

**TITLE: Getting from Here to There: Achieving Indigenizing Description through Transformative Ally-ship**

**Witnessing and Closing Keynote, at the Sorting Libraries Out symposium, Simon Fraser University, Harbour Centre, Vancouver, B.C., March 13, 2019. Presented by Deborah Lee, University of Saskatchewan.**

I just want to start with acknowledgements, especially to honor the traditional Coast Salish peoples of this unceded land, especially that of the Musqueam, Squamish and the Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. I recognize that I am a guest on this territory and I honor the traditional knowledges that you have created, organized and preserved throughout the generations. Aho! I lift my hands to you.

I also want to say a big thank you to the organizing committee for inviting me to deliver this last piece, to be a witness to what was shared over the last two days - such a big responsibility – and to provide some concluding thoughts.

In terms of a personal introduction, my family comes from the Lac Ste. Anne, Onoway and St. Albert communities in Treaty 6 Territory, all of which are located near *amiskwaciwaskahikan*, also known as Edmonton. The *nehiyaw*, Métis and Haudenosaunee peoples shared this land in the 1800s and some of their descendants still do. The Sturgeon River links all three of these communities and was important not only for the fur trade but also for farming in the area. This river ran through my *kohkum's* and *moshom's* farm, not far from the community of Onoway, just after the first world war, so it has special significance for me.

I often feel the presence and influence of my ancestors, especially at gatherings such as this and when I am called upon to be a strong *nehiyaw* woman. I'm so proud to have come from such hard-working and fun-loving people. Both my *kohkum* and my father were musicians and we enjoyed listening to usually spontaneous displays of their musical talents, which were heart-filled expressions of their love for life. So, my people are Prairie people – and I'm proud of that too.

**Tribute to Gene Joseph:**

It is my honor to be called in to try to fill Gene Joseph's shoes in this role of witnessing and closing this interesting gathering. I was very fortunate to have interviewed Gene during a sabbatical four years ago. Not having had a lot of interaction with Gene prior to the interview, I learned first-hand why she is the legend that she is. She is small in stature but she is feisty and mighty in her spirit and words. While our interview took place over a two-hour stretch, I will only touch on three points that I wish to summarize for the purposes of this talk: her librarianship journey; her high regard for Indigenous Knowledge organization sovereignty; and the challenges she put forward to non-Indigenous library folks, mostly at the BCLA conferences in the 80s and 90s.

Regarding her unusual librarianship journey, we have already heard that she was the first First Nations person in B.C. to obtain her MLIS but it is worth repeating. This was in

1982 – that’s more than 35 years ago. But she had worked in libraries for almost a decade before that. Her first experience working in libraries was doing some copy cataloging for the B.C. Native Indian Education Resource Centre at UBC in the early 70s. Then, as a student, she worked at the Langara College Resource Centre for their Native Studies Dept., a library which no longer exists. She then worked at the UBCIC library and archives (where she learned about the Brian Deer Classification System, and I will say more about this later). Once she completed her MLIS, she began doing consulting work with many First Nation communities in B.C., such as for the Secwepemc (pronounce as Secwepmec), the Dene-Metis, the Heiltsuk Cultural Centre, and the Native Brotherhood of B.C. – often she was hired to organize their collections and she implemented the Brian Deer system for this work. Later, she was recruited by Dr. Verna Kirkness to set up the NITEP or Native Indian Teacher Education Program library at UBC, and then the First Nations House of Learning library at UBC, the forerunner for the Xwi7Xwa Library, and eventually, she became the head of the Xwi7Xwa library. She then moved on to become heavily involved with researching oral histories and other documents for legal title cases for various First Nations, such as the Delgamuukw Gisdawya Court Case, which was for her own people, and otherwise known as the Gitksan Wet’suwet’en Court Case, and later the Haida title case. It was her pride and joy to apply her librarianship expertise to help First Nations people.

Of most relevance to this gathering, Gene’s high regard for Indigenous Knowledge organization sovereignty began with her introduction to the Brian Deer Classification System and how she learned about it from a non-Indigenous librarian, Francis (or who was also known as Keltie) McCall, who worked at the National Indian Brotherhood but later transferred to the UBCIC when George Manuel came back to B.C. from the National Indian Brotherhood in Ottawa. Gene said that Keltie rightly brought the Brian Deer system to UBCIC and adapted it to B.C. First Nations. She was quite impressed with the Brian Deer system because, in her own words: “it uses language that First Nations use”. About this time, the First Nations in B.C. were reclaiming their traditional nation names, and in her own nation, the Wet’suwet’en changed their name from the name given to them by the colonizers, which was the Carrier people. So as the First Nations in B.C. have gone back to using their traditional names, Gene stated that “we changed and adapted the Brian Deer system accordingly, so it’s easy for us to do. We don’t have to write off to the central repository in Ottawa, or the Washington Library of Congress to ask permission to change something. We’ll do it if we darn well need to do it!”

Now to get a better sense of Gene’s feisty spirit, I want to highlight how she approached the challenges she was facing as the only First Nations librarian in the province. She would attend as many BCLA conferences as she could and once, in the 1990s when she was at the conference in the Okanagan, she addressed the crowd and said:

“Look around. I look at all of you, and I see a homogenous group.” I said, “How many colored people do you see here? Me.

“There were very few. I was the only First Nations person there. And I think they all sort of looked at themselves and cringed.

“They didn’t say anything to me but I think it’s something that people thought about.”

Gene then stated that, shortly thereafter, people at the UBC iSchool made plans to start the First Nations Curriculum Concentration program there. While it has experienced growing pains, overall, several excellent Indigenous librarians have graduated from the program, including Kim Lawson, Camille Callison, our host, Jenna Walsh, Jessie Loyer, and Patricia Geddes, to name a few. So, the successful Indigenous alumni from this program are a testament to Gene’s strong influence in the area of Indigenous librarianship. This success serves as impetus for us to follow her lead in improving subject heading access, that of adding Indigenous nation’s names that reflect the traditional names that they use as new subject headings.

Engaging in this type of a project, that is to respond to Gene’s challenge to is particularly salient during 2019, the UN’s International Year of Indigenous Languages.

As per the UN’s statement on its IYIL 2019 website:

“Languages play a crucial role in the daily lives of people, not only as a tool for communication, education, social integration and development, but also as a repository for each person’s unique identity, cultural history, traditions and memory.”

This latter role sounds a lot like the role of libraries and other collections’ institutions. We know how important the development and preservation of our own identities are for our own well-being. And libraries are well known for preserving history, traditions and cultural memory that take shape in the form of books, musical and film recordings, etc. But what if we all made a concerted effort to preserve Indigenous language materials this year and represent them with subject headings that the Indigenous peoples use. Think about what that could look like.

### **The Witnessing Keynote Section:**

So, on to the section on Witnessing: I could just direct you to this gathering’s hashtag – and I think you folks on Twitter have done an excellent job of witnessing – but I don’t think that’s what the organizers wanted when they asked for a Witnessing and Closing Keynote!

Overall, I have seen considerable evidence of a willingness to listen, to learn and to change, which is really encouraging.

But, I will spend a bit of time sharing some of my thoughts in a more itemized way on what I have seen over the last couple of days.

## Tuesday, March 12, 2019 – Day 1

### Opening Keynote with Dr. Deanna Reder and Treena Chambers: The People and the Text

Dr. Reder started the conversation off by contextualizing how this gathering got its name, based on the book, “Sorting Things Out” by Bowker & Star, after apartheid in South Africa, and the categorization of people that occurred during that time. Then, both scholars provided an insightful talk about the People and the Text, a digital humanities initiative that honors Indigenous writers who were publishing in this country prior to 1992. Dr. Reder has encountered colonial categories often as an Indigenous Literatures professor, including through the Indian Act and its discrimination of Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men. Both presenters focused on how to decolonize categories on the People and the Text database, noting that various categories have been challenged by community members. Deanna and Treena learned that they don’t want to replicate the problematic issues of applying colonial labels, such as those used by the Library of Congress. They challenge inappropriate terminology by adding a **[sic]** in the subject heading.

Later we heard from Camille about some of the history of the decolonizing classification and indigenizing description movement in Canada, some of which occurred through the CFLA Indigenous Matters Committee, but also through the University of Alberta Libraries, who organized the first Making Meaning Symposium that took place in early 2018, and followed by the “In Our Own Words” gathering at Ryerson a few months later. We have seen the recent commitment made by many people to allocate time, energy and resources to advance the important work of decolonizing and Indigenizing description.

We were also reminded through Gene Joseph’s powerful Statement, that we need to focus on the names that Indigenous peoples use for themselves as subject headings: “Let our people be known by their own names!”

We were then treated to a tribute to the late Brian Deer from Kahnawake and for whom this library group is so indebted, such a humble man about his noteworthy accomplishments in developing the first Indigenous library classification scheme in Canada. Thank you, Elizabeth.

Next, the Indigenous Scholars’ panel demonstrated how scholars have their own colonial categories that are problematic, such as with how rights and title claims get categorized based on the strength of community claims. Dr. Menzies indicated how his anthropological research is driven by how their rights and title claims are categorized. We also learned how changing the vantage point or position from which we do our work matters; not just staying in our offices but getting out into the field and working with community enriches our work outcomes. It’s important to shift the categories that we carry into the places where we do our work. Finding the abalone in a ceremonial house

was new and interesting – but we have to get beyond “the shocking and unusual”. When his team went back to the site a year later, they saw different things. There was a sense of returning, which is common to all learning processes. We were also enriched through hearing about the ethnobotany research of Leigh Joseph, and the discomfort Indigenous people can feel when non-Indigenous people interpret the healing power of harvesting food from the land as a process of knowledge extraction.

Then, we experienced a new vantage point during the community members’ panel, such as, for example, how the repositories in communities are the people. The under-resourcing experienced by community members during environmental assessments that Bruce Muir talked about is eye-opening; communities don’t have the capacity to organize the vast amounts of material that is coming in. They also encounter considerable sensitivity issues, where racist and/or offensive messages are openly displayed and continue to this day. In addition, Marvin Williams, from Lake Babine Nation, provided insight into the day-to-day life of a hereditary chief, learning about maps and how to draw his own for traditional use studies and other purposes, and how mining industries have left waters full of mercury levels that have caused cancers which have been devastating to the health of the people. Marvin also spoke to his role in researching archives, which are of extreme value to Indigenous peoples. We heard that archives can enhance oral histories and vice versa. Also, Elizabeth Kawenaa Montour shared that repatriating archival documents from LAC has been a very positive move for Indigenous peoples through the Indigenous documentary heritage initiative, where treaties, photos and other archival documents are being digitized. It is important for us as librarians and archivists to keep in mind that, often, visiting archives is an emotional experience for Indigenous people.

## **Wednesday, March 13 - Day 2**

Dr. Sandy Littletree’s keynote provided some thought-provoking insights into Indigenous systems of knowledge and their intersections with LIS – knowing about relational accountability (just one aspect of IK systems) can help inform our library practices when dealing with Indigenous peoples, knowledges and materials. We heard about how Indigenous information protocols, such as that some information is not to be shared, can be counter to LIS values and has faced a lot of resistance from libraries in the recent past. How can we go beyond the rigid thinking that classifies these incongruencies as impossible to resolve? Maybe through another vantage point that makes us more open to respecting Indigenous Knowledge systems?

### Metadata solutions panel

Many thanks to Melissa Adams for both providing some history on the UBCIC and its resource centre and showing us some elements of the Brian Deer classification in action. For those of us who are not familiar, you have reduced some of the mystique around it! And perhaps more importantly, for showing us that we have to just dive in to

do the work, no matter how scared we might be of what we might find once we roll up our sleeves!

Sue Andrews: provided a very helpful and detailed account of the cataloguing enhancements being done at UBC to improve the findability of Indigenous content in the various collections. It was particularly interesting to hear about the idea of directing users to the Xwi7Xwa collection via the catalog. As well, Rachel Rogers provided a public library perspective about subject heading reform, including by removing offensive subject headings and terminology and replacing them with preferred terminology.

### **The Closing Keynote Section**

I also want to take a few moments to add some commentary on my own experience of decolonizing and Indigenizing description. There are two components to this experience. One was the work I did with the Indigenous Studies Portal team at the University of Saskatchewan and how we developed our own vocabulary / thesaurus for this decolonizing initiative and research tool which began in the early 2000s. Harkening back to Gene's legacy, we also very much enjoyed the Indigenous Knowledge organization sovereignty that was available to us in growing the iPortal and its thesaurus because we did not have to answer to LC subject headings. I also did a survey of preferred terminology by Indigenous librarians, archivists and faculty that was published in the Partnership Journal in 2011.

The second component was the work that our research team at the U of S did on the Ithaka S+R qualitative research study interviewing Indigenous faculty at the University of Saskatchewan. For those of you who are unfamiliar with Ithaka S+R, it is a non-profit research organization based in New York City and which looks into various trends in academia, including in academic libraries. This particular study was part of a larger project involving 11 research sites across Turtle Island and sought to determine how to improve library services and resources for Indigenous Studies scholars. The capstone report for all 11 research sites will be released in about one month's time at ACRL in April of this year. While there were many issues that surfaced through this qualitative research project, I will only speak to what we learned about the discoverability and access issues shared by Indigenous faculty at the U of S. For instance, most Indigenous faculty interviewed indicated that they don't use subject headings. This was somewhat apparent at the Making Meaning Symposium at the University of Alberta as well. At the U of S, faculty mostly hear about new publications through bookstores, Amazon and/or social media (especially Indigenous Twitter). Then they search the catalog using title and author to see if we have it. As well, some faculty mentioned problematic subject headings and one scholar wanted further differentiation within the Cree nations (or peoples) subject heading, such as classifying items separately for differing types of Cree nations, i.e. Plains Cree as different from Woodlands Cree

because geography makes a difference in their traditional knowledges and ways of making a living.

I also had the opportunity to present the U of S findings at the International Indigenous Librarians Forum (or IILF) in Auckland, Aotearoa, this past February. IILF has special significance to me because it has convinced me long ago that I belong in librarianship. There was a time when I didn't know if I did. IILF was where I could be comfortable in expressing my views about Indigenous librarianship (where there was very little conversation happening about it in Canada at the time), and it has been a place of support for me since 2003, no matter where it was held, over five different countries on a bi-annual basis over the years. Delegates who attend know what it means to be a part of the IILF family. I learned that some countries were much farther ahead on decolonizing classification and Indigenizing description than what we were. For instance, in Australia, they have been working on this through the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the National Library of Australia since the mid-90s (see publications by Alana Garwood, Heather Moorcroft, Fiona Blackburn and Alex Byrne), including the publishing of *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Thesaurus* in 1997. More on the Indigenizing descriptions appear in a later publication on ATSI LERN Protocols.

In addition, the Maori Subject Headings project was published in 2005 and was sponsored by the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa, Te Ropu Whakahau (the Maori library workers group), and the National Library of New Zealand. Here is an image of bibliographic information about a Maori title owned by Auckland City Libraries.

You can see that the subject headings in the Maori language are add-ons to the Dewey subject headings. The many Maori library members of Te Ropu Whakahau who worked over many years to make this practical change a reality wanted to see subject headings in place that Maori would use and search by.

More recently, while I was at IILF 2019, I was able to attend the Hawaiian panel on their experience of working on the Ithaka S+R qualitative research project. One faculty member interviewed stated that they had gone to library school and completed the MLIS but had no intention of becoming a librarian. They took the program so that they could become a better researcher and then went on to do their Ph.D. in Hawai'ian Studies. I think that many of us here would be surprised to hear someone take this journey, perhaps partially due to the vocational awe that they have for librarianship. Vocational awe has been discussed in a recent article by Fobazi Ettarh in the online and open access journal, "In the Library with the Lead Pipe". Fobazi states that vocational awe is something that can get in the way of providing equitable access services in libraries, even though we hold "equitable access" dear to our hearts as a core value of librarianship.

That it has taken this long for the Canadian library community to acknowledge and make some headway with the intricacies of subject heading reform for Indigenous peoples' access to relevant library and research materials is mind boggling to many

Indigenous librarians. We are, in a sense, like the Victoria Native Friendship Centre in their response to an invitation to assist with decolonizing description by the Greater Victoria Regional Library System quoted this morning: “What took you so long”? By coming together for these gatherings across the country over the last year, Indigenous library employees and our allies are making a huge commitment to right this prior wrong.

Further, I encourage libraries and other collections organizations to hire Indigenous librarians and other skilled Indigenous employees. And not just one. We are needed throughout these organizations because the responsibility and work needed to make access equitable for Indigenous peoples in libraries and archives is holistic and multi-faceted. Gene Joseph challenged B.C. libraries to increase the numbers of Indigenous librarians 25 or more years ago, and the SLAIS program has helped to make librarianship more appealing to our people; however, we don't see a lot of action on the hiring and retention front across the country. Library and Archives Canada, it would be great if you could bring back the Aboriginal Trainee program for Indigenous peoples. I am a graduate of this program. When I started working at the National Library of Canada in the spring of 2000, there were several of us, we had a cohort and we had capacity to improve library and archival services for our people. Almost all of us left the organization during those lean years for federal libraries, following the establishment of the Conservative minority government. And we need more academic libraries to create internship programs for Indigenous MLIS students – U of A's iSchool has done a good job of graduating Indigenous librarians in the last 3 years or so. And once they complete their programs, hire them, not just as one-year academic residents, but also as tenure-track librarians and archivists. We can do the job – we are capable. When you have capacity with Indigenous employees, you can get some remarkable equity work done. So, yes, we appreciate inclusion programs and policies, but more than that we want to be at the decision-making tables. When we are not, we wonder about your motives because the work we accomplish when we are not in roles with decision-making authority will most likely not be transformative nor long-lasting. This is both discouraging and perhaps not being accountable with public funding dollars. Having Indigenous employees at the decision-making tables can be one way to make the investment count for transformative change.

### **Conclusion:**

So, wouldn't it be fabulous if one piece of the puzzle, the one put forward as a challenge by Gene Joseph, that of Indigenous language subject headings, could be accomplished in libraries across Canada in the next 9+ months that we have left in 2019? What will it take to reach this goal? Do we have the supports needed? What can be done through LAC and Canadian Subject Headings? What can be done to influence OCLC to make these changes? Do COPPUL and other consortia have the collective clout needed to influence OCLC to make change? These are some questions I've had for a long time.

Perhaps it will take some convincing that implementing Indigenous language subject headings and investing in Indigenous librarianship as allies are worth the effort. Currently, Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures are the hot button items and

often the way forward for reconciliation efforts in libraries, including for non-Indigenous library employees. As one member of a Senior Leadership team at a university said to me a year or so ago, “Non-Indigenous people are hungry for Indigenous knowledge and culture.” But that can be a double-edged sword (and is reminiscent of Leigh Joseph’s talk where she warned us of the process of knowledge extraction that is sometimes undertaken by non-Indigenous people and the discomfort this causes Indigenous people), in that it can be another colonial strategy used to usurp Indigenous power. Many of you have spent some time out at Musqueam on Monday and I have heard that many good teachings were shared on the land there. I hope you have reflected on that experience, not as someone hungry for that knowledge, but as someone who respects it and understands that it comes from the Creator. What we don’t want to see is a hunger for the knowledge as another colonial, extractive and greed-based industry.

I think that our allies become transformative when they “get it”, that is, they act with humility and are willing to make a long-term commitment to the cause for improving complex life situations faced by Indigenous peoples, often on a daily basis. How many in the room have heard of the Indigenous Ally Toolkit? It was recently developed by the Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network. Their first step is to be critical of any motivations a non-Indigenous person might have about becoming an ally, i.e. one should ask themselves the following questions:

1. “Does my interest derive from the fact the issue is currently “buzzing”?”
2. Does my interest stem from the fact that the issue will meet quotas or increase chances of any funding?
3. Does my involvement hijack the message and insert my own opinions or values instead of respecting those of the Indigenous communities?
4. Am I doing this to feed my ego?”

The toolkit then offers the advice that: “To be an ally is to:

- Actively support the struggle.
- Stand up, even when you feel scared.
- Transfer the benefits of your privilege to those who have less.
- Acknowledge that the conversation is not about you.”

We are all aware that we are experiencing a time of great change – some consider this a time that is ripe for a paradigm shift. The Opening Keynote at the 2019 IILF in Auckland was delivered by Bernard Makoare, a Maori consultant who was a former administrator at Auckland City Libraries. One of his strong messages during his keynote was that the catalysts for paradigm shifts come from extreme intellectual revolutions. I’m thinking that Indigenous description can be deep intellectual work and might be considered just one facet of an intellectual revolution.

As Jeremy Dutcher, an Indigenous musician from the Tobique First Nation in New Brunswick, was quoted, upon receiving the Polaris Prize nearly a year ago, “Canada, you are in the midst of an Indigenous renaissance!” His award-winning album, “Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa”, is operatic, performed completely in the Wolastoqiyik language and is both beautiful and deeply moving. Who would have thought even two years ago that such an album would be recognized by mainstream society with a Polaris Prize?

And who would have thought a dystopian novel written by Métis author, Cherie Dimaline, from Ontario, about Indigenous peoples being hunted down for their bone marrow by non-Indigenous peoples would enjoy the recognition of being the best-selling book of the year in Canada in 2018?

And then there’s Billy Ray Belcourt, a First Nations Ph.D. student at the University of Alberta, who won the Griffin Poetry Prize in the spring of 2018 for his debut collection of poems.

The list goes on, including the influx of Indigenous faculty that have recently been hired or are being recruited for our campuses across the country. Unfortunately, this has not transferred to an influx of Indigenous librarians on our campuses.

So, yes, there is hard work before us, but we are in the good company of an Indigenous renaissance. A focus on a mutually respectful and reciprocal project between indigenous people and non-indigenous transformational allies that taps our creativity is exactly what we need to counter the negativity that we see in the world. I am a firm believer in the maxim that what we give our energy to is what we will manifest. In the words of the late Gord Downie, “Nobody’s interested in something you didn’t do”.<sup>i</sup> On the other hand, and as our Elder, greeted us this morning about us creating a dream, I wanted to expand on that. “A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality.” - Yoko Ono

I hope I did Gene some justice by way of this talk. *kinanaskomitinawaw / ekosi maka*, and thanks for listening.

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<sup>i</sup> The Tragically Hip (1992). “Wheat Kings”, on the *Fully, Completely* album.