



To: Kaukauna Public Library Board of Trustees
From: Library Director A. Thiem-Menning
Date: 4/16/2024
Re: PLA Conference Notes

Employee Resource Groups (ERG) and Why They Matter

This particular session was a bit thin in subject matter, but I wanted to attend it because the City has created their first ERG, which I am helping to facilitate. This particular library is quite large and has an extensive branch system, so their scope is far beyond ours. However, it was interesting to hear about the types of events and meetings they participated in and what types of affinity groups they had for ERGs. Probably most important is that they had a budget for their group, which while small, did pay to bring speakers in, which were open to all staff.

Black Men in Public Libraries

This panel was fantastic. Two Wisconsin Library Association conferences ago, one of the speaker's was Felton Thomas, CEO of Cleveland Public Library, who was a member of this panel with three other men. Black men in the US hold less than 1% of all MLIS degrees. The panel was very eye-opening and reiterates for me the importance of our removing the barrier of the required MLIS for librarian positions. They also advocated for getting more books for and about black boys into the hands of black boys, and advocated for us to encourage the young black men we meet to take an interest in the library field.

Radical Supervision, Applying the Teachings of Black Liberation Leaders to Management

This session was less lecture and more participation, which I was not expecting. The Black Liberation Principles are Struggle, Freedom, Power, Autonomy, Collectivism, Care and Future Visioning. After talking about each principle, at our tables we were encouraged to fill out a self-assessment as supervisors. Questions for the self-assessment included:

1. How would you rate and/or describe your enthusiasm to supervise others?
2. How often do you engage with people of different backgrounds, experiences, and identities as you?
3. Rate and/or describe how comfortable you are discussing race, gender, sexual identity, and class.
4. Are you mindful of addressing your feelings when you are in uncomfortable spaces and do you use practices and tools that ground and support you in such space?
5. Do you listen or talk more when in conversation?
6. Where on the scales of Black Liberation Principles would you situate your supervisory style?

After the self-assessment, we were asked to talk through each question with the people at our table.

Indigenizing the Library: How Idaho Created a Statewide Training for Indigenous Inclusion

This is one of the best sessions I attended! The Idaho Commission for Libraries and a Youth Services Librarian teamed up to put together a class for state librarians to learn about the five federally recognized tribes in Idaho. This aligns very well to one of Kim's projects, which is to have a circulating bin with information about each of the federally (and one not federally) recognized tribes in the State of Wisconsin. The two presenters created the curriculum with the Niche Academy software, which also included readings and guest speakers during the course. While I know that this would be a very large goal, I do think it would be incredible to begin working on a project of this magnitude. The group did mention that they had already started this project in several other states and were open to more!

Changing Subject Headings for a More Inclusive Library

While this was a fascinating and very moving presentation, I will admit that I do not have expertise in this particular area, which is cataloging. I know that OWLS is aware of this push in libraries to make Library of Congress subject headings more inclusive. Two libraries talked about how they were able to bypass the slow changes to subject headings, which can be blocked at times by those in power. By updating subject headings, libraries can improve discovery of diverse titles, improve sensitivity/exposure to terms, and use natural language search terms. Most subject heading changes are related to race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, familial and veteran status. Both the libraries used the ERIC Thesaurus, Homosaurus, local tribes, and OLA TSRT Critical Cataloging to develop their headings. Both libraries ended up changing terms from broader to narrower, as well as from narrower to broader. The libraries also worked with their catalog vendor to remove terms, but they did caution to highly research before removing. While the terms are still there in the background of the item record, they do not display on the screen. Both libraries worked with a third party vendor to implement this work within the ILS and discovery layer. The good news is that one of the libraries that implemented the change uses the same catalog vendor as us, so we know they are capable of implementing changes. I have already sent copies of the slides over to OWLS for their review. This session also reminded me that at some point in the future, it would be very helpful to have a professionally trained cataloger on staff.

The Role of Libraries in Workforce Development

While this is definitely an important topic in Wisconsin with so many physical job centers being permanently closed, the scope of work being done by the libraries on the panel is a little overwhelming. These large libraries have staff dedicated to workforce development, called Career Navigators, to help specifically with workforce development and majorities of them are paying for it from their own budgets. Pre-COVID, Appleton Public Library had something similar, but their career navigators were volunteers. These libraries also had a WIAO Specialist, staff trained in the U.S. Department of Labor Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The libraries had regular support group

gatherings for job seekers, weekly speakers, and tables for networking. While I did gather a few programming ideas from this, the scope is simply too large for our library.

Three Must-Have Activities for New Employee Training

As this session pertained to onboarding, something we are looking to better develop, I was interested to hear what other libraries are doing. Again, these libraries are extremely large, so a scope we will not be able to reach, however there were a few interesting takeaway's. It was very neat to see that the libraries actually have documentation for new staff on how they can professionally develop within the organization and then even allow shadowing between branches to allow the staff member that is interested in moving up within the organization to have real experience in the position. They also role play and practice how to respond to certain situations as well as make a lot of training into games. We do have staff practice shelving, but we could certainly develop scavenger hunts to help teach them about different collections, services, programs, and databases as part of training. We will absolutely be utilizing items from this panel into our new onboarding procedures.

African American Isn't a Genre: Collecting and Promoting Black Books

This is one of the best programs I attended. During this session, I learned that while we have been actively purchasing diverse titles by and about people of color, we have no urban fiction titles in our collection. One of the first things I did upon our return was begin to purchase some titles from all of the 12 publishers that were recommended during the presentation. We now have a small core collection that will be available and James has included all the vendors in our acquisitions file so that we stay on top of ordering new titles. A keyword search of urban fiction has zero results in InfoSoup. Further in-depth searches in InfoSoup show that there are almost no urban fiction titles available. On top of this information, it was pointed out to us that while there is a ton of research on the reading habits of white people, there is almost no information or research being conducted on the reading habits of black people.

Increase Religious Equity by Reclassifying Dewey 200's

This was also an eye-opening session and again, while I am not a cataloger, this particular session was a bit easier to understand as it focused predominately on changing call numbers and making the 200's more equitable. A common theme in many of the sessions was on equity and also more specifically on the reclaiming of space. When looking at the current OCLC breakdown of 200s in Dewey, they cater heavily to Christianity. In part, this is because the world was not nearly as global and information rich when the classification was put together, but it was also very much a product of systemic racism. The current arrangement only allows for the 290's to include other religions. The new optional arrangement in Dewey that was proposed in this session changes the focus chronologically by evolution of the religion, and also allows for greater space for other religions numerically. Again, the focus on the reclaiming of space.

The new classification offered allows for subject headings for religions of East & Southeast Asian origin, African, American native, Australian origins, the Bible, Judaism,

Christianity, Christian moral & devotional theology, Christian social & ecclesiastical theology, Islam, and modern spiritual movements, as well as Wicca.

There is a wave of this reclassification occurring in New England. Our library will be taking on this project once the weeding of nonfiction collections have been conducted. This will also allow for better collection development, as the new arrangement allows us to be more aware of the holdings and gaps for each of the various religions.

Spanish for Library Staff: Bridging the Language Barrier

This was another one of my very favorite sessions. It was extremely inspiring and will result in action on our part. We will be developing core phrases, which we will post at the service desks for staff to say if a non-English speaking patron needs assistance and none of our Spanish-speaking staff are available. We will practice these phrases as a group during all of our staff training days so that staff can build comfort in the practice.

While this session dealt primarily on staff-only basic Spanish language learning, predominately in a virtual setting across multiple campuses, for me, I felt like this was an opportunity to begin some English-Spanish conversation groups as a library program. I am proposing for our fall session that we begin having one morning and one evening group session a month. Those interested in practicing their English can come participate, while also having the opportunity to teach those learning Spanish, and vice versa for those learning Spanish with the means to help someone practice their English.

Other notes from PLA:

On top of all of these wonderful programs, we did have the opportunity to spend time in the exhibit hall with national vendors. We came back with at least 80 lbs. of books, which will be used as summer reading program giveaways, some that were not advance reader copies have made their way into the collection, and the adult advance reader copies will go to staff at our next training.

We also got to play with Automated Materials Handling Sorters and found several companies to get quotes from for our Capital Improvement this year. I learned that there are WAY more questions I need to be asking vendors about AMH's before we begin the RFP process.

Some of my actions items from this PLA include:

- Check the 398's, which are typically fairy tales to remove any religious materials and put them back into the 200's where they belong.
- Arrange all the Dewey 200s with the new standards.
- Increase and maintain collection development of urban fiction.
- Incorporate new hands-on strategies into onboarding practices.
- Continue to promote equity, diversity and inclusion. There were many panels featuring minoritized peoples and it was very clear how much work still needs to

be done. I am grateful to have had opportunities to feel uncomfortable during lectures.

- The addition of Spanish-English Conversation Group programs.
- Begin laying some groundwork for a statewide indigenous inclusion-learning model, or at a minimum, something for our system.
- Advocate to OWLS regarding subject-heading changes, which has already started.

