

# Interrogating EDI: An exploration of white supremacy in libraries using a reflective learning approach

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# Background: UBC Okanagan Library EDI Committee

- Broad representation
- Develops anti-racism initiatives
- Smaller working groups to include more staff members engage on specific topics
  - Learning, Research and Engagement
  - Indigenous Strategic Planning
  - Recruitment, Retention and Success

## Dismantling White Supremacy working group

Our library's communications coordinator posed a fundamental question:



Why is EDI important to our library, and to academic libraries in general?

## Dismantling White Supremacy working group

- Need to better understand complicity of folks who are primarily white in enabling and supporting structures of white supremacy in the library and the academy (Brook, Ellenwood and Lazzaro, 2015)
- Intentional space to explore:
  - white supremacy
  - culture of whiteness

That enables the structures of colonialism, imperialism, and oppression within the academic library and university context.

## Dismantling white supremacy culture

- Counteract white supremacist culture of perfectionism, where “little time, energy, or money [is] put into reflecting as a group and identifying lessons learned that could improve practice” (Centre for Community Organizations, 2020)

# Dismantling white supremacy culture

Farkas, 2021

- Achievement culture in libraries focuses on producing “short-term wins, visible results, maximizing productivity, and collecting accolades.”
- Slow librarianship: “Critically evaluate the assumptions and power structures that undergird library services, structures, collections, information organization, and goals.”

So, what is our group?

# Components

- What we do NOT have: a lead, terms of reference, set length, predetermined outcomes or outputs
- Started with LIS literature
- Immerse ourselves in reading, thinking, reflecting, and discussing for that time
- Engage and collaborate with students



## Why ‘white supremacy’?

*Naming it, to begin confronting it:*

“Before you can do anything about whiteness, you have to go further than this. You have to identify whiteness and describe it in detail...” Espinal, 2001, p. 146

Moving out of the safe space of buzzwords, e.g. EDI, critical librarianship into interrogation of the roots of the situation

## Processes - Slow looking/Reflective practice

“...moving beyond first impressions toward more immersive, prolonged experiences that unfold slowly over time” (Tishman, 2017, p.5).

# Processes - Pomodoro technique

Time-management technique invented by Francesco Cirillo (named for timer shaped like a tomato)

- Four, 25-minute intervals with a break in between each, then a longer break
- Helps with motivation, reducing distractions, setting clear objectives
- Software programming, law, (COVID-19) working from home, teaching online

<https://francescocirillo.com/pages/pomodoro-technique>

## Processes - Adapted Pomodoro technique

Our rough adaptation (we didn't set out to do the exact technique)

- One-hour weekly Zoom meeting
- Usually 1 or 2 x 20-30 minute intervals of reading articles
- Round-table discussion summarizing and reflecting
- Creating space in our calendar to do this work, and not just talk about doing the work
- Google doc with notes

# Challenges

- It's hard to slow down, not work to finish something or act towards a specific actionable goal
- Library literature does not apply to everyone working in libraries
- No administrative representation
- Could read forever...

## Initial findings

- Starting with a group who buys in has advantages and disadvantages
- We all look forward to the meeting
- Getting a sense of how much we don't know
- Extending what we know into our practice (architecture for example)
- Characteristics of our discussions: values associated with libraries

## Value of this work

- Frank, frequent conversation
- Encourages us to slow down and think
- Provides us with a framing
- Incorporates student perspectives
- It is a starting place, that should have been started long ago

## Impact on daily practice

- Keeps it at the forefront of our minds when we do our daily work
  - Normalizes the language
  - Whose perspectives do we include and reference when we are making decisions
  - Allows us to see the interconnection of white supremacy and white supremacy culture in multiple aspects of our work
  - Who benefits from our work and who doesn't, why is that



Thank you to our other members!

- Jessica Lowry
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- Taya Jardine
- Atmaza Chattopadhyay
- Donna Langille

# References

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