

How we organize information is laden with value related to power structures and worldview. Langara Library, as with most academic libraries, uses the Library of Congress classification scheme and subject headings to organize our collection, especially books and media materials. The system has an embedded Euro-centric worldview along with its attendant colonial practices. For example, Indians of North American and Indian Art continue to be subject headings. Titles by and about Indigenous peoples are overwhelmingly classed in history and ethnographic studies. For example, most books about Indigenous peoples in Canada are found in the E's and FC's call number section under the history of North America. Explicit in this organization is that Indigenous peoples are 'cultures of the past' for study. Names of tribes in LC also continue to be defined by ethnographic studies rather than names used by the Indigenous peoples themselves.

There is movement within the library community to shift the paradigm. However, the shift is slow moving and tends to be localized initiatives. Part of the problem is the desire within the profession to apply universality and standardization whereas land, relationships and community specificity are so important to Indigenous frameworks of knowledge. For example, the Xwi7xwa Library at UBC has adopted the Deere Classification, an Indigenous classification scheme and further developed new subject headings to better reflect Indigenous. While some libraries such as OCADU have adopted some of the subject headings, they are initiatives that are dependent upon each institution's policy and resources. Furthermore, the Deere classification scheme is intended for an Indigenous library and cannot be employed for libraries with a wider mandate in collection and purpose. The echo is "yes we need to change" but there is no collective consensus on best practices in descriptive work.

I started a journey back in May of this year to decolonize our book collection, in particular titles about Indigenous art and artists. My starting point was to locate some best practices on changing our descriptive work such as cataloguing and classification and to identify concrete ways to support the Indigenization of the curriculum. Of course, the best journeys, at least those in memorable stories,

meander and sometimes never quite arrive at a destination point. But I would like to share some of my stopping points.

Emerging from my readings and conversations with faculty and scholars is that while we (the Library) can take some steps to change some of our descriptive work, it isn't about finding that 'perfect' set of classification and subject headings. Furthermore, it is also not about an overarching set of concrete steps that can be applied to all contexts. Rather, the response lies in nurturing local and specific relationships to support the Indigenization of the curriculum at diffused levels (individual, class, project and departmental). As the relationships grow, the conversations will hopefully deepen and lead to impactful actions.

While we can make local efforts to change subject headings to reflect contemporary discussions, there is no practical way to erase them entirely from our library catalogue. The sharing of cataloging records among libraries especially in North America means that offensive subject headings such as Indian of North America will continue 'seep' into our local catalogue. Retroactive descriptive work also has resource limitations. On a philosophical level, complete erasure of outdated and offensive cataloging work does not take away our responsibility to engage in challenging conversations about decolonization and to redress systematic inequities. For example, changing the subject heading for a book on 'totem poles' to Indigenous Art does not address colonial view by which Indigenous cultural production is often discussed. As noted by one of my faculty interviewees, the Indian Act still exists and that "word should not be deleted until the act is repealed".

So how does a library, in the role of information provider and collection curator, support decolonization and Indigenization of the curriculum when land, relationships and community specificity are foundations to Indigenous knowledge, when colonial practices have tried to homogenize and erase unique Indigenous communities?

I believe commitment to dialogue and engagement with our direct communities should frame the approach, one which can be applied to all aspects of our work including collection management, provision of services and information literacy instruction. For my report, I will only focus on two actions that serve as examples:

The study of art or cultural production is not a significant part of the curriculum in the Aboriginal Studies Program at Langara. In contrast, the Fine Arts department has incorporated decolonization and Indigenization into its curriculum. Examples of their efforts include an Indigenous carving course and the inclusion of BIPOC artists in their speaker series. Within the Langara context, it makes sense then to re-class many titles about Indigenous art and artists from the E's (History of North America) to the N's (Art). This is not to suggest that the N's is the perfect 'parking stall' for these titles. Rather, this is to prioritize the subject where there is likely most interest among our users. In addition, while formal subject headings (so called authority list) are slow to change, we can add keywords to enhance the record for access. This includes adding a reference to the communities to which an artist has indicated an influence on their practice. On this journey stop, I have identified about 40 existing titles that should be relocated to the N's section to provide colocation with other art related titles. The Library has also started a subscription to [First American Art magazine](#). Hopefully this will expose more books about Indigenous art and artists to Fine Arts and other Creative Arts students.

Our information literacy instruction is where we can continue to decolonize. Wemigwans, in *Digital Bundle* emphasizes the difference between Indigenous information and Indigenous knowledge, especially on the Web. The [ACRL Information Literacy Framework for Higher Education](#) sets out a number of frames for learning. Two important ones for this discussion are that authority is constructed and contextual, and that information is a creative process. As part of information literacy work, we need to highlight the critical question of authority in works

about Indigenous art and artists. More significantly, libraries need to curate ethically publications beyond traditional literature such as interactive story works and podcasts and to prioritize Indigenous primary voices especially knowledge shared with permission by elders. Whenever appropriate, I plan to incorporate the concept that authority is contextual and created in library sessions for the Creative Arts Division.

In response to an instructor who expressed a need for a guide to help them with their teaching, I have developed a resource guide on Indigenous Art and Artists

<https://langara.libguides.com/indigenous-art>. More than a list of links to resources by format, which are typical of library guides, I tried to incorporate some context for conversations:

- An explanation is provided at the beginning to acknowledge the colonial and Euro-centric bias of the library descriptive and classification work
- Background articles and/or community websites alongside links to books about art in specific communities.
- It is of course a continuous project. There is a tab on which students as well as you can share your feedback about the guide.

Wemigwans, in her book, *Digital Bundle*, adopts Simpson's four tenets to discuss Indigenous knowledge online:

- Biskaabiiyang – to look back, to recreate cultural and political flourishing of the past; to reclaim
- Naakgonige – to carefully plan, impact on life relationships
- Aanjigone – non-interference; decision focused on concepts rather than individuals; patience at each learning their own way; respect in claiming, testifying and negotiation

- Debwewin - recognizing the diversity of truth

The four tenets propose an iterative and integrated view which speaks to the complexity of Indigenous knowledge as a living process for knowing and acting. Within our professional lens of librarianship, we need to consider this complexity in our practice. During interviews with faculty (both Indigenous and not), I would often start the conversation by asking “what the library can do to support Indigenization”. In retrospect, that question has proven to be not very useful - it is an inherently one way, both in direction and intent, conversation. That is, the question exposes a disconnect between librarianship that is deeply embedded in Euro-centric and Indigenous frames of reference. Perhaps it may be better to start the conversation with “telling each other who we are and where we are at that moment” - a greeting that, as advocated by Wemigwans and Simpson, better situates us to look back, to carefully plan, to make respectful decisions and negotiate the diversity of truth. It is also an approach that holds promise for sustainable and impactful actions.

## Bibliography

- Bechtel, R. "Oral Narratives: Reconceptualizing the Turbulence Between Indigenous Perspectives and Eurocentric Scientific Views." *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, vol. 11 no. 2 (2016): 447-469. doi:10.1007/s11422-014-9659-z
- Doyle, Anne M., Kimberley Lawson, and Sarah Dupont. 2015. "Indigenization of Knowledge Organization at the Xwi7xwa Library." *Journal of Library and Information Studies* 13 (2): 107–34. doi:10.6182/jlis.2015.13(2).107.
- Duarte, Marisa Elena and Miranda Belarde-Lewis. "Imagining: Creating Spaces for Indigenous Ontologies." *Cataloging and Classification Quarterly*, vol. 53 no. 5-6: 677-702.
- Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*. Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2013.
- Munroe, Howard and Daniel Payne. "Creative Research as Story-Telling: An Indigenous Visual Culture Course From the Perspectives of a Librarian, a Professor and Students." *ALJ*, vol. 45 no. 4 (2020): 128 – 142.
- Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*. Winnipeg : ARP Books, 2011
- Wemigwans, Jennifer. *Digital Bundle*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2018
- Wilson, Debby Danard and Jean-Paul Restoule. "Tobacco Ties: the Relationship of the Sacred to Research." *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, vol. 33 no. 1 (2010): 29-45.

A special note of thank you to the following people for sharing their time to speak with me: Sarah Butterill (OCADU), Alwyn O'Brien (Fine Arts), Alena Buis (Art History), Aaron Nelson (Fine Arts), Suzie Webster (Fine Arts), Jennifer Wemigwans (University of Toronto).

Joyce Wong [joycewong@langara.ca](mailto:joycewong@langara.ca)

Last updated: November 15, 2021

