Crash Course in the

Brian Deer Classification System

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iSkills Summer 2021

Learning Objectives

- Summarize the concepts behind library classification;
- Summarize the concepts behind the Brian Deer Classification system;
- Recognize the challenges in using Western classification systems for Indigenous knowledges.

Why do we classify?

> "To classify is human." Bowker & Star (1999, p. 1)

> "Classification, however, although necessary in systems of language, contributes to hierarchies of power." Vaughan (2018, p. 2)

People classify their possessions, experiences, and even other people to make sense of the world at large. It creates their personal worldview. Libraries do this on a larger scale, primarily using two systems: The Dewey Decimal Classification system and the Library of Congress Classification system.

In her 2018 article, Vaughan writes that the language used in cataloguing is important because of its "impact both on how others are viewed and how others view themselves."
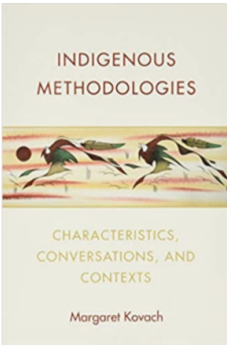
We see this in the practice of putting Indigenous materials in the History section - it implies that Indigenous Peoples in North America are people of the past. This obviously isn't true, but the cataloging and classification systems we primarily use represent the viewpoints and socio-political thinking of the time they were written.

In a 2013 article titled "Queering the catalog" Emily Drabinski writes that "In both their activism and their scholarship, librarians have convincingly made the case that Library of Congress Classification and Library of Congress Subject Headings fail to accurately and respectfully organize library materials about social groups and identities that lack social and political power."

What does this look like?

The image below includes both LCC and DDC call numbers for three books, taken from the reverse side of the title page.

Does anything stand out to you, that might be problematic?

E96.2 B355	E76.7 K68	HV6250.4 W65 M33
History, America: Indians of North America - General Works, Canada, General Works/Indian Schools	History, America: Indians of North America - Study & Teaching, Research	Social Sciences, Social pathology, social & public welfare, criminology; Special classes of persons as victims, Women
371.829 97071	305.897 071072	362.88089
Social Sciences: Education: Schools & their activities; Special Education	Social Sciences: Social Groups	Social Sciences & Social Problems; Social welfare problems & Services

Activity: "Paper talk" by Brendan Frederick R. Edwards

Using the cover, table of contents, and reverse side of the title page, how would you classify this book in either LLC or DDC?
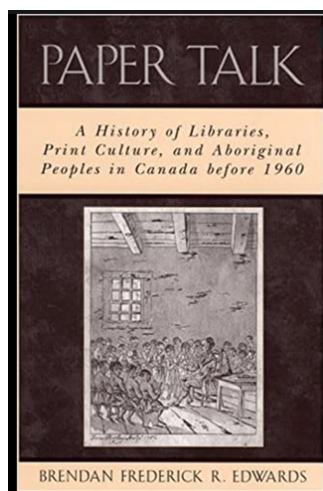
1. Contexts and Foundations: Placing this history: literacy, books, libraries, and First Peoples

2. The Nineteenth Century: "Read, write, and worship God daily": The Missionary's tools: the written word, books, and education

3. First Quarter of the Twentieth Century: Books in the schools and Aboriginal literacy initiatives

4. 1930 through 1960: Community development, philanthropy, and educational neglect: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literary perspectives

Conclusion: Knowledge keepers: libraries and the printed word

Appendix 1: Approved Supplementary Reading Books for Indian Schools, 1931-1938

Appendix 2: Day School Libraries, 1943

Materials Needed

1. Reverse title page:
   https://www.google.ca/books/edition/Paper_Talk/7MnFLVRdOk4C?hl=en&gbpv=1
2. Library of Congress Classification:
   https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCC/freelcc.html
3. Dewey Decimal Classification:
   https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/oclc/dewey/resources/summaries/deweysummaries.pdf

Libraries and colonization

Libraries are colonial institutions, and therefore sites of racism and assimilation.

Does this statement make you uncomfortable? Why?

There is a gap in library literature on racism and Canadian libraries, but that doesn't mean it isn't there.

Library history is full of segregation, inappropriate materials, and even a lack of library access in communities. For example, in Alberta until 2016 Indigenous peoples[1] living on reserve were required to pay for a public library card because reserves are considered a federal jurisdiction.

Often, the land is referred to as the library for Indigenous Peoples. Stories are held in the mountains, trees, flowers, waterways, and creatures. The notion of a library as we know it today came over with colonization, and through colonization the Indigenous library (the land) faced destruction.

Further reading on racism, neutrality, and libraries

Theory into practice, 3 part series by Amber Matthews[2]

Reflections on the Public Library System in Canada: Inclusivity, Race and Power[3]

Open to all? The public library and social exclusion[4]

Are libraries neutral?[5]

Libraries Should Take Sides: Breaking Down the Neutrality Myth[6]

The Hidden History of Segregation in Libraries[7]

The dark history of segregated libraries[8]

Establishing and enhancing libraries within Indigenous communities[9]

A history of racism in American public libraries [10]

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[1] https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/alberta-government-funding-free-library-cards-for-aboriginal-residents-on-reserves

[2] https://open-shelf.ca/amber-matthews/

[3] https://ojs.library.dal.ca/djim/article/view/10880

[4] http://eprints.rclis.org/6283/1/lic084.pdf

[5] https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2018/06/01/are-libraries-neutral/

[6] https://hacklibraryschool.com/2020/02/25/libraries-should-take-sides/

[7] https://about.proquest.com/en/blog/2018/The-Hidden-History-of-Segregation-in-Libraries/

[8] https://www.theculturecrush.com/feature/bodies-of-knowledge

[9] https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/FINA/Brief/BR8398338/br-external/NationalReadingCampaign-e.pdf

[10] https://bookriot.com/racism-in-american-public-libraries/

Indigenous Classification

What's wrong with how things currently are?

"What is signified by the placement of Indians of North America after Pre-Columbian American and before Discovery of America? The use of that problematic last phrase implies that Indians were **either gone by the start of American history, or just didn't matter enough to be counted as part of it.**"

~ Kelly Webster and Ann Doyle (2008), "Don't class me in antiquites: Giving voice to Native American materials". (emphasis added)

In the article "Don't class me in antiquites" (p. 190)Ann Doyle shares some guidelines that were developed in the 1970s around evaluating Indigenous materials for inclusion in collections:

- Are the contributions of American Indian culture to Western civilization given rightful and accurate representation?
- Is American Indian culture evaluated in terms of its own values and attitudes rather than in terms of those of another culture?
- Consider the effect of the material on a Native person's self-image
- How does the language of cataloguing contribute, or not, to meeting these evaluation requirements?

In the same article, Kelly Webster shares about a session she attended at the American Indian Library Association meeting, where a memo written by Sandy Berman was discussed. The memo, written in 1995, provided suggestions about changes that should be made to LC Subject Headings such as including tribal preferred names, changes to the heading "Indian of North America" but nothing was done. 25 years later, we still haven't seen these changes done at a system level though many libraries are making local changes, such as creating a local heading for "Indigenous Peoples". Another avenue is using the notes field to include a message regarding the terminology; acknowledging that it's problematic, and that library systems are working on it.

In his 2006 PhD dissertation, George Chester wrote that "Since cataloging and organizational systems influence relationships and attitudes, it is critical that librarians align their cataloging systems so that if the systems are not value neutral, they can still

promote healthy attitudes and relationships toward what is cataloged." Doyle, Lawson, and Dupont remind us that "the terminology and arrangements in use in libraries to organize materials on Aboriginal topics reflected the views and values of newcomers to First Nations territories including early anthropologists, missionaries, government agents, and travellers, and not Indigenous perspectives or values." (2015, p. 111). Cherry and Mukunda (2015) state that how Indigenous Peoples are represented is "inappropriate, missguided, and discriminatory" (p. 549).

For information on how libraries contribute to the erasure of the genocide within North America, Michael Dudley[11] has written and presented on the absence of accurate subject headings.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

"…. The source of indigenous knowledge and wisdom arises from the people - past, present, and future - and is existential to their very being."

~ Peters, W.M.K. (2016). The embodied library: The culmination of all who came before. In C. Callison, L. Roy and G.A. LeCheminant (Eds), Indigenous notions of ownership and libraries, archives and museums, (pp. 25-39). IFLA Publications.

Thinking back to the first page of this handout, people classify things, experiences, etc. to understand their world. Libraries do this on a large scale, supposedly encompassing all knowledge or information, but through a Western-European lens. Indigenous Peoples have their own worldviews, and had for thousands of years before colonization a way of organizing that knowledge (Younging, 2016).

This Indigenous worldview is reflected in how Indigenous knowledge is organized. The emphasis is on connections, and therefore Indigenous knowledge "cannot be separated from land, work, life-practice, and the relations between the individual or community and the natural world." (Cherry and Mukunda, 2015, p. 550). Knowledge is passed between people through oral tellings and lived experiences (Peters, 2016), an educational system that became under attack with colonization, where Indigenous knowledge is considered "anecdotal, primitive, prescientific, or even ignorant" (Peters, 2016, pp. 28) in contrast to Western-European knowledge.

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[11] https://winnspace.uwinnipeg.ca/handle/10680/1068
https://librarytoolshed.ca/content/library-matter-genocide-0
https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/iipj/article/view/7519

There is no one unified system of Indigenous knowledge.There are commonalities, such as being "wholistic, interrelational, interactional, and broad-based" (Kovach, 2009), however each Nation and community will have its own understanding of the world, language, and spirituality.

The Brian Deer Classification System

The late Mohawk librarian, Brian Deer, developed his system in the mid 1970s while working at the National Indian Brotherhood library - known today as the Assembly of First Nations. This system was "based on the areas of activity of the NIB, a national Indigenous political organization representing Aboriginal interests, rights and title." (Doyle, Lawson, Dupont, 2015, p. 112). Finding both the LCC and DDC problematic, he developed a system that centred Indigenous knowledge structures. The system honours relationality above all else. Brian's creativity and innovation has inspired a number of libraries to modify his system for their own libraries.

In their article about modifying the UBCIC Deer system, Cherry and Mukunda highlight that "Deer's system prioritized issues of importance to Indigenous peoples, and described their world, their ordering of social relations, and in short, their epistemologies." (2015, p. 553). As Bosum and Dunne write (2017) the "BDC is a nontraditional classification system in that it is not intended to be imposed on a collection. Rather, the collection informs the classification plan, using the general organization of the plan as a rough guideline." It was never meant to be a universal Indigenous classification system, but rather provides an Indigenous framework for other libraries to create their own (Swanson, 2015). It's important to understand the significance of this on two levels: first, both the DDC and LCC prioritize Western-European worldviews, and proposed modifications to those systems attempt to merge worldviews without thinking about the structural changes that need to be made (Cherry & Mukunda, 2015). Second, while there is overlap in worldviews, when we say "Indigenous" we are talking about 600 unique First Nations, 56 Inuit communities, and a vast Metis homeland. There is a rich diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, that often becomes an imagined pan-Indigenous culture.

In the literature on the Deer system, two libraries are mentioned multiple times: X̱wi7x̱wa Library at the University of BC and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. Both use a

locally modified Deer system. Keltie McCall was the librarian at NIB after Brian, and in the late 1978s she was recruited to work at UBCIC. There she worked with Gene Joseph, a librarian who later became well known for her work on the Delgamuukw case. Keltie and Gene revised the Deer system from NIB for the UBCIC. Then, when Gene was working with the library collection for the Native Indian Teacher Education Program (now the Indigenous Teacher Education Program) at UBC, she expanded on that work. This collection later became the X̱wi7x̱wa Library. (Doyle, Lawson, Dupont, 2015).

Modifying the Deer system for SFU Library's Indigenous Curriculum Resource Centre

When modifying the Deer system for the ICRC, it was imperative that SFU faculty would be able to "see" their subjects in collection. For this to happen, some of the main headings needed to change, to reflect faculties and departments at SFU. Faculties and departments also needed to be mapped to each main heading (see the below chart for an example). In some cases things were added, such as with Sociology and Anthropology, and in others it was a matter of making sure a discipline was included.

During conversations with X̱wi7x̱wa staff, we talked through a more 'radical' reorganization of the system. The order headings and sections were reexamined, and rearranged to reflect a more relational understanding.

Using a spiral or ripple metaphor we approached it with the understanding that community is at the core of all Indigenous Nations and communities, and therefore should be in an Indigenous classification system. With communities at the centre (or heart) of the classification scheme, we identified language, worldview, and culture as being at the centre of community and culture. The farther from the centre, the more colonial-influenced the topics are the farther from the centre they're located. We recognize this isn't a perfect system, yet we are hopeful that it better reflects a (pan) Indigenous worldview.

Within this large revision, there were other changes made. The first, and maybe one of the most important is changing "Indigenous Peoples: History and Culture" to "Indigenous Peoples: Communities and Culture." While a seemingly small change, just one word, it drastically alters how Indigenous communities and Nations are thought of. No longer are they being historicized, but recognized as living and vibrant peoples. It also provided space for materials being published on contemporary topics.

	ICRC Classification Main Headings	Faculty
A	Reference	
B	Indigenous Peoples: Communities & Culture: BC	
C	Indigenous Peoples: Communities & Culture: North America	
D	Indigenous Peoples : Communities & Culture: Rest of the World	History, sociology
E	Language	Linguistics
F	Worldview (i.e. Spirituality and philosophy)	Philosophy, Indigenous Studies
G	Tangible & Material Culture	Contemporary Arts, SIAT
H	Intangible Culture & Literature	English Literature, Indigenous Studies, Communication, Dance, Publishing
I		
J	Education	Education
K	Sociology and Anthropology	Sociology added to reflect SFU department
L	Archaeology	Archaeology
M	Community Planning	Urban Studies, Semester in Dialogue (?), Recreation, Gerontology, Labour Studies
N	Roles & Relationships	GSWS, Indigenous Studies, Gerontology
O		
P	Health	Health Sciences, Biomedical Physiology & Kinesiology, Psychology/Mental Health
Q		
R	Nature & Ecological knowledge	REM, Environmental Sciences, School of Sustainable Energy Engineering, Faculty of Science, Biology and Molecular Biology/Biochemistry

For a more in depth explanation on the changes made, and discussion regarding terminology choices, please visit the Indigenous Curriculum Resource Centre's page on the Brian Deer Classification system[12].

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[12] https://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/academic-integrity/indigenous-initiatives/icrc/brian-deer-classification

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