recommendations. So for example, about indigenous knowledge protection there was much more granular recommendations made within that chapter to be able to address the implementation of UNDRIP and we can work with communities to create knowledge protocol agreements and things like that.

Those ten recommendations were pretty innocuous and they were endorsed and are being adapted across the country and remembering that many libraries and universities were already doing this work but we just tried to put it together into a way that gave them a mandate to be able to kind of say we're doing this because we're following these reported recommendations that's come down.

So the first one was to create the national voice. To be able to have an indigenous matters committee by utilizing the medicine wheel structure. So that's actually in place right now and we have over 20 working groups that are working on different areas of implementing. So we all know that it's much easier to make a recommendation than to do the implementation. That needs more people and more skills in different areas to be able to make those implementation happen.

The next one was that we endorse the position statement on library and literacy services to indigenous people from the Canadian Library Association. So that was number two. Number three was really talking about encouraging libraries and archives to follow the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 calls to action and identifying them and working within that. Number four was to ensure accessibility. So really talking about equitable library access for all peoples and to be able to ensure that that happens for all Canadians.

We wanted to address that there was a need to decolonize access and classification by addressing structural biases that are existing in schemes of knowledge organization information which we wanted to talk about integrating indigenous epistemologies into cataloguing practice and knowledge management. So really, we wanted to address some of the problematic terminology that's being used in our classification systems and our subject headings.

And then number six was decolonizing libraries and space by recognizing and supporting indigenous cultures, language and knowledge through culturally appropriate space design, interior design, signage in indigenous languages in the territory where you're located doing territorial acknowledgements and having art installations and public programming with elders and with youth and other indigenous stakeholders. So that's really important to have happen.

And then really talking about training in a few different ways under number seven. So enhancing opportunities for indigenous peoples to train as library, archive and information professionals including indigenous epistemologies into the MAS, the NLAS and library tech programs where we can have culturally appropriate pedagogy, recruitment practices, and also to deliver professional and continuing education across cultural training for people who are already existing in our profession. And then to have libraries as supports for local indigenous stakeholders and partners to be able to utilize our space and collections to be able to create training.

Number eight was talking about the implementation of indigenous knowledge protocols and implementing UNDRIP in Canada and supporting the TRC calls to action, number 69, by fully implementing UNDRIP, and to afford indigenous knowledge protection underneath the existing copyright act. So talking about that and a means of where there might be a blanket acknowledgement of indigenous people having ownership over their own knowledge but to allow indigenous communities and provide them with the necessary means to develop their own governance and laws related to those knowledge protocols. So that's really important to be able to have happen because what works for us in northern BC might not work for the Mohawk or the Micmac people across the country. So it's important to be able to have something that's adapted to their knowledge system and their way of life.

And then number nine was our amazing black team's best practices. So they gathered best practices from across our country and internationally that other libraries, archives and cultural memory institutions could use. And part of that is so that we often work in our own silos and we're recreating the wheel and there's so few indigenous professionals in this field that we really wanted to be able to share that wealth of knowledge across the country and have people be able to adapt things and to use things that other people are doing rather than having to, you know, develop everything from scratch themselves.

And then the last thing was number ten and that was supporting in principle having a national indigenous library and library knowledge, library archives and cultural memory professional association but an association that's able to deal with preserving cultural memory and not limited to library archives or museums but to build that relationship and support an indigenous association. So that's kind of in the making right now.

Part of the disclaimers was that of course we didn't in three months have time for consultation with communities but remembering that we're talking to other professionals and on our team all of the team leaders had one indigenous person and one nonindigenous person so we could come together to make these recommendations. And I would say probably about 80 percent of many of the indigenous professionals across the country either had eyes on it or gave input into it or were on the team. So I felt that many of the things that we were pulling together as part of this either they've been talked about by us as indigenous professionals in this field or we had gone back and looked at the literature from writings from other people that had been involved in this field. So that gave us some comfort to be able to do that.

It's also important to remember that this is a foundation. So it's a beginning. Within the timeframe we did the best that we could. It wasn't meant to be inclusive of everything that there was across the board. So there are some places where it needs to be filled out whether it's health or legal or school libraries where we needed to have more best practices filled out and more examples for people to follow. And the other thing was the archives association didn't join us until November so there wasn't representation from them that we would have hoped for, although we did have Sam Markavis on the committee to help us with that.

So out of that, we edited the report. We gave the recommendations on February 1st verbally and they were accepted and so we edited the report and then put it out in a press release at the end of April because it took quite a bit of time to do the editing for that number of pages and for the report to get into a place where we wanted to be able to put it out and did a press release for it. And then on June 21st which was Aboriginal Peoples Day then, now it's Indigenous Peoples Day, we released the indigenous hub which houses the report and the databases and a number of other things that we have done since and links to the indigenous Moot Canada Reconciliation Canada that we've partnered with other libraries or other organizations to do that.

So that's really where we're at right now. We're doing a lot of work in the working groups. Again, of course there's a new indigenous matters medicine wheel that now includes traditional knowledge and language and cultural memory and a number of other ways of being able to implement these recommendations that we've done based on those calls to action.

kirstyn: One of the things that really stood out to me in your summary there is that emphasis on collaboration. I really feel like the description you gave of the committee work there is very much the ideal in collaboration both in general and particularly in indigenous/nonindigenous work. I'm wondering if you can speak further to the sort of challenges and opportunities that came up in trying to make recommendations that would be readily acceptable while still recognizing all those idiosyncrasies that are going to vary from community to community.

Camille: First of all, I guess the thing that I always say to people is that I really talk about relationships, relationships, relationships. So how do we create those in a good way and in a respectful way so we're honouring each other and where we're coming from. So we're all coming from different places and we all view the world in a different way. And it doesn't even matter if you grew up in the same city side by side as neighbours, you're still viewing the world in a different way because it comes from the perspective that we learn from our families and from our cultural, you know, ethnicities and how we grew up culturally. And so you could live beside each other and be coming from completely different places, but you also could be living across the country and come from different geographic places.

So you have all these differences in Canada which I truly believe makes us such a strong and beautiful country because we have these differences and that diversity is really our strength as Canadians. But how do we then pull together to create something that's going to be adapted by everybody in a group too. Well, that is really the difficulty to be able to do that and I think that one of the strengths in these recommendations is that they were strong enough but they were also innocuous in that it didn't really raise huge red flags for people to be able to endorse them and adapt them. The adaptation we knew would take a lot of work to be able to do and to be able to implement the recommendations, but I don't think that anything was really, really controversial, I guess is the thing.

I mean some of it's going to be controversial and we are pushing the package and we're moving forward, but I believe that we chose to do it in a respectful way. And I think that that was because of the balance of the teams. If you look at the people that were on the committee and the people that are on our indigenous matters committee, I mean I'm amazed that I was able to work with some of the people that I've been able to work with on this project. And the wealth of knowledge that they bring to the table and the years of experience and then the younger people with their energy and enthusiasm, I think it just was a really good balance of being able to make that happen. And some of that is creating relationships in the team, but then also too for the committee or the teams to go out and have those relationships in the communities, not only in the library community but in the communities where they live and so it's really important to be able to make that and to make things generic enough that it might work across the country with having it to be able to be adapted to that local geographic area or that local environment or that local library.

So we needed to be able to talk about every type of library because CFLA-FCAB is about all types of libraries. So how do you talk about a library that's special collections versus a university versus a school or public library and have to be able to make it so that it's adaptable to each of those environments as well and those sectors. I would say that that was really challenging, but I would also say that the wordsmithing and editing was always challenging to be able to get them into a place where they were able to be adapted and that they were innocuous enough that we weren't offending but we were pushing the package. So there was really trying to create that balance and I think some think we didn't push the package enough and others think that it was pretty radical.

So I figure if we have people on both ends then we're kind of in the middle and that's probably the best place where we could be and hopefully creating that change.

kirstyn: I think that's a very relatable challenge for a lot of librarians of finding that way of addressing multiple communities and those multiple needs. Considering the wonderful people you got to work with on this and particularly with the amount of indigenous representation and as you spoke to the elders that you were able to work with, I'm wondering if you have any specific memorable stories or anecdotes about counsel you received or stories that were shared.

Camille: There's people that actually reviewed this for us that I haven't actually talked about yet, but one of those was my mentor who's now a doctor, Jean Joseph who was the founder of Xwi7xwa library located at the University of British Columbia who actually pulled me into librarianship and one of the things that I always remember is that I was pretty much done and we'd gone through I don't even want to say how many drafts there were and I remember thinking I promised myself I wouldn't edit another book but here I am doing this which is almost the same thing and it was very interesting process but also too, you know, you're tired of this editing and I'm thinking okay, I think I've got everything. You know, we've been through all these eyes, all these eyes, and my mentor, Dr. Jean Joseph, said to me Camille, did you forget to thank the truth and reconciliation commissioners and the committee work and I'm like oh, no. And I thought to myself, you know, I know where I come from and I know that that's so important for me as an indigenous woman to thank those whose – we stand on the shoulders of giants and people who have done this work for years and not acknowledging them would have been a huge faux pas.

So I guess one of my biggest things coming through that is no matter how perfect you think it is, going back to elders and people that have that wisdom of a lot more years than myself in the profession because I started in the profession as like a fourth profession, I think is really important is going back and getting that advice from them. And I would say also too that I had Dr. Marlene Atleo look over the draft and of course as a professor in education she found a huge grammatical error in the first recommendation that had been overlooked by over 50 people.

So sometimes you need to step outside of your field and talk to other people. Another recommendation that she made to me is that as librarians and archivists we use all of these acronyms. You know, we might spell it out once but we haven't really said who that is or what that is and so a lot of that she caught which we wouldn't have caught as librarians or archivists because we use that lingo interchangeably. But when somebody else is reading it it's our technical language so just remembering to bring it back because especially if we're trying to reach indigenous people who don't have the same knowledge as we know.

I know if I go back to my community and I start talking to them about subject headings and classification there's quite a blank look on their face which that would have been my look, you know, 20 years ago before I went and did my master's and worked in a library previous to that, but I think that that's important to remember is that we're not always talking to our own profession but that other people are looking at it too and seeing what we're doing and if we want indigenous communities to approve and to be able to create this warm and welcoming place some of it is our language that we're using as professionals.

So going back to those principles of how we do things in a traditional manner. And I will remember one really meaningful moment that had happened during the course of this is that it's kind of ironic to think about now, but Trump had just been elected and I think that there was a general sharp intake of breath after in Canada and the library community and I think that people were surprised or, you know, concerned about the future. And Elder Norman Meade sent us a beautiful email that I had many, many people come back to me and email me and thank him and say that that was just really meaningful for them and it was about the hope that, you know, this too will pass which is something that we say in our communities, but also too the hope for the future and the hope that we can still continue to make change for the future and to create a better life for future generations than what previous generations of indigenous people have had to face. And so that was a really powerful moment as well.

I think that there's so many stories. Really amazing things happened during the course of this and I think afterwards one of the things that was really pivotal is that because we had hosted the international indigenous librarians forum at the University of Manitoba in August 2015, we had what is the essence of it is what we called the international indigenous librarians forum which is the mauri stone and that mauri stone was being cared for at Trudeau Lodge during the two years when Canada held it. And all of this work that happened during the truth and reconciliation committee happened during that time.

So we were the caretakers of indigenous knowledge professionals and keepers of knowledge from around the world. At that time we were holding that essence in Canada. And so because of that, when we had the first meeting in February 1st and all the new board was actually elected to CFLA-FCAB, I brought the mauri stone with me just before we took it

and gave it over to Australia. I brought it to the national gathering and it was there when we read these out and each of the leaders across Canada were able to hold that as well as other people and smudge with it and so it was quite powerful when the recommendations were read out at that meeting and approved to go forward and deliver this report. And then I believe that it really empowered and revitalized our community in a very unique way.

kirstyn: There are so many humbling and invigorating components in your stories and thank you so much for sharing them. Part of what speaks to me in all that is the importance of outreach. You describe those opportunities that arise and working together. I'm wondering if as you start seeing the implementation of these recommendations do you have any specific examples of projects you were excited to see or libraries that seem to be setting the stage for what can be done as exemplary projects?

Camille: Some of the recommendations that we're working on are works in progress whether it's on our joint subject heading and classification working group now or working trying to create indigenous curriculum or space and design. So those are things that are ongoing. One of the things that we have had happen that's been really exciting is that Toronto public and Edmonton public libraries asked us to partner with them to be able to promote the indigenous Canada move from the University of Alberta to help them promote it and to put together a toolkit to be able to promote it and to be able to give people that are in libraries the ability to host some of those sessions and it's a, you know, massive online open learning course.

So you can take it for free or you can take it for university credit. It's up to you how you want to take it. It was developed by the University of Alberta to be able to work for people at a distance. And so I worked together with the team that was made up of Alex Carruthers, Melanie [Rabeau], Linda Garvin, Collette [Portraz] who's actually a vice-chair now and then myself and we worked together with people from the University of Alberta and our executive director to create these resources. That has been amazing because we're using it not only in our library as professional staff training, but people are having events at libraries and public libraries to deliver this. It's just really gone like wildfire.

So without taking any of the credit away from the University of Alberta, I know that they had an increase like 80 percent within a year and I think it's still going up. So it's really been able to be something that we're quite proud of that we are able to provide the webspace to be able to do that and we have this team of people who really led the initiative to be able to develop this program as something that we could use in libraries. So huge kudos to the indigenous MOOC team and there was another reconciliation Canada that was done by UBC and so we were able to use some of those same resources to promote that as well too.

And then we partnered with Canadian Council for UNESCO, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, Library and Archives

Canada and National Film Board and what we called reconciliation dialogues that are to take place in libraries across the country and what happens is the National Film Board or NFB allows them to screen a movie, one of their indigenous collections for free and they have a list of the titles that they can pick from then to be supported with that to create a public event. To be able to do the screening with elders and bringing people into it using some of the same resources and toolkit that we had developed to be able to support that. So part of that toolkit that we developed as part of Indigenous Canada in MOOC is being used for that. As we're coming up now to the year of indigenous languages in 2019, we'll employ some of those same resources to be able to assist libraries or just to elevate their voice on what's happening across Canada because we have this web presence to be able to do that.

So we've created a Facebook and Twitter that's quite strong already. We actually just created that on June 21st this year and I think that you'll see a lot more happening. We have an indigenous health group that's working on a hub for them to put into the best practices so we're updating that and trying to honour people that are implementing the TRC calls to action or these recommendations just really trying to get that word out there that this is important to be able to do and give people the resources to be able to do that. So the question that I get the most from libraries and librarians and archivists is where do we start and one of those places that you start is that relationship building.

The other thing was is we were able to present to the standing committee to work with the copyright committee from the FLA-FCAB to create a statement on indigenous knowledge and the copyright act in Canada that talks about honouring indigenous knowledge in library archives and cultural memory institutions.

So I think that there's been some really exciting things that have already happened, some things are in the works, and we'll see some of the working groups are almost done some of their work and some are just beginning. And so I think it's a really good synergy where we're really keeping going and moving forward with trying to create some of these changes and work within the existing structures to be able to create that change.

kirstyn: It's so inspiring just to be reminded of the number of people who are putting the time in so we can have, as you say, starting points. Anything else that you want to include that we haven't been able to touch on, though I recognize we could easily take up your afternoon if we tried.

Camille: I am really looking forward to moving forward with the national indigenous knowledge and language alliance and hopefully bringing people on board to be able to work with that because I think that one of the things is that we don't have a group where we have people that indigenous and are allies working together to be able to create some of these things. And that was part of our commitment to CFLA-FCAB is that we would help to be able to form this and they did some amazing

work as part of the National Reading Campaign. And so they did some amazing work trying to start the National Aboriginal Librarians Association and had a business plan.

We've tried to partner with them to be able to kind of kickstart this work to be able to create a national association. So we decided that we needed to use indigenous so it covers First Nations, Métis and Inuit so it's more inclusive. And we're hoping that maybe that that will be something that happens in the next year. I think that it's always hard to be able to start things off, but I think that we've made a really good beginning and hopefully that work will carry on and I'm really grateful that I was able to be part of it.

Yeah, I'm looking forward to seeing where it goes and especially after I'm done my term in February to see where Collette moves it because I think it's really important to harness some of the youthful energy that's out there and to pass that torch on to the next generation for them to move forward. I see incredible young indigenous people in library archives and museums that are motivated and energetic to do this work. So I'm looking forward to hopefully having that foundation ready for them so that they can just go forward and create that change that we need.

kirstyn: Thank you so much for your time and thank you as well to the many people who you've been working with because this is impressive work and like you say, that balance between ambitious projects and feasible projects is very promising. Thank you. Chi-miigwech.

Camille: [Mē-duh].

Thank you in Tahltan for having me here and I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

kirstyn: If you'd like to know more about the truth and reconciliation report and recommendations you can visit the Canadian Federation of Library Associations, Fédération Canadienne des associations de bibliothèques online at cfla-fcab.ca. Or go to this episode's page on the "So What?" website for a list of resources related to this topic.
[Ojibwe] Chi-miigwech; Giga-waabamin menawaa.
Thank you; 'til next time.

Announcer 2: This has been another episode of "So What?"

Announcer 3: The podcast about library and information science research and why it matters.

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