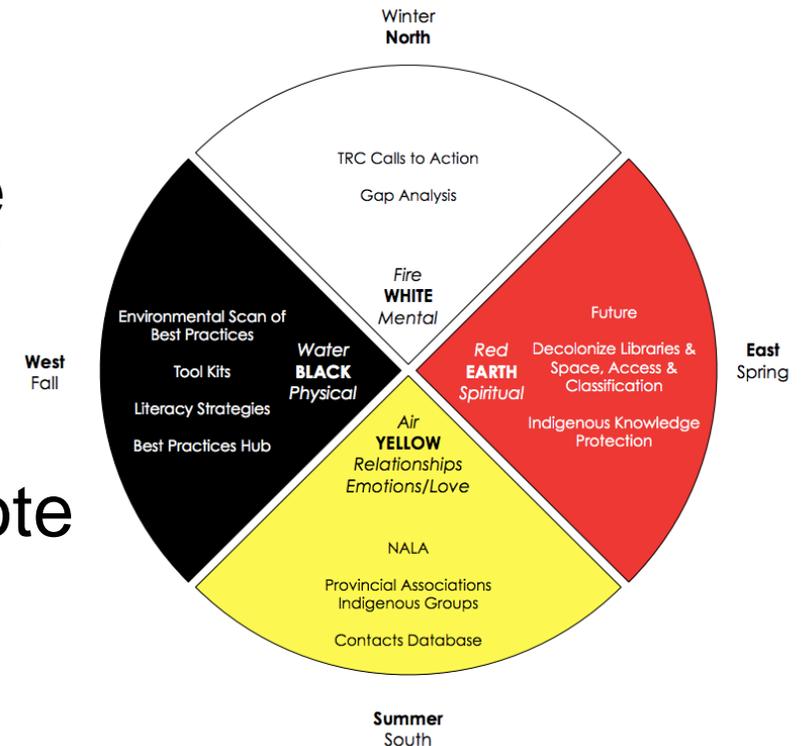# Decolonizing Academic Libraries

CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY AND TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Donna Langille, MISt Candidate, McGill University

CFLA Truth and Reconciliation Committee Mandate

"The Truth and Reconciliation Committee exists to promote initiatives in all types of libraries to advance reconciliation by supporting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action and to promote collaboration in these issues across the Canadian library communities."

Winter
North

TRC Calls to Action
Gap Analysis

Fire
WHITE
Mental

Environmental Scan of Best Practices

Tool Kits

Literacy Strategies

Best Practices Hub

Water
BLACK
Physical

West
Fall

Red
EARTH
Spiritual

Future

Decolonize Libraries & Space, Access & Classification

Indigenous Knowledge Protection

East
Spring

Air
YELLOW
Relationships
Emotions/Love

NALA

Provincial Associations
Indigenous Groups

Contacts Database

Summer
South

Academic librarians can work towards truth and reconciliation and support decolonization in academic libraries by committing to a critical IL instruction that applies an anti-racist and anti-colonial lens and deconstructs the power dynamics that position Indigenous knowledge and information as Other.

Outline

- Libraries as institutions of oppression

- What is critical information literacy (IL)?

- How can critical IL support decolonization?
- Challenges
- Allyship

Libraries as Institutions of Oppression

- Libraries as sites of assimilation and conversion

- Literacy (of texts) used to measure the success of assimilation and conversion to Western ideals (Edwards, 2005)

- Libraries as institutions function in similar ways to that of other systemic institutions, such as government and the criminal justice system, in that they have a role to play in creating and sustaining hegemonic values (de jesus, 2014).

Literacy continues to be the "international yardstick the colonizer and former colonizer [use] to determine progress"

(Maracle, 2017, p. 30).

Critical IL

- Moves beyond "one shot" library instruction

- Critical of power structures embedded in information

- Prioritizes the role of student

- Influenced by critical pedagogy theory

An important goal of critical pedagogy is that the student will cultivate a new "social awareness and a desire to work toward social justice (often referred to as 'critical consciousness')"

(Baer, 2018, p. 7).

Critical IL and Decolonization

A decolonizing praxis is one that "addresses cultural hegemony and, through reflection on ethics, dispossession, exploitation and injustice, recognizes the untenability of recuperating an authentic or pristine cultural space untouched by colonization"

(Hattam and Mathews, 2011, p. 15).

Privilege and Power in the Library

Critical IL can support decolonization by **providing a framework for identifying privilege and power within the library that specifically relates to white settler colonialism**.

Examples:
- Whiteness in LIS
- LOC Subject Headings

Questioning Authority

Critical IL can support decolonization in academic libraries by **encouraging students to question and challenge the concept of authority sources.**

Examples:
- Written or textual sources versus oral
- Citation politics

"That would be a great project for a Canadian group to engage in, elevating oratory to the position of the written word. Oratory and literature is all word art to me. However, that is not likely a Canadian idea that would come up. They all treasure writing over oratory. We are not equal in any way in Canada's mind"

(Maracle, 2017, p. 50).

Citation Politics

- Citations are political; used to measure impact and importance

- Citing more Indigenous scholars, POC (people of colour) and women helps to distribute power in the academy

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Critical IL in academic libraries can support decolonization by **acknowledging and incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing.**

Examples:
- Knowledge can also come from memories, oral histories, the land, and lived experiences (Ritskes, 2011).

Why Scientists Are Starting to Care About Cultures That Talk to Whales

Arctic people have been communicating with cetaceans for centuries. The rest of the world is finally listening in

Photo [as cited on the Smithsonian Magazine website]: "Tattooed Whale, 2016" by Tim Pitsiulak. Screen-print on Arches Cover Black. (Reproduced with the permission of Dorset Fine Arts)

"…decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes"

(Smith, p. 39).

Challenges

Discomfort

- Critical IL instruction that addresses white settler colonialism in the library will invite a multitude of reactions and emotions from students and users.

- For white settler librarians, teaching IL through a critical, decolonizing framework, is a way of enacting **allyship** in the library and embracing discomfort is a part of that process (Sentance, 2018).

Allyship

- **Allyship is a process, not an identity** (The Anti-Oppression Network).

  ◦ Make space and lift up the voices of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized communities

  ◦ Build and sustain relationships

"…if you are not pushing back against white supremacy, then you are sitting comfortably within it. Those are the only choices that we have."

Dr. Hannah McGregor

My Secret Feminist Agenda Podcast, Episode 1.6

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