

# Respectful Relationships in Libraries: Where Should We Start?

**A** colleague and faculty member recently reminded me that, as a settler and a non-Indigenous person, what I should continue to strive for is being in right and respectful relationship with Indigenous peoples. Being in respectful relationship is a complicated goal. It looks different depending on where you live, your relationship with the Indigenous peoples of the land and changes with time. In Toronto, where I live and where I was born, this means understanding my responsibilities and obligations to Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory, including the people, cultures and languages tied to this place. It is important to note that our identities, perspectives and life experiences will lead us to relate differently. It means understanding my role as a guest in these lands and what it means to be a good guest and treaty partner. It also means bringing my experiences and my gifts to celebrate, promote and contribute to the Indigenous knowledges that come from these lands.

As a librarian, this is especially powerful to me. My goal is to learn from and alongside Indigenous community members, follow Indigenous leadership and to show up and work where I am needed. Wherever you are and whatever stage you are at in your relationship with Indigenous peoples and knowledge, we should all continue to humble ourselves and to learn. Reflecting on my own journey, taking a first step was certainly the most daunting. However, as professionals focused on information literacy, we already have the skills to be able to seek out quality resources that can begin our journey towards being in respectful relationship. It is our responsibility, as library people, to gain new skills that can help in the process of evaluating how the resources in our libraries relate to Indigenous peoples. As teacher-librarians, you have a special responsibility to the Indigenous youth that are in your schools and your libraries. It is important that young

Indigenous students have a space to see their identities and lives reflected back to them in culturally safe and non-stereotypical or tokenized ways. Take this as your first call to action and purchase a book by an Indigenous author for yourself or your library and begin from there.

In the face of this action, we should remain conscious of the space and places that we occupy as non-Indigenous people and acknowledge our limitations. Indigenous knowledges have long been intentionally excluded from our work. The library and its collections can never be a replacement to authentic relationships built on reciprocity and respect. However, libraries can be, and always have been, spaces for communities to gather. How can your library be a space for students, and especially Indigenous students, to gather, learn, share and celebrate? We conceive of libraries as quiet spaces for reflection and peaceful study, but what is the sound of being in respectful relationship? Imagine the library as a place filled with the joyful din of students gathering in community, sharing, laughing and growing together. 2019 is the UNESCO International Year of Indigenous Languages. There could be an Indigenous language café for your students, to practice words in the languages of the particular territory that you are on led by local knowledge keepers. What a thrill it would be to walk into a usually silent library, suddenly filled with the sounds of a language that has been spoken on that land since time immemorial!

Relationships are dynamic and they will change as we develop. As we move forward, as we are spurred to action, as we learn, these relationships will grow. Remember that these relationships are reciprocal, we must contribute to benefit from being in respectful relationship. With all of this in mind, what will it mean to be in respectful relationship in 10 years? 20 years? 50 years? We all will need to work together to find out. ■

**“ It is our responsibility, as library people, to gain new skills that can help in the process of evaluating how the resources in our libraries relate to Indigenous peoples. ”**