

## REVISED VERSION

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# Naming and Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledges in Public Institutions: Intersections of Landscapes and Experience.

**Abstract:** This paper tells a story of a practitioner's experience in a First Nations library and how it shaped a doctoral research project on knowledge organization. It connects the landscape on the edge of a pacific forest to considerations of the impacts of the erasures of Indigenous knowledges by dominant knowledge organization systems and practices. The LIS literature on cultural bias in knowledge organization is reviewed and some ameliorative initiatives described. A theoretical lens is created by conjoining the new sociology of education with analyses by Indigenous governance organizations. The potential of LIS research to contribute to the naming and reclaiming of Indigenous knowledges is highlighted and a proposed research plan to contribute to methodologies for Indigenous knowledge organization is outlined.

## 1. Introduction

Ulq̓sən<sup>1</sup> is the hən'q'əmin'əm' name of the point of land where the university is located on the traditional unceded lands of the Musqueam people. University walking trails trace the original Indigenous paths that led from villages on the river to the fresh water sites and fishing camps on the inlet. The land bears the inscription of canoe runs, it remembers the good places for sturgeon fishing, the look outs, and gathering places for crab apples, camas, and medicines on what is now the university campus and endowment lands. Musqueam people serve as university instructors and Senate members, Musqueam Elders convene official events and provide student support services. Musqueam people are university students, leaders and alumni. There is no authorized subject heading for Musqueam in the University Library catalogue.

As a librarian working at the First Nations library here, I often explain to visitors, "The name of the library is Xwi7xwa, pronounced whei'wha. It means 'echo'." This story of the name is retold each time a visitor asks the question and opens the possibility of a new understanding of this place: one with its own ways of knowing, and its own ways of telling. This is the ground of my question: how would the political, cultural and intellectual dimensions of this landscape become more visible within the academy? how could First Nations' values and protocols be manifest in library classifications? how could Aboriginal ontologies and epistemologies inform knowledge organization: naming, structure and relationships? The guiding ethical principles have been put in place by the Elders and educators of the Longhouse council and their aspirations for the next generations.<sup>2</sup>

The Xwi7xwa Library's knowledge organization, that is, the classification and naming systems, aim to be congruent with Indigenous worldviews and to reflect Indigenous intellectual landscapes in order to support an organizational mandate to

make the University's vast resources more accessible to Aboriginal peoples. This commitment to Indigenous knowledge organization emerges from two interrelated assumptions: 1) mainstream library knowledge organization and naming systems carry the biases of the dominant culture and marginalize or completely exclude Indigenous histories, cultures, knowledges, languages, and efforts toward self-determination -- jurisdictional and intellectual 2) the development of meaningful knowledge organization systems for the Indigenous knowledges held within libraries is integral to the larger projects of Indigenous scholarship, research and pedagogy at local and global levels. Culturally relevant knowledge organization can also contribute to capacity building within local communities, and extend foundations for cross-cultural understandings. From international perspectives, it may be seen as part of the larger global repatriation of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property. Due to the convergence of technologies and spread of bibliographic utilities, the mainstream classification systems are now ubiquitous in global contexts and have unprecedented power to erase local and regional knowledge domains. Theoretical and applied research on Indigenous knowledge organization contribute to the larger project of knowledge organization for a global learning society.

## **2. Background**

The First Nations House of Learning (FNHL) is an Aboriginal student services unit at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. It has a mandate to make the vast resources of the university more accessible to Aboriginal people. The FNHL logo shows *Raven*, a northwest coast trickster figure and symbol of creativity, transforming the university to reflect First Nations cultures and philosophies. In 1993, the vision and persistence of Aboriginal educators, academic and community members secured a First Nations Longhouse facility for Aboriginal student services including a separate library building to house the Aboriginal community-built library and archives. The library collects, organizes and preserves textual and non-textual records relating to the Aboriginal peoples of British Columbia with a focus on Aboriginal perspectives and scholarship. In the 1980's, Head librarian Gene Joseph of the Wet'suwet'en Nadleh'den Nations, selected the Brian Deer Indigenous classification scheme for the collections and began to develop Aboriginal subject headings to describe the contents. (Joseph, 1993) She understood that any possible futures for a nascent Aboriginal library were seeded by the knowledge organization systems that formed its infrastructure.

The Brian Deer classification was developed in the 1970's and is one of the few Indigenous general knowledge classification systems in Canada. However, it does not, and was not designed to, accommodate the large interdisciplinary literatures on Indigenous topics and a burgeoning Indigenous scholarship. In order to renew or replace the Deer classification, research is required to investigate culturally appropriate design principles that could inform the development of Indigenous knowledge organization: knowledge organization that gives voice to Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous scholarship, and is congruent with the demands of Indigenous research methodologies and ethics.

## **3. A Theoretical Lens: The Sociology of Education and Knowledge Organization**

The New Sociology of Education (NSE) provides a theoretical lens with which to view the intersections of libraries, education and Aboriginal peoples. NSE

theorists, such as Michael Apple and Basil Bernstein, examine the interrelationships between knowledge and power stating that “[t]he distribution of power and principles of social control are reflected in the ways in which society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers public” (Bernstein 1971, 47). Curriculum, viewed as a form of knowledge organization, is conceptualized as a symbolic, material and human environment that is socially constructed and socially distributed. At the same time, it is recognized that only certain types of knowledge are selected to be legitimized by educational and social systems, for example, being included in curriculum. Moreover, this privileged knowledge becomes available to certain groups (and not to others). Educational knowledge is transmitted and distributed in textbooks, and controversies over what is considered to be legitimate knowledge often centre on what is included or excluded from textbooks: “They help set the canons of truthfulness ...” (Apple, 2000, 46). If library subject headings and classifications are viewed as text (Bowker and Star, 1999, 55), the new sociology of education has the potential to provide tools to understand how dominant classification and subject representation systems entrench what is ‘taken for granted’ as legitimate knowledge, and how socially marginalized groups and their knowledge domains are excluded.

#### **4. Aboriginal Education and Curriculum**

Even before the Native Indian Brotherhood published its first national policy paper *Indian Control of Indian Education* in 1972, Aboriginal people emphasized the primacy of culturally appropriate curriculum to the successful education of Aboriginal students. Bias in the content and delivery of curriculum still continues to be viewed as a crucial factor contributing to the failure of the education system for Aboriginal children (Hampton 1995; Battiste 2000). All types of educational institutions implicitly transmit biases about First Nations in their stated curriculum as well as in hidden curriculum. “They transmit attitudes, values, and beliefs about what is important, who is credible, the “right” way to do things, and place of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.” The design of these educational processes occurs at both conscious and unconscious levels. (Hampton, 2000, 215).

The National Indian Brotherhood’s early analysis of the public school curriculum concluded that Aboriginal children will “continue to be strangers in Canadian classrooms until the curriculum recognizes Indian customs and values, Indian languages ...” and their ongoing contributions to Canadian society (p. 26). In 1974, Manitoba Indian Brotherhood’s *The Shocking Truth about Indians in Textbooks* presented one of the first content analyses of the representation of Aboriginal peoples in textbooks. The study found that textbooks were derogatory, incomplete, and distorted in their representation of Aboriginal people and identified ten types of bias.<sup>3</sup> The ten types of bias identified in Canadian school textbooks thirty years ago might also be identified in the standard Anglo American classification and subject representation systems currently used by libraries throughout North America and the world. The negative impacts of bias on the education and self image of Aboriginal children, cross cultural understandings, and diversity of human knowledge systems are similar. For example, locally in 2006, at a university located on Musqueam territory, the library catalogue includes no subject heading for the Musqueam nation or the Musqueam people. A search of the library catalogue for works on Indigenous classification retrieved the pejorative term ‘primitive classification’, and a search for

elders in this locale retrieves the heading, 'Salish aged' a term which skews the meaning and ignores the ubiquity of the term 'elder' in Indigenous contexts.

## **5. Library Classification: Erasures and Loss**

Library and Information Science (LIS) scholarship has documented cultural bias in subject access through classification and subject headings since the 1930's (Berman, 1971, 1981; Yeh, 1971; Olson, 2002; Hermalata, 1995; Foskett, 1982). It demonstrates that Indigenous knowledges have been marginalized through historicization, omission, lack of specificity, lack of relevance and lack of recognition of sovereign nations. Researchers report this bias in Canada (Lee, 2001; Lawson, 2004; Blake, 2003), the United States (Olson, 2002; Carter, 2002; Exner, 2005), Australia (Moorcroft, 1997) and New Zealand (Simpson, 2005; Smith, 1999).

As Hope Olson describes, classification systems reinforce the established intellectual and literary canon by placing subjects in traditional places, and reinforcing the expectations of users to find them there (Olson, 2002: 29). Interrelated notions about quality and authority underlie canon development and what is chosen as part of the canon (Searing, 1986). They also underlie the criteria that libraries use in selecting materials, such as, favourable reviews or indexing by standard sources. One problem is that reviewers often lack a depth of knowledge of Indigenous topics and scholarship (Taylor and Patterson, 2004). At a systemic level, the standard sources by definition choose more of the same standard sources creating a closed system. The information industry not only acts as a gatekeeper to knowledge, it also controls the interpretation of knowledge through the naming of concepts, and the application of subject headings (Moorcroft 1993). In Indigenous contexts, these practices constrain the information available to selectors who develop the current library collections, and the collections in turn shape research patterns and determine the options that will be available to future researchers. In this way they also *construct* memory (Traister, 1999, 213), and skew the telling and retelling of Aboriginal histories (Moorcroft, 1997, 108-112; Shilling and Hausia, 1999, 18). Collections and subject representation "affect the way library patrons view themselves and their relation to their academic community, as well as, to the larger culture" (Manoff, 1992, 3-4). Understandings of identity are related to positive self-image and psychological well-being (Joseph and Lawson, 2003). Librarians are also urged to acknowledge the importance of tribal governments through their classification schemes as well as acquisitions, collections, and reference publications (Carter, 2002, 14). It is important to recognize that First Nations and Aboriginal people "are not just racial groups, they are also self-governing, sovereign political entities empowered to exercise governmental functions" (Carter, 2002, 23).

The Dewey Decimal System (DDC), the most widely used classification system in the world, is in use in over 135 countries and translated into over 30 languages. Similarly, the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) is used in libraries and around the world and, as Olson points out, is gradually becoming an "international subject language" (Olson 2002, 13). Libraries in 82 countries use OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) and copy millions of its records worldwide (Kyung-Sun, 2003; Olson, 2002). These convergences of networks and bibliographic utilities facilitate copying of catalogue records among libraries, and the sharing of data over networks and through consortia. The international standardization of knowledge organization and subject representation systems enables unprecedented

sharing of knowledge and also holds unprecedented power to erase local and regional knowledge domains. At risk are the voices that represent diversity of human experience, including the thousands of unique Indigenous cultures, languages, stories and ways of expressing them. The result could be the loss of representation and access to alternative ways of understanding, conduct and being in the world (Smith, 2005).

## **6. Repatriation: Naming and Reclaiming**

LIS classification theory recognizes that its traditional foundations of logical division and post-positivist paradigms do not adequately express the perspectival (Ranganathan, 1967) and 'border areas' (Broadfield, 1946) and a challenge for the discipline is to seriously imagine theoretical alternatives. Feminist theorists interested in the relationships between power and knowledge, and in multivocality produce an interdisciplinary literature that develops theoretical strategies for bridging limits. (Rose 1994) cited in Olson (2002). This literature envisions 'boundary objects' to link disparate knowledge domains, (Bowker and Star, 1999) and 'eccentric techniques' to create spaces for multiple voices (Olson, 2002). Digital library researchers also seek methods of traversing boundaries, both disciplinary and technical, for information retrieval of web resources and electronic collections (Dean, 2003; Manoff, 2000).

Internationally, there are ambitious Indigenous thesaurus projects in Australia and New Zealand. The Māori Subject Headings grew out research on the information needs of Māori people and aim to provide access to the Māori body of knowledge held in public institutions for Māori people. In Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Thesaurus aims to improve access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander materials. The Rasmussen Library at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, in recognition of local Indigenous language revitalization efforts there, has undertaken the reclassification of all Hyperborean languages, Alaskan and Other Arctic Native languages due to multiple inaccuracies and omissions within the Library of Congress classification. "We do not want to be perceived, as libraries often are, as a component of a white, European imperialist institution but rather as supportive partners in this process of cultural reassertion" (Lincoln 2003: 266). In Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) recommends establishing an Aboriginal documentation centre and clearinghouse to provide access to Indigenous histories, knowledges and research (1996 Vol 3, 24). Library and Archives Canada notes in a recent consultation report that Aboriginal resources and services are affected by "issues of racism and ignorance raised by present cataloguing standards and terminology" (2003 p. 23).

From Indigenous perspectives, "research like schooling, once the tool of colonization and oppression, is very gradually coming to be seen as a potential means to reclaim languages histories and knowledge, to find solutions to the negative impacts of colonialism and to give voice to alternative ways of knowing and being (Smith, 2005, 91). Although there are approximately ten specialized Indigenous classifications in use in North America (Hills 1997), LIS theoretical work deriving from Indigenous epistemologies and values that also comprehends the contemporary self-determination projects of First Nations has not been imagined. It can be expected that libraries, archives, museums, cultural centres, and digital collections will benefit from conceptual, theoretical, and applied research on knowledge organization for Indigenous purposes. The research project views the development of culturally

appropriate subject representation and organization (in libraries) as a mechanism for reclaiming Indigenous knowledges and considers it to be part of a larger global repatriation of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property.

## **7. Next Steps: Proposed Research Study**

The next steps for the proposed research study are to examine theoretical foundations to guide the design, development and evaluation of classification systems for organizing Indigenous knowledges in public collections. As some forms of Indigenous knowledge are considered to be the cultural and/or intellectual property of Indigenous Nations, the research focus is on public collections. A further phase of the research will seek grounds of compatibility between Indigenous classifications and existing mainstream classification systems. There is a gap in the North American literature on theoretical foundations for organizing and describing Indigenous knowledges, however, there is a growing Māori literature (Simpson 2005) describing Māori classification projects in New Zealand. The research will build on the existing theoretical literature guided by the scholarship on Indigenous knowledges, Indigenous research methodologies and ethics. Indigenous knowledges typically recognize the primacy of relationship and interconnectedness, (Hampton, 1995) are place based, (Kawagely, 1993) rooted in genealogy, informed by Indigenous language, and attuned to the wisdom of revelation (Cajete, 1994). Indigenous research methodology (Smith, 1999; Castellano, 2004) requires a commitment to produce work relevant to Aboriginal community needs. The Indigenous ethics of the "The 4 R's Protocol" of higher education: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991) guide such work. This type of qualitative research project is a blend of pragmatic and interpretive methods composed of the following plan to: (1) collect existing Indigenous library classifications and subject headings (2) conduct interviews with the creators and users of those classifications and subject headings to determine design principles and usability (3) undertake a collaborative project with an Aboriginal community that intends to describe Aboriginal collections from an Aboriginal perspective (4) reflect on the principles that informed the collaborative research (5) present a case study of the use of the classifications and subject headings that is a proof of concept.

The purpose of the research is to explore theoretical tools to aid in the development of classifications of Indigenous collections, and contribute to methodologies for Indigenous knowledge organization. It intends to improve access to information that is germane to Indigenous interests and to facilitate Indigenous research and knowledge production in academic environments. Improved access may serve to foster the success and participation of Indigenous students within educational institutions. The research is congruent with The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) policy goal of the affirmation of Aboriginal knowledges (Castellano, 2000). From an international perspective, it is part of the larger project of repatriation of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property held in public institutions. Finally, it aims to make space for Indigenous research and scholarship within the academy to benefit Aboriginal students and thereby also contribute to a more relevant and diverse academic community.

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<sup>1</sup> Larry Grant, Musqueam Elder. Musqueam Language class. Musqueam Elders' Centre, Musqueam Nation, British Columbia, Term 1. 2000. Ulq̓sən means nose or point in the hən'q'əmin'əm' language, one of three dialects of Halkomelem, which like many Indigenous languages in Canada is endangered. Point Grey is the English place name for Ulq̓sən.

<sup>2</sup> For definitional purposes, this paper uses the terminology of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996): *Aboriginal people* refer to the indigenous inhabitants of Canada when referring to Inuit, First Nations and Métis without regard to separate origins and identities. The term *Native* is used as a synonym when it is used in cited materials. The term *First Nations* replaces *Indian* except when the latter is used in a source document. *Aboriginal peoples* refers to organic political and cultural entities arising historically from the original peoples of North America. *Indigenous* and *Indigenous peoples* refers to organic political and cultural entities arising as the original peoples of the world. Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Minister of Supply and Services, 1966): xv

<sup>3</sup> Manitoba Indian Brotherhood *The Shocking Truth About Indians in Textbooks* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, 1974). The categories of bias examined in this analysis include those produced by (1) omission, (2) defamation, (3) disparagement, (4) cumulative implication, (5) lack of validity, (6) inertia, (7) obliteration, (8) disembodiment, (9) lack of concreteness, (10) lack of comprehensiveness.