

Catalogue System Analysis:

Brian Deer Classification Scheme

Myles Wirth

The Brian Deer Classification Scheme is a rethinking of library classification from an Indigenous perspective. Devised by Brian Deer in 1974 for use by the National Indian Brotherhood Library, it is “not discipline-based but designed for action.” (Doyle, 2015, p.122) It is deliberately limited in scope and not intended to be universal; it was originally designed to serve the specific information needs of a particular Indigenous community in a specific time and place. It has, however, since been adapted by other Indigenous communities and institutions, in each instance modified to address the information needs of those groups.

As such, the Brian Deer Classification System is not centrally administered. Every institution’s implementation of the scheme is unique; these schemes can also be understood as bespoke classification schemes derived from the Brian Deer Classification Scheme. (Weihs, 2019)

The scheme was adapted for British Columbian Indigenous groups in 1980 by Gene Joseph and Keltie McCall (Weihs, 2019), and has been further modified for use by institutions such as the Unions of British Columbia Indigenous Chiefs (UBCIC) Resource Centre. In a description of their version of the scheme, the UBCIC (2015) related that “the system could be easily adapted for other collections situated in any geographic area or political structure. This can be done by revising the B’s, C’s, and D’s to reflect the repository’s core subject area as positioned within its geo-political structure in relation to the rest of the world. The rest of the scheme can be revised as necessary and there are plenty of vacant letters to work with.” (p.1)

UBC’s own Xwi7xwa Library, opened in 1993, is another leading example of a Brian Deer Classification Scheme in practice. Its top-level categories are roughly summarized in the table opposite.

Subcategories are often divided by location (e.g. “Forestry - Quebec”) and additional granularity is given to topics of particular concern to Indigenous communities (e.g. “Residential Schools”

includes seven subcategories, including “Healing” and “Law, Court Cases, Redress”.)

A noted drawback of this system is its shortage of clear guidelines, which can lead to “inconsistencies not only between the catalogues of different libraries but also within a particular library’s catalogue.” (Weihs, 2019) While the system’s principle of localized classifications makes it more useful for the community in which the library is situated, it presents obstacles to integrating these schemas into larger networks of knowledge.

Xwi7xwa Library Scheme Classifications

- A-D** Resources broadly about particular Indigenous nations, tribes, and peoples, grouped geographically and expanding outward from BC;
- E-G** Topics of professional and practical interest, such as Education, Economic Development, Fishing, and Housing;
- H-P** Legal and political topics, including Law, Self-government, Treaties, Rights and Titles, and Natural Resource Management;
- S** Health, Psychology, and Family Life;
- T** Philosophy and Fine Arts;
- X** Indigenous languages;
- Y** Fiction, poetry, and other popular literature.
- I, L, O, Q, R, U, V, Z** Left vacant for future use.

(Xwi7xwa Library, 2018)

References

Doyle, A., Lawson, K., & Dupont, S. (2015). Indigenization of knowledge organization at the Xwi7xwa Library. *Journal Of Library & Information Studies*, 13_(2), 107-134. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0103204>

Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs Resource Centre (2015). *UBCIC Resource Centre Classification Plan*.
<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/ubcic/pages/1166/attachments/original/1507335846/UBCICClassification.pdf?1507335846>

Weihs, J. (2019). A Tribute to Brian Deer. *Technicalities* 39(3), 11-12.
<https://xwi7xwa-library-10nov2016.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2019/10/A-Tribute-to-Brian-Deer-by-Jean-Weihs-Technicalities.pdf>

Xwi7xwa Library. (2018) *Xwi7xwa Classification Scheme (based on the Brian Deer Classification Scheme)*. <https://xwi7xwa-library-10nov2016.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/06/2018-MODIFIED-DEER-Public-version.pdf>