

6B—Contested Knowledges

Comparing Indigenous Approaches to Autism with Western Approaches to Autism, Anna Wilson (University of Alberta).

On World Autism Awareness Day, April 2, 2014, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave a global call to action for improving the quality of life of people suffering from autism, through helping them reach their fullest potential. This paper challenges the dominant narrative in Western society's medical model that views autism as a "disease," by defending the empowering Navajo view of autism as a "difference" of beauty "hozo." This envisions people with autism as a source of social capital instead of a social burden. The healing Indigenous people experience through community sharing can also help non-Indigenous people with autism heal in their communities. The healing stories of people with autism provide a wealth of experience to the LIS field. The World Health Organization supports librarians' roles by claiming that "E-learning approaches, and innovative models for engaging" people with autism to develop informative autism web sites and share their valuable experiences through digital stories, can be facilitated with library professionals. Librarians can challenge society's stereotypes of autism through promoting appropriate autism web sites and critiquing inaccurate web sites. This paper examines how five autism organization websites challenge the Western medical view of autism as a disease, through alternative Indigenous methods of coping with autism. These refreshing stories of people with autism reveal how nourishing their strengths enables them to flourish creatively as authors of their own destiny. First, the research design will be presented with the research questions, and autism will be defined and given prevalence. Second, a literature review of Indigenous and Western approaches to autism will be given, including a definition of transformative education. Third, Navajo approaches to autism will be explored. Fourth, healing stories from Western autism websites will be examined. Fifth, future implications for library and information studies will be critically analyzed. The speaker is grateful for travel funding provided by Litwin Books in support of this presentation.