ALA American Library Association

TO: ALA Executive Board

SUBJECT: Final Report of the Working Group on Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice

BOARD REQUEST: Information Only

CONTACT PERSON:
Martin Garnar and Valerie Bell, Co-Chair

DATE: July 12, 2022

BACKGROUND:
This report is a summary of the activities of the Working Group on Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice, which was charged by the Executive Board to explore alternatives to neutrality rhetoric and provide dialogue opportunities to discuss this issue. The report includes three frameworks that may inform how libraries provide services, and offers recommendations for further action.

ATTACHMENTS:
Final report with appendix

Final Report from the Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice Working Group

Outline:

Introduction

Libraries should be a force for social change. We in the American Library Association can no longer remain passive and compliant in the face of continuing inequity and injustice. We aspire to a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive future and refuse any longer to hide behind the practice of neutrality. This report details the activities of the Working Group on Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice as it explored alternatives to neutrality rhetoric as potential frameworks for the provision of library resources and services.

At the start, it should be noted that there is no official ALA definition for neutrality. The term does not appear in the glossary or index of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Manual. This lack of an official definition was the subject of some discussion within the Working Group and in dialogues sponsored by the Working Group, as it was noted that exploring alternatives to neutrality rhetoric could be difficult when there is no official definition of what neutrality means. The question of whether the Working Group should attempt creating a definition was raised but ultimately was deemed to be outside its charge, and there was not consensus as to whether a definition of neutrality is something ALA should pursue in the future, which will be discussed in greater detail in the Recommendations section of this report.

Background and Charge

The Working Group on Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice was originally formed at the request of ALA President Julius C. Jefferson, Jr. in the fall of 2020 as a subgroup of the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee with a charge of providing dialogue opportunities on the intersection of intellectual freedom and social justice. Members were recruited from the following groups affiliated with the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy, and Outreach Services and the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom:

- Accessibility Assembly
- American Indian Library Association
- Asian Pacific American Librarians Association
- Black Caucus of the American Library Association
- Chinese American Librarians Association
- Committee on Diversity
- Committee on Professional Ethics
- Intellectual Freedom Committee
- Joint Council of Librarians of Color
- Library Services to the Justice Involved Interest Group
- Rainbow Round Table
- REFORMA: National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-Speaking
- Social Responsibilities Round Table

Shortly after the subgroup was formed, the ALA Council adopted [the Resolution to Condemn White Supremacy and Fascism as Antithetical to Library Work](#) at the 2021 Virtual Midwinter Meeting and charged the Working Group with exploring alternatives to neutrality rhetoric. Combining the two charges to include exploring alternatives to neutrality rhetoric and dialogue opportunities about those alternatives, the ALA Executive Board formally appointed the group as a working group of the association to be co-chaired by the chairs of the Committee on Diversity and the Intellectual Freedom Committee and requested a report on its activities by the summer of 2022, at which point it would conclude its work.

Initial meetings of the Working Group were used to build trust among members and to discuss possible approaches to fulfilling its charge. A subgroup identified radical empathy as a potential framework that could be used in place of neutrality rhetoric. The Working Group developed a draft report on this topic that was shared with the groups represented on the Working Group and the larger library community in advance of the 2022 LibLearnX conference for feedback. The Working Group also sponsored a program at LibLearnX to provide an opportunity for dialogue on radical empathy. Based on the feedback from the initial draft and from the LibLearnX program, the Working Group expanded its list of potential frameworks to include trauma-informed response and cultural humility. Three webinars aimed at different segments of the library community (public, school, and academic libraries) were held in the spring of 2022 to provide overviews of the three frameworks and to gather feedback through small-group

discussions, with a final in-person program held at the 2022 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. for an additional opportunity for feedback and dialogue.

Alternatives to Neutrality

Having reviewed neutrality rhetoric and searched for alternatives as charged in the Resolution to Condemn White Supremacy and Fascism as Antithetical to Library Work, the Working Group on Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice proposes the exploration of the following frameworks as alternatives to centering neutrality in library work:

- Radical Empathy
- Trauma Informed Response
- Cultural Humility

The library profession and its institutions have long perpetuated the myth of neutrality, but it is not accurate to suggest that libraries and library workers are neutral. In fact, libraries have historically had, and continue to have, a primary role in upholding unjust systems of racism and discrimination. To claim neutrality in a system with inherent power differentials is to support the inequities that stem from those differentials and to privilege those in power. If neutrality was supposed to be the foundation for building trust between libraries and their communities, then we must find new ways to build trust, especially with those communities that have been and continue to be harmed by our approach to our work.

Radical Empathy

Radical empathy, according to Terri Givens, calls for "moving beyond an understanding of others' lives and pain to understand the origins of our biases"[1] including internalized oppression. Radical empathy is a framework for addressing inequities using six steps, which we suggest applying to library work through thoughtful questions:

1. **Being willing to be vulnerable**. How can library workers examine the structures of our institutions and our profession to identify the impact of structural racism and other built-in biases on how we do our work and interact with others?
2. **Becoming grounded in who you are**. What does it mean to know ourselves, to understand how we express that knowledge in our work, and to understand how other people are impacted by the systems of our society?
3. **Opening yourself to the experiences of others**. How should library workers open ourselves to the experiences of others? What does it mean to listen to and learn from others as we do our work?

---

[1] Dr. Terri E. Givens, "Radical Empathy: Finding a Path to Bridging Racial Divides," Brighter Higher Ed, 2020.

4. **Practicing empathy**. What does it mean to practice empathy in library work? What does this mean for neurodiverse people who may have different approaches to empathy? How can a library or association promote empathy through its policies and practices? How do we build diverse perspectives into the way we approach our work?
5. **Taking action**. How do we move from rhetoric to action as library workers, institutions, and associations? How do we build connections and establish or strengthen communication?
6. **Creating change and building trust**. How can library workers and leaders work for effective change? What steps can we take to build trust within the profession and with our communities?

In order to provide 'the highest level of service to all library users'[2] and to facilitate the necessary structural changes to promote equity, library workers must practice radical empathy. However, library workers cannot be expected to make these changes on their own.

Radical empathy must also be practiced at the organizational level. While individual action is key to the success of implementing radical empathy, organizations and their governing bodies must set the tone by applying a lens of radical empathy to all policies and procedures, including institutional values, and make changes that reflect this shift in focus.

Through radical empathy, we can commit to combating implicit and explicit bias and dismantling structural inequities, such as white supremacy, patriarchy, classism, heteronormativity, trans-antagonism, and ableism. Radical empathy calls on library workers to prioritize marginalized people's safety and needs over privileged people's comfort.

As libraries move from neutrality rhetoric policies to radical empathy they should take care to ensure that neurodivergent library workers, who may have limited capacity to engage in emotional empathy or cognitive empathy, are sensitively considered.

We believe that radical empathy would be an effective way to achieve the goal of a more equitable and inclusive future.

Resources on Radical Empathy:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsQXdy8FYm0https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/04/09/importance-practicing-radical-empathy-bridge-racial-divides-opinion

https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/171/101

https://campstompingground.org/blog/2017/2/16/what-is-radical-empathy

---

[2] *American Library Association's Code of Ethics*, adopted 1939 by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; January 22, 2008; and June 29, 2021.

Trauma-Informed Response

In response to a growing awareness over the last 20 years of the impact of trauma on children, educators and library workers have turned to a whole-person approach in the classroom and library. This approach is generally called trauma-informed teaching and librarianship. The approach means relying on building positive relationships and resilience. Trauma-informed practices include such techniques as mindfulness, self-awareness and awareness of the present moment.

Data and science suggest that trauma has lasting impacts. "According to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), before the age of 16, three out of every four children will have experienced or been exposed to a traumatic event. These may include exploitation, violence, natural disasters, loss of a loved one, military family-related stressors, poverty, food insecurity, and systemic racism. Trauma, which is commonly defined as an emotional or psychological response to a terrible or deeply distressing event, can also stem from bullying, assault, neglect, accidents, and life-threatening illness. These and other "adverse childhood experiences" (ACEs) have been shown to impact health and development, education, and future opportunities."

Trauma is disruption of two basic human needs: safety and community. "The U.S. Centers for Disease Control concurs, reporting that multiple ACE exposures trigger increased risk for chronic health conditions, risky health behaviors, lowered life potential, future violence, incarceration, and early death. In the U.S.,nearly 35 million children have experienced one or multiple ACEs." Trauma-informed environments are a shift from punitive to restorative responses. This generally leads to calmer users and increases their ability to participate.

The school library can be a lower-stakes environment than a classroom where library workers make efforts to make students feel welcome, safe, and important.

Like radical empathy, trauma-influenced or trauma-informed approaches rely on mindfulness of certain key points:

- Characteristics of a trusting and transparent library organization, plus discussion questions to promote a sense of psychological safety among library workers
- How certain language and labels can undermine mutuality, with suggested phrases that will help library staff demonstrate openness to users' ideas and views during information requests
- Delivery models that empower users
- Advice on balancing free speech on campus with students' need for safety
- How proper furniture arrangement can help people suffering from PTSD feel safe
- Guidance on creating safe zones for users experiencing identity-based discrimination
- Self-assessment tools to support change toward trauma-responsive library services

A trauma-informed approach to library work realizes that every choice we make, every interaction we have, every policy we create has the potential either to be retraumatizing

or healing for library users and each other. Let's be intentional about creating cultural shifts in our work and allow our libraries to choose healing.

We don't need to know why someone is reacting the way they're reacting, but we do need to understand that every person deserves empathy, compassion, and healing. For this reason, staying calm, warm, and informative is very important and can even potentially keep difficult interactions from escalating.

"Trauma-informed care" is a term that originated from the healthcare field but is now being applied to a wide range of other professions – like librarianship. Trauma-informed care has four goals, known as the four R's.

The first is that trauma-informed care **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery. Realization means that all people, at all levels of the library, have a basic realization about trauma and understand how trauma can affect users, families, groups, organizations, and communities. This means that we understand people's experiences and behaviors in the context of coping strategies designed to survive adversity and overwhelming circumstances.

Secondly, trauma-informed care **recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in users, families, staff, and others involved with the library. Recognizing means that people in the library can recognize the signs of trauma, which may be gender-, age-, or setting-specific and may be manifested by individuals seeking or providing services in these settings -- for example, both users and library workers.

Next, trauma-informed care **responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices. This means that the library responds to the needs of its community by applying the principles of a trauma-informed approach to all areas of functioning. The library integrates an understanding that the experience of traumatic events impacts all people involved, whether directly or indirectly. **It also means that staff in every part of the library have changed their language, behaviors and policies to take into consideration the experiences of trauma among users and staff.**

Finally, trauma-informed care **resists** re-traumatization, meaning that the library seeks to resist re-traumatization of users, as well as staff. Libraries often unintentionally create stressful or toxic environments that interfere with the recovery of users, the well-being of staff and the fulfillment of our mission. So, staff are taught to recognize how organizational practices may trigger painful memories and retraumatize users with trauma histories.

A trauma-informed framework relies on six key principles, which are:

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer Support
4. Collaboration and Mutuality
5. Empowerment, Voice and Choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Resources on Trauma-Informed Response:

https://www.slj.com/story/Where-Healing-Happens-Librarians-libraries-Adopt-Trauma-Informed-public-health-Practices-To-Help-Kids

https://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2020/07/trauma-informed-approach-library-services

https://acrlog.org/2020/06/23/moving-towards-healing-a-trauma-informed-librarianship-primer/comment-page-1/

http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2020/04/implementing-a-trauma-informed-approach/

Cultural Humility

Cultural Humility is a lifelong process of self-exploration and self-critique, combined with a willingness to learn from others and a commitment to reducing power imbalances and building relationships. It means entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their individual beliefs, customs, and values. It means acknowledging differences and accepting that person for who they are.

Cultural Humility is a concept developed by physicians Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-Garcia. Both have made a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation, and self-critique. They define Cultural Humility as "the ability to recognize our own beliefs and assumptions and to break through commonly held assumptions and stereotypes that can get in the way of being 'competent' or 'sensitive' to another's 'culture.'"

There are three dimensions to Cultural Humility:
● Lifelong Learning and Critical Self-Reflection: Acknowledging that this is a lifelong journey toward understanding ourselves and how we relate to others, especially to those who are different from us.
● Challenging Power Imbalances: Recognizing that power imbalances exist in many library transactions and that, in order to build authentic and trusting relationships, we need to be aware of the various power dynamics at play and to understand the possible impacts they have on our relationships with others.
● Institutional Accountability: Insisting that the institution models these principles as well. The institution must also recognize that each of us and the people we serve have our own stories and history and as individuals; we don't fit into the boxes of generalizations and stereotypes.

How is Cultural Humility different from Cultural Competence?

To practice Cultural Humility is to be willing to suspend what you think you know about a person based on generalizations or assumptions of their perceived culture and cultural norms. Cultural Humility encourages building authentic relationships with people by being open to getting to know people based on what they themselves have determined are their individual cultural norms and practices.

All of our lives, we have been encouraged to be "culturally competent" to aid us in our approach and interactions with diverse multicultural people. In reality, cultural competence falls short of its goal. Despite the best of intentions, being culturally competent can lead to negative and harmful impacts. By operating on generalizations and assumptions of different cultures, racial identities, and ethnic backgrounds, we deny ourselves the opportunity of getting to know individuals for who they really are. Instead, we rely on stereotypes to guide our interactions with people.

How would Cultural Humility be applied to the work that libraries do?

Accountability is essential to racial equity work and institutional accountability; it is an important dimension of Cultural Humility. Accountability refers to creating processes and systems to help individuals and groups to be held in check for their decisions and actions. This is asking if the work being done reflects and embodies the vision, mission, and values of the organization. Accountability isn't just for the employees of an organization; it is for the entire institution including leadership, policy and physical and virtual spaces. Accountability is acknowledging that harm has been done and being committed to repairing harm.

Cultural Humility and Workplace Diversity

Diversity in the workplace means that a company employs a wide range of diverse individuals. This means that a company's workforce includes people of varying gender, age, religion, race, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, religion, languages, education, abilities, etc.

Some top benefits of workplace diversity are:
● Variety of different perspectives
● Increased creativity
● Faster problem-solving
● Better decision making
● Higher employee engagement
● Reduced employee turnover
● Improved hiring results

Resources on Cultural Humility:
Cultural humility versus cultural competence: a critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education - PubMed (nih.gov)

Integrating Cultural Humility into Librarianship

Executive Summary of Feedback

The following is an executive summary of feedback shared with the Working Group through its dialogue series and other avenues. For the full notes from the webinars, please see the appendix.

Themes from the feedback vary from statements like "This policy change is unneeded" and "This policy change will be disastrous for ALA" to statements like "This is long overdue" and "This is the only way to save ALA". Despite repeated attempts to explain that the Working Group was only exploring alternatives to neutrality and neutrality rhetoric not writing, proposing, or suggesting new policy some people continued to base their objections to the Working Group's activities on the new policy assumption.

For example, this paragraph from the longest and perhaps best researched response, shows the policy-centered argument: "We, the undersigned librarians, are respectfully submitting this letter to express our grave concerns regarding the proposal now being considered by the ALA to replace officially-endorsed language related to library neutrality (in the Library Bill of Rights, the ALA Code of Ethics, and other statements) with alternative concepts and practices such as radical empathy, trauma-informed response, and cultural humility. Our concerns are not limited to the particular choice of terms, but to the entire premise underlying this project: that library neutrality is an inherently flawed and harmful stance that upholds a socially unjust status quo. We not only believe that this initiative is unwarranted and fundamentally misguided, but that the proposed alternatives – if adopted – will themselves threaten to be the source of considerable harm to library workers and the communities they serve."

Despite the assertions in the letter, the word neutrality does not appear in the Library Bill of Rights, the ALA Code of Ethics, and any other ALA statements that the Working Group could locate. It does not appear in the Intellectual Freedom Manual (10th Edition) nor is it defined in any official ALA document or policy. Some suggest that it is implied but implication does not serve a fact-based foundation for discussion.

Another prominent theme is that the ALA does not define neutrality. Some argued that ALA could solve this issue by simply defining neutrality while others posit that defining neutrality is a pointless exercise if ALA is going to replace the concept.

The following is from the June 8, 2022, virtual session: "We have no definition of neutrality; therefore, it is hard to agree on an alternative to something we have not defined. The Working Group has landed (right now) on: Neutrality means 'we don't take sides.' Sometimes this can be used to our service advantage. And to help with hard decisions and hard choices. We can step

back and say we do not take sides. The application and usage of neutrality situationally fluctuates."

Another breakout session on June 8 produced this comment: "Neutrality is in the eye of the beholder. We are seeing Indigenous people in Canada that are traumatized by the way our institutions are set up. Insisting that users come into the building for services can be triggering and traumatic for Indigenous groups that have flashbacks of violent experiences in residential schools. Our neutral institutions may not seem as neutral to these communities. Tribal identities were erased for years because the scholarship that spoke of them in the literature was not in the language they spoke, and it was behind a paywall that made that information inaccessible to most Indigenous people."

The conclusions in several sessions were that we may not need to replace neutrality with one of the studied approaches but we should devise from neutrality, radical empathy, trauma-influenced librarianship, and cultural humility approaches that would restore trust in libraries and enhance library workers' understanding of service.

"Moving from judgment to understanding for authentic connection is key; understanding one's own internalized oppression in service to empathy and understanding our own biases," said one attendee in a June 8 breakout room. This concept carried over into other sessions on the studied neutrality alternatives.

The most contentious phrase in the original draft and one carried over in the final report: "… prioritizes marginalized people's safety over privileged people's comfort." Those with concerns that the Working Group went too far often cite this phrase in their arguments. From an April 25, 2022, session: "I feel it is dangerous to promote a concept that privileges marginalized peoples, as much as I support that personally, as a concept like that can be misused by opponents, who will push back on the concept. And it would be hard to enforce this kind of work. And just saying this is our new defining principle does not mean that everyone can or will live up to it. I think a better tactic would be to release statements regarding how the term neutrality has been misused and misunderstood and defining the kinds of choices that librarians actually make."

Some who participated in the review process suggested that the Working Group had not gone far enough to eliminate neutrality and neutrality rhetoric within ALA. Again, this came from a misunderstanding of the role of the Working Group. In their fervor to purge neutrality from ALA these folks tasked us with solving complex issues that were beyond the portfolio of the Group.

The Working Group's conversations and discussions made clear that a resolution to the issue of neutrality – or at least a definition – is essential to moving forward with work toward reconciling social justice and intellectual freedom within ALA.

Recommendations

Members of the Working Group entered this discussion with different perspectives on neutrality and, while we came closer together during 18 months of dialogue and work, we are still not of one mind about how to address the problem of neutrality. The three proposed frameworks represent alternatives to how we approach the work of libraries, but to what end? If being neutral was supposed to be in service of building trust with our communities, how else do we build that trust?

While we have not come to consensus about how to best replace neutrality, we do agree that this work must continue. We make the following recommendations.

- The Executive Board should identify existing groups within the Association to continue exploration of the three proposed frameworks and their potential impact on ALA policies and guidance. These groups could be existing committees such as the Committee on Diversity, the ODLOS Advisory Committee and the groups represented therein, the Committee on Professional Ethics, and the Intellectual Freedom Committee.
- The Association should acknowledge that there is no single approach to the work of libraries that will meet every community's needs. Instead, the Association should promote a variety of approaches, such as the frameworks described in this report, that may be used individually or in concert depending on the needs of the communities being served.
- The Association should continue to provide dialogue opportunities to the profession on this topic.
- Expert-led training on the frameworks should be made available to library workers, trustees, and other interested parties through the Association.
- The Association should develop toolkits for implementing the frameworks in libraries.
- The Association should remind members and other library workers of the resources available through ALA-APA and the Leroy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund that provide support for library workers when they are facing financial difficulties due to their support for intellectual freedom or because of identity-based discrimination. The Association should also identify more funding for these efforts.

The Working Group agrees that the worst outcome of this process would be that this report is shelved and no further action is taken, so we urge the Executive Board to take action on these recommendations in a timely manner.

Conclusion

The ALA's core values are anything but neutral. The positions and policy statements in the ALA Policy Manual spell out specific ethical commitments demanding that sides be taken in contentious situations. It is important to be explicit about our beliefs and how they inform our work. As library workers, we should:

- advance and fully implement equity, diversity, inclusion, justice, and belonging in hiring, mentoring, supporting, and promoting library staff; and advocate for equity, diversity, inclusion, justice, and belonging in relationships with library vendors;
- promote equitable access to information, providing more assistance to those who need it most;
- provide a diversity of perspectives in our collections and resources highlighting communities that have historically been underrepresented or excluded;
- listen actively to recommendations of individuals from marginalized groups;
- ensure and advance equity in providing access to facilities, resources, and services;
- educate ourselves and our users about the critical evaluation of information and the structures in which it is created; and
- champion social justice, taking action to combat discrimination and systemic racism.

To succeed in these goals we propose adopting an approach based on these frameworks that meets the goal of building trust with our communities rather than using neutrality as our guiding value. In doing so, libraries and library workers will be prioritizing the defense and support of the humanity of our users.

Acknowledgements

The Working Group would like to thank Naghem Swade (Denver Public Library) for her participation in the webinar series. The Working Group would also like to thank Kristin Lahurd (ODLOS) and Deborah Caldwell-Stone (OIF) for their steadfast support throughout this process.

Additional Sources Consulted

Jennifer A. Ferretti, "Neutrality is Hostility: The Impact of (False) Neutrality in Academic Librarianship," Medium, February 13, 2018.

Mike Murawski "Towards a More Human-Centered Museum: Part 2, Building a Culture of Empathy," Art Museum Teaching, February 6, 2018.

Dani Scott and Laura Saunders, "Neutrality in Public Libraries: How Are We Defining One of Our Core Values?," *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, June 30, 2020.

Urban Libraries Unite, 2022 Urban Library Trauma Study: Final Report.

Appendix: Feedback from Webinars

Trauma Informed Library (4/25/22 webinar)

Trauma informed services keep library workers from accidently retraumatizing users

- Realize the widespread impact
- Recognize the signs and symptoms
- Responds by integrating knowledge
- Resist re-traumatization

What is neutrality? not taking sides

How does neutrality as described in the introduction relate (or not) to Trauma-informed services and care as described in these slides?

- We're experiencing the effect of "neutrality" here in Louisiana as dark-money groups seek to ban materials and programming concerning the LGBTQI+ community. The removal or potential removal of these materials risks re-traumatizing LGBTQI+ community members as they are likely already experiencing discrimination in a "conservative" state like Louisiana. A policy of neutrality in libraries here perpetuates injustice.
- The balance between providing information in terms of the catalog.
  - If a person is looking for information on African American studies, they may find information on white supremacy. Decisions are made from a cataloging perspective from the very beginning. The catalog process may retraumatize (i.e. Library of congress subject headings, I think this also happens with native and indigenous peoples)
- The term "neutrality" can be twisted by bad-faith actors to legitimize discrimination as is being done in Louisiana.
  - That's a good point but I have often used neutrality to resist attempts to censor LGBT materials.
- Used the term neutrality to remove barriers. There is a difference between doing this work from an equity response and a trauma informed response. The trauma informed response puts the onus of responsibility on the library.
  - Fine free, don't have to have an ID to get a library card

Is it possible to insert a trauma-informed approach to library programs, services, & policies in place of neutral areas?

- For example, if a teen breaks policy, working with that teen to reinstate their library privileges

- Libraries offer the same services to someone regardless of what they may be searching for… but what does it look like if a person is breaking a behavior policy, how does one interact with a person who may be reacting based on a past trauma. Where can staff get that training?
- "Trauma informed" seems more of an interpersonal, transactional, customer service approach than one that would inform institutional policy. Unless someone can think of what a "trauma-informed policy" might look like in more than general terms.
  - An example of this might be giving honest feedback on catalog searches
  - Collection policies, behavior policies
- Adjusting library policies so users can use their digression and aren't locked into rigid rules. That's what I think of with trauma-informed approach, looking at policies. Doesn't have to be incompatible with neutrality IMHO.
- Applying policy with too much sensitivity/discrimination could become a problem for a public accommodation (like a library) vis-à-vis Title II of the Civil Rights Act. Have any lawyers weighed in on this?

Are there other approaches that would better serve our community other than our three breakout rooms?

- Fine free
- Free printing
- No ID needed
- Whatever we end up choosing should encourage us to really see and connect with people (users and staff) beyond differences, in ways that actively acknowledge and resist structural inequities

ALA Working Group on Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice Intellectual Freedom and Social Justice: Exploring Alternatives to Neutrality Webinar

May 17, 2022 Break-out room re: Cultural Humility There were six attendees, including the clerk and the scribe. The group was clerked by Naghem Swade. **Premise:** We were offered two complementary definitions of cultural humility: **1)** *Cultural humility is "the ability to recognize our own beliefs and assumptions and to break through commonly held assumptions and stereotypes that can get in the way of being "competent" or "sensitive" to another's "culture."*

2) *Cultural humility is a lifelong process of self-exploration and self-critique and combined with a willingness to learn from others and a commitment to reducing power imbalances and building relationships. It means entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs and values. It means acknowledging differences and accepting that person for who they are. It is not a matter of whose values are right or wrong, but rather intentionally creating space where people can safely express their individual and collective identities.*

The three dimensions of cultural humility are: 1) Lifelong learning and critical self-reflection 2) Addressing power imbalance 3) Institutional accountability See the presentation's slides for more about these dimensions.

Discussion: We discussed the relationship between cultural humility and cultural relativism. One of us said that cultural humility is an awareness of cultural relativism and of the implications of the diversity of our different backgrounds. Two attendees talked about their experiences at their respective school libraries. One attendee pointed out that people have various understandings of what neutrality means. One attendee asked how librarians relate to material expressing intolerant opinions. Someone replied that they are in libraries' holdings — even positions that are threatening to people. One attendee made the point that even if cultural humility is not adopted as a policy, the intentional pauses that it asks people to practice will help librarians move toward that position. It was repeatedly asked: what is neutrality? ALA doesn't have a definition.

Trauma-Informed Response (May 17, 2022)
- How does this relate to neutrality?
  - De-escalate situations
  - Background training in service
  - Blend of social work and public service
  - (Still don't see the connection of this to neutrality, though think it's a very valuable toolset to have
- Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery;
- Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in users, families, staff, and others involved with the system;
- Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and
- Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization
- Library schools don't have this curriculum
- How it relates to working with staff as well
- Librarians don't have a background in social work
- SAMHSA's 6 key principles of a trauma-informed approach
  - Safety
  - Trustworthiness and Transparency
  - Peer support
  - Collaboration and mutuality
  - Empowerment, voice, and choice
  - Cultural, Historical, and gender issues
- Does this set up our communities from a deficit mentality instead of assets? Restorative justice models
- How does this apply to collection development or meeting rooms, etc.
  - Can take the 6 key principles and use them to inform
- How will this information give us a new lens to view librarianship?
- Key principles are asset-based that can make a difference in a kid's life.
- All of the key principles are worthwhile aspirational goals. No one will ever be perfect, just like neutrality.
- Trauma-informed services are not the same thing as neutrality
  - One is an approach to service
  - One is more of a philosophy
- Trying to move away from "all points of view" because not all information is coming from a valid purpose. Points of view that can be actively harmful to people. Moving away from punitive measures like going fine-free (way to move away from neutrality in policies).
- Ideas around access have become the focus in libraries - want everyone to be able to access all points of view so that they can become informed citizens and voters. Trauma-informed might encourage people to believe the library is a safe space.
- Can we have a shared definition of neutrality?
- Libraries have never been neutral. Do we need replacement language at all? Can we come out and say that we're not neutral and have never been neutral?
- Should we define neutrality in a negative way?

- Are these nuanced conversations happening at our libraries and schools?
- What are the consequences politically of removing neutral language?
  - Risk of libraries losing funding
- Moving towards creating a welcoming space where everyone belongs should be a top of mind priority for all of us.
- Collections should reflect their communities and that's not going to be the same everywhere
- We also need to define community. Who is coming to the library and who isn't? and Why?

Alternatives to Neutrality Webinar

6/8/2022

ALA Working Group on Intellectual Freedom & Social Justice

Valerie Bell, moderator

Anthony Davis Jr., scribe

Trauma-Informed Response Breakout Session

Valerie Bell gave a PowerPoint overview of the fundamental principles of Trauma-Informed (TI) Response according to SAMHSA guidelines.

Discussion questions:

How does neutrality as described in the introduction relate or not relate to TI services and care?

We need to acknowledge intersectionality in all of our experiences and understand what we bring to the table. We cannot be neutral in ourselves because we have our own experiences.

Don't see neutrality as opposed to TI approach. Libraries have never been neutral and have always taken sides on things.

Either/or concept doesn't work. Don't see the juxtaposition between TI and Neutrality.

We need to acknowledge different types of trauma. In Ohio, there's a political struggle over critical race theory, actively denying different sources of trauma. Neutrality comes into play by not acknowledging systemic racism, transphobia and other areas of trauma.

Our work demands that we take a side. For example, drag queen story hour. The policy in our library was to stay neutral and not offer event space for drag queen story hours, despite the fact that an event had been scheduled. LGBTQ teens were traumatized by the cancellation and by seeing themselves slandered in the papers.

Neutrality is in the eye of the beholder. We're seeing Indigenous people in Canada that are traumatized by the way our institutions are set up. Insisting that users come into the building for services can be triggering and traumatic for indigenous groups that have flashbacks of violent experiences in "residential schools." Our neutral institutions may not seem as neutral to these communities.

Tribal identities were erased for years because the scholarship that spoke of them in the literature was not in the language they spoke and behind a paywall.

Is it possible to insert a TI approach to library programs, services, & policies in place of neutrality?

In our profession, we love our policies and procedures, but they stand in the way of an empathy driven approach. We should start to think of who might be left out. Takes a lot of imagination for some of us depending on our background.

Given that one of the TI principles was to build on collaboration and mutuality, reaching out to the communities and groups we work with can help us develop a relational approach to policy making.

Transactional services vs. Relational services and how we can move in that direction

The Increase in transparency would bring a greater sense of collaboration.

We should also use the opportunity for programming. It give space to hear other voices and allows them to speak to the policies and procedures we develop.

Are there any approaches that would better serve our community?

Build partnerships with the groups that have been historically silenced.

Alternatives to Neutrality: ALA Working Group on IF and SJ

Wednesday, June 8, 2022

Scribed by Deb Sica

Number of Attendees: 100 at the start of the session with Valerie Bell and Martin Garner (Co Chairs)

Review of Charge & Welcome

Study and address the problems with concept of Neutrality

Charge to explore alt. to neutrality rhetoric, not charged with recommending policy changes even though that has been a misunderstanding with outside the WG. The origin of WG came out of Resolution in Jan 2021 Council Meeting with Res. that framed white supremacy as antithetical to librarianship. How do we hold SJ and IF together in our professional ethics?

We have no definition of neutrality; therefore, it is hard to agree on an alt to something we haven't defined. The WG has landed (right now) on:

Neutrality means "we don't take sides." Sometimes this can be used to our service advantage. And to help with hard decisions and hard choices. We can step back and say we don't take sides. The application of usage of Neutrality situationally fluctuates.

Breakouts Sessions

Radical Empathy

Trauma-Informed Response

Cultural Humility

Scribed Notes for Ray James

Overview of Radical Empathy

Current statement is in the process of being revised. It may no longer be applicable after the findings of

WG are shared, and they used Radical Compassion by Khen Lampert (2003) as the primer.

Lampert's theory of Radical Compassion (RC) stemmed from religious duty and activism. RC a special case of empathy directed towards others distress.

Radical Empathy (RE) is finding a path to bridging the racial divide; Terri E. Givens (Bristol Uni Press, 2021).

The deep divides remain, and inequality persists. RE moves beyond individual pain to understand how our bias impacts empathy and compassion. We are coming from a place of actively striving to better understand and share the feelings of others. Moving from judgment to understanding for authentic connection is key, understanding one's own internalized oppression in service to empathy and understanding our own biases.

**RE prioritizes marginalized people's safety *over* privileged people's comfort. THIS part has been contentious part.

Break Out Group Feedback

(paraphrased comments)

When people are upset by this approach and don't think it's an issue of prioritizing for comfort already, RE makes sense. People are silently prioritized. That is the status quo right now and that is lip service if we don't intentionally change this status quo. We do already prioritize comfort, and object to that fact itself is proof we should value RE.

Do you see neutrality as a part of that? General yes response from small group.

Do we all have a shared understanding of what it means? Being a decent human being is an oversimplified understanding. We need to actualize and mobilize in ways that create a more specific definition that others can agree upon the base. Neutrality isn't real and it only exists to uphold systems of oppression.

Neutrality doesn't appear in any ALA document – so it is difficult to say what it is. First, we have to establish definition and expand the definition of neutrality rather than replace it; more adequately define it.

This is the first time he saw alternatives to neutrality. Will it work well under discrimination? Our use of neutrality is broader than discrimination. Should we be neural for political events, too? E.g., Vietnam War. Is that work interchangeable with neutrality? What about Nuclear Power… most environmentalist say they do not support that. How do we expand neutrality in opposition to those political issues?

A statement like Vietnam war was harmful is not a neutral statement. It is a recognition of harms caused. No such thing as neutrality. We can't adequately define it due to the impermanence of change.

What if a T-Shirt re: North Vietnamese was worn? What about who it was worn by? Would we have a different reaction if they were Asian v. not Asian? Would we give the same service and same attitude and same cooperation with our service model?

I work with international students; they are often more invested in neutrality. ESOL students have a different frame. Students from all over the world are different opinions and they are coming at the controversial topics from a very different place. This often complicates and augments neutrality – moves their library workers towards more evidence-based research support. I try as much as possible to maintain a neutral stance so they can create the paper/research they want. Neutrality is not imposing values, but the institution is not neutral – these are different concepts. I do not interfere in learning/research process.

Found it very interesting that neutrality is not in ALA documentation. She is tired of the argument; esp. when neutrality is connected to funding or defunding things. She would appreciate ALA guidance around this in regard to alt. neutrality for grantmaking purposes. We are assuming library workers have agency in their work. Many don't have agency to make these choices. Stepping towards it or away from it might not be an option. How are we supporting library workers in this path? RE rootedness may be challenging to uphold if the institution doesn't support for this approach.

There is some research on this. Radical empathy has to be accepted by ALA Council to replace neutrality which is beyond the scope of the Workgroup.

Neutrality doesn't appear in ALA documentation… likes about the definition on slide as it is not just about interpersonal empathy BUT acknowledging the roots. Radical means grasping at the root. (Angela Davis). Here personal empathy applies, but radical is an institutional disposition. It is not based on policing our language, but more so getting to the root of our bias, our budget, our values and gives us a path to create a way that addresses those.

What other alternatives should we be considering? A single word capturing all the things will not serve us well. That ship has sailed on neutrality. What are the usable things we can implement rather than complicated like this idea? Neutrality is too complex to understand. It isn't a drag and drop, replace word situation. The other 2 discussions (re: trauma informed and cultural humility). Perhaps we are looking at some aspects of all three. To choose one concept is not what the WG was charged with doing.

Other disciplines describe neutrality in four dimensions:

Stakeholders

Process

Service

Goal neutrality

And the applications of these four areas define a holistic service approach. Overall, a definition of neutrality is needed, but not to establish it as the way to address disparity. Conversation ended quickly and was leading into a discussion that we do not need a conceptual framework, rather a plan of action, instead.

Group Discussion

Noted that even with just connecting quickly and without time to build trust, we still were able to yield a lot of input. We are ALA and what will we have ALA do about it – is really up to us. We can't make decisions unless we know what we are talking about (ref: to definition of neutrality). Hard topic conversations are part of the work.

Next Steps

Program at ALA will be on Monday, June 27 @ 2:30 pm, Washington CC, Rm. 151B

Follow up will be a report to ALA EB.

ALA IFC and Social Justice Working Group

Alternatives to Neutrality webinar

June 8, 2022

Break-out group re: Cultural Humility

Moderator: Naghem Swade

Minutes submitted by Steven Greechie

We define Cultural Humility (CH) as:

The ability to recognize one's own beliefs and assumptions and to break through commonly held assumptions and stereotypes that can get in the way of being "competent" or "sensitive" to another's "culture".

It is an accountability tool.

There are three dimensions of CH:

1) Lifelong learning and critical self-reflection

2) Recognize and challenge power imbalances

3) Institutional accountability

The topic of lifelong learning was expanded upon.

—————————————————

The break-out group included 40 people. The following points were made:

A) CH complements our work — it does not conflict with neutrality. It builds space for intentional pauses and includes both unlearning and relearning.

B) The Denver Public Library (DPL) has had staff training regarding cultural humility. An external vendor talked about cultural competence. There were two workshops and the DPL is developing a tool kit.

C) CH expands on what is acceptable in library space. It guides us to have conversation in the political sphere.

D) Do we replace neutrality w CH? CH is a tool to achieve neutrality because it builds in accountability and bias.

E) Participants shared their experiences:

— Staff may not feel comfortable with the topic and think it's too controversial. Some thought that we're not acknowledging the whole reality.

The reply was that we're acknowledging all reality and not pushing a political agenda on people.

— We need a definition of neutrality.

The reply was that the IFC will address this issue.

— Neutrality hasn't worked because libraries haven't been welcome to all.

The reply was that CH is not a replacement for neutrality but another avenue to the same goal. It was suggested that we define that goal, not "neutrality". The difference is that CH engages with power issues.