

Library Curriculum as Epistemic Justice Decolonizing Library Instruction Programs

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Article abstract

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Library Curriculum as Epistemic Justice: Decolonizing Library Instruction Programs

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ABSTRACT

Information literacy scholars and leaders are calling for the decolonization of library instruction, knowing that our work helps to maintain colonial systems. While there is no checklist or road map to program decolonization, academic libraries and instruction teams must start the work anyway. This article shares the story of curriculum decolonization at Western Libraries, so far, including the decolonization ‘cycle’ we followed and our resulting six learning outcomes. Grounded in epistemic justice, our new curriculum prioritizes living beings over information, and uses a broad, inclusive definition of knowledge throughout. Librarians at Western University acknowledge that the first step in decolonization is making space for multiple ways of knowing and that white librarians have particular responsibilities within this work to decolonize their minds. While our curriculum is far from perfect, we invite other educators to use and adapt our learning outcomes, as well as the decolonization approach and reflection questions shared here.

Keywords: curriculum · decolonization · epistemic justice · information literacy · library instruction

RÉSUMÉ

Les chercheuses.eurs et les responsables en sciences de la maîtrise de l'information appellent à la décolonisation de l'enseignement en bibliothéconomie, sachant que notre travail contribue à maintenir les systèmes coloniaux. Bien qu'il n'existe pas de liste de contrôle ou de feuille de route pour la décolonisation des cursus, les bibliothèques universitaires et les équipes pédagogiques doivent tout de même commencer le travail. Cet article présente l'historique de la décolonisation des programmes d'études dans les bibliothèques de l'Université Western, y compris le « cycle » de décolonisation que nous avons suivi et les six résultats d'apprentissage qui en découlent. Ancré dans la justice épistémique, notre nouveau curriculum donne la priorité aux êtres vivant.e.s plutôt qu'à l'information et utilise une définition large et inclusive du savoir. Les bibliothécaires de l'Université

Western reconnaissent que la première étape de la décolonisation consiste à faire de la place à de multiples façons de savoir et que les bibliothécaires blanc.he.s ont des responsabilités particulières dans ce travail de décolonisation mentale. Bien que notre programme soit loin d'être parfait, nous invitons d'autres éducatrices.teurs à utiliser et à adapter nos résultats d'apprentissage, ainsi que l'approche de la décolonisation et les questions de réflexion partagées ici.

Mots-clés : curriculum · décolonisation · enseignement en bibliothèque · justice épistémique · maîtrise de l'information

INFORMATION literacy (IL) educators are increasingly calling for the decolonization of academic library curriculum (Lavery and Berish 2022; McCartney and Wilkinson 2021; Marsh 2021; Crilly and Everitt 2022). Building on the work of Indigenous scholars including Marie Battiste (2000, 2018), Sheila Cote-Meek (2020), Candace Brunette-Debassige (2022), and Cash Ahenakew (2016), librarians like Ashley Edwards, Jessie Loyer, and Sofia Leung make it clear that we are beyond the point of debating our profession's complicity in colonial systems of oppression (Edwards 2019; Loyer 2018; Leung 2022). While many individual library instructors and educators have incorporated critical and decolonized pedagogies into their teaching practices, we have yet to see widespread efforts to decolonize library instruction programs or the curriculum that we use. Part of this is because decolonization can be hard to envision or define (Battiste 2018; Allan et al. 2018; Lavery and Berish 2022). In this paper we will outline the steps Western Libraries' Teaching and Learning team took during early decolonization work, as an invitation to other library teams hoping to begin their own unlearning journeys.

As a preface to this discussion, and in consideration of the focus for this special issue, we first situate library instruction's place within the academy, a system created specifically to uphold colonial values and processes (Battiste 2002, 2018; Brunette-Debassige 2022). Readers unfamiliar with the university's colonial roots are encouraged to learn from Indigenous and Black scholars and activists local to them, since decolonization can be understood differently based on one's geopolitical context (Stein, Andreotti, Ahenakew and Hunt 2022, 200). Western University, where we work, is located on the Antler River (Deshkan Ziibi), the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton Nations. We frame our decolonization discussions in this article around our Reconciliation responsibilities as settlers on Turtle Island (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Heather is a white settler of Scottish and Irish descent, and as Curriculum Librarian for Western Libraries also works in Western's Centre for Teaching and Learning; Dan, a white settler of Slovak and Mennonite descent, is the E-Learning Librarian on Western Libraries' Teaching and Learning team.

Engaging in the initial decolonization steps outlined below helped us reconsider how and what academic librarians teach, and who we consider our learners. While we share six new learning outcomes below that are grounded in epistemic justice (Western Libraries 2022), we acknowledge that we are still at the beginning of our decolonization journey. Rather than presenting a ‘polished’ curriculum, the main purpose of this article is to outline the methods we are using as a group of mostly white settlers to ‘decolonize our minds,’ and to invite readers new to this work to do the same (Edwards 2022; Pardy and Pardy 2020). We drafted Western Libraries’ new curriculum in Summer 2022, and our Teaching and Learning team has already found it challenging to use our new learning outcomes with colleagues who have not yet engaged in unlearning work themselves. We do not claim to be decolonization experts, nor do we intend to frame decolonization as a checklist of tasks. We invite all readers to use, adapt, and revise our decolonization cycle and learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Connections to Epistemic Injustice

Scholars such as Beth Patin, Tami Oliphant, and Sofia Leung expand on the work of Marie Battiste (2000, 2018), Miranda Fricker (2007) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2011, 2018) to outline how librarians and archivists commit epistemic injustice and epistemicide through our collection, preservation, and teaching traditions (Patin, Sebastian et al. 2021a, 1312; Patin et al. 2020, 2; Leung 2022; see also Oliphant 2021; Blair and Wong 2017; Warner 2001). Such professional practices function as epistemic gatekeeping by privileging European knowledges and “suppress[ing] and eliminat[ing] the creation of rival, alternative knowledges” (Patin, Sebastian, et al. 2021a, 1310; Fricker 2007). Such injustices have long-lasting effects, as our library collections and instruction practices influence what knowledge is passed on to future generations (Inefuku 2021; Morales and Williams, 2021). Marie Battiste describes epistemic injustice as “cognitive imperialism,” where Indigenous and Black knowledges and cultures are stolen, silenced, or destroyed by universities, all while they present European epistemologies as superior or more civilized (Battiste 2018, 186). Leung connects this to the work of academic libraries when she says, “research is being used as a tool of imperialism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression... [and] the library is the chief officer of that system, meant to house and regulate research under the codes of colonial governance” (Leung 2022, 756).

Librarians have the responsibility to root out white supremacy and Eurocentrism from our teaching practice (Brown et al. 2018; Hudson 2017a). As Battiste explains, “the work of educators, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, is to heal the lasting

effects of cognitive imperialism and enable the human potential of all peoples” (Battiste 2018, 187). Sofia Leung (2022), Jorge López-McKnight (Leung and López-McKnight 2020), and Tami Oliphant (2021) are among the library and information science scholars calling for a paradigm shift in LIS curriculum and information (IL) practice, away from harmful colonial values that include neutrality and white supremacy (see also Morales and Williams 2021; Clarke 2021b; Burgess and Fowler 2022; Jiminez, Vannini, and Cox 2022). As Brown et al. explain:

“The fact that professional library culture refused to engage with racism in the past, and continues to do so, demonstrates how it has become an entrenched part of the culture to not discuss race. Without interrogating this idea of neutrality and whiteness further, we as a profession cannot move forward.” (2018, 165)

Any discussions about decolonizing library instruction or information literacy must be within this context: where white librarians acknowledge our “vocational awe” (Ettarh 2018) and commit to concrete, decolonial action (Gohr 2017). We tried to heed Marie Battiste’s advice when she said educators must, “understand the processes and methodologies of decolonization and how to blend together distinct and different knowledge systems” (2018, 186). In the next section, then, we outline what the term decolonization means within our university’s setting, as well as the curriculum decolonization methodologies found in the literature.

Definitions of Decolonization

Defining decolonization is an essential first step so that we (as white, settler-authors) do not perpetuate the very systems this work tries to undo (Tuck and Yang 2012; Moosavi 2020). Decolonization is described by Stein and Andreotti as concerning:

“(1) the continued colonization of Indigenous Peoples in settler colonial countries, as well as the ongoing legacies of Black enslavement, and violent policing of national borders; (2) the highly uneven accumulated social, economic, and epistemic effects of centuries of colonialism and slavery for populations throughout the globe; and (3) the continued colonial architectures of global governance.” (2016, 1)

Indigenous activists, scholars, and educators such as Pam Palmater, Marie Battiste, and Ashley Edwards urge Canadian settlers to centre their understanding of decolonization within the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action* (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; Palmater 2023; Battiste 2000, 2018; Edwards 2019). Librarians, information scientists, and archivists on Turtle Island have specific responsibilities toward Reconciliation and must ensure we stop contributing to Canada’s ongoing genocide against Indigenous Peoples (Edwards 2019, 2020). The *Igniting Change: Final Report* (Smith et al. 2021) discusses the

decolonization and Reconciliation responsibilities of universities more broadly, using the following definition of decolonization:

“Decolonization is a necessary and ongoing process of unlearning, uncovering, and transforming legacies of colonialism, as well as utilizing the educational and knowledge systems available to relearn and rebuild the social, cultural, and linguistic foundations that were lost or eroded through colonialism. Decolonization also requires making space, balancing, generating, and enabling diverse knowledge systems to thrive in the academy as well as in and through educational and knowledge transmitting places for Indigenous Peoples, the formerly colonized or continuing colonized nations, peoples and cultural knowledge systems” (Smith et al. 2021, 6).

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that the word decolonization relates only to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity (Tuck and Yang 2012, 2). They warn against conflating decolonization with every other form of social justice, such as when white scholars exclusively rely on critical theory to frame decolonization work (2012, 21). This is not to say that critical pedagogies are harmful—quite the opposite—but Tuck and Yang explain that using them in one’s teaching is not the same thing as decolonization:

“We are asking you to consider how the pursuit of critical consciousness, the pursuit of social justice through a critical enlightenment, can also be settler moves to innocence - diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege.” (2012, 21).

It might be easy, in other words, for white settlers to engage in self-reflexivity work, as bell hooks (1994) describes, or to incorporate feminist pedagogies into our teaching practices, and consider our decolonization work done (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013; Moodie 2017). It is here that we see the complicated nature of decolonization, and why we must consider its definition within our local context. As Bhambra (2021) explains, colonization was grounded in racism and therefore has important connections with critical theory and anti-racist work. Yet as scholars like Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2008), Sandy Grande (2010) or Eve Tuck and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández (2013) argue, critical race theory does not focus on Indigenous self-determination or land-rights (Moodie 2017; Bhambra 2021). Rather than pitting one approach against the other, Western’s Indigenous curriculum and pedagogy advisor encouraged us to consider where and why we need both anti-racist and Indigenous decolonization approaches (Sara Mai Chitty, personal communication with Heather Campbell, April 14, 2023).

In writing this paper, we took time to consider whether our team’s work should be described as decolonization, or if academic librarians, a predominantly white profession, can decolonize our work at all (Statistics Canada 2016; Lavalée 2020).

For help with answering these questions, and to further our understanding of decolonization, Aisha Haque, Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning, encouraged us to explore the works of the Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures Collective, which includes scholars like Sharon Stein, Vanessa Andreotti, and Cash Ahenakew (“Publications” 2023). Stein and Andreotti say that while decolonizing the academy may be complex and paradoxical, it is not mutually exclusive from working toward Indigenous sovereignty (2016, 2). This is because Tuck and Yang’s paper describes high-intensity decolonization, or work pertaining to “those urgent struggles to defend one’s land, lives, and livelihoods from active threat” (Stein, Andreotti, Ahenakew, Susa, Valley, Amsler et al. 2022, 143). Low-intensity decolonization, meanwhile, “ensure[s] more access to resources, representation, and security within the modern/colonial system,” (Stein, Andreotti, Ahenakew, Susa, Valley, Amsler et al. 2022, 143) of which decolonizing curriculum, or information literacy, could be considered. Both types of decolonization, Stein and Andreotti argue, are essential because of how universities “continue to reproduce an epistemological hierarchy, wherein Western knowledges are presumed to be universally relevant and valuable... [and] curricula remain dominated by Western epistemologies” (2016, 2).

Given that libraries directly contribute to epistemicide and epistemic injustices, settler librarians have a responsibility to contribute to low-intensity decolonization work —so long as our collective efforts do not stop there. White-settler librarians, especially, must critically and honestly evaluate how white supremacy and colonialism show up in our thoughts, behaviours, work, and systems. As Brown et al. describe, “room for these discussions has to happen in a true environment for learning, in spaces ranging from LIS programs to conferences to daily work meetings” (2018, 179). Returning to the *Igniting Change* definition of decolonization, settler librarians must “unlearn, uncover and transform the legacies of colonialism” in library instruction work, because otherwise we will not be able to contribute to “rebuild[ing] the social, cultural, and linguistic foundations that were lost due to colonialism” as they describe (Smith et al. 2021, 6). To do this well, librarians must “make space... [for] diverse knowledge systems” (Smith et al. 2021 6) in our curriculum, pedagogies, processes, and policies. Decolonizing information literacy curriculum is important, and could be considered low-intensity decolonization work, but it is also only a first step.

Methods of Curriculum Decolonization in the Literature

We did not find many examples of decolonized library curriculum or library instruction programs that “balance, generate, and allow diverse knowledge systems to thrive” in the way the *Igniting Change: Final Report* define (Smith et al. 2021, 6). The “Liberate Our Library” initiative at Goldsmiths, University of London (“Learning,

Teaching, Assessment Strategy” 2017) is one example of program-wide decolonization (Clarke 2019; 2021a; 2021b), albeit not from a settler-colonial context. Indigenous librarians have long been demonstrating decolonized and Indigenized teaching approaches: Spencer Lilley and Te Paea Paringatai (2014) incorporate Māori principles into their Library and Information Science curriculum, while Jessie Loyer (2018) and Ashley Edwards (2019) advocate for reciprocal, relational, and kinship-based approaches to IL instruction. Overall, though, examples of curriculum decolonization in the literature describe the practices of individual instructors rather than the work of entire teams or programs. In their literature review, Shahjahan et al. (2022) found that teaching and learning decolonization work often falls into four different categories:

1. “[R]egularly critiquing and probing the positionality of knowledge in educational spaces”;
2. “[C]onstructing an inclusive curriculum beyond dominant knowledge systems”;
3. “[D]ecolonizing environments [that] foster relational teaching and learning”;
4. “[C]onnecting higher education institutions, community, and sociopolitical decolonization movements.” (2022, 86-7)

Of those relevant to curriculum, most of their reviewed articles were case studies focused on individual efforts, rather than program-wide or systems change.

Building on the work of Sharon Stein (2019) and Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), a study by Western colleague Candace Brunette-Debassige and others (2022) found that curriculum decolonization work in Canada tends to only be “minor reform,” or changes that do not fundamentally disrupt the university’s colonial foundations (Brunette-Debassige et al. 2022, 5). Updating one’s course learning outcomes, or engaging in anti-racism professional development, are examples of minor change because they could be lost when the person involved leaves the institution, and do not address the “deep, structural flaws in universities” (Brunette-Debassige et al. 2022, 3). The Anishinaabe principle of Seven Generation Thinking (Haley 2021) guided our group’s thinking here, as did Candace’s leadership, helping the Teaching and Learning team identify our desire to engage in major reform even at the start of our decolonization journey.

Major reform “disrupt[s] the epistemological foundations of universities” (Debassige et al. 2022, 3) and “redistribute[s] material resources, opportunities, and epistemic authority to the most marginalized” (Stein 2019, 674). Stein’s description of major reform provided many useful reflection questions for our team, such as: what do we consider knowledge, and why? Who is considered knowledgeable, or an authority? “This theory of change questions the construction of what is perceived as natural, normal, and common sense by asking: who decides, in whose name,

for whose benefit and to what end?” (Stein 2019, 675). While reforming our library instruction curriculum is only the beginning of our team’s decolonization work, it may be an example of major change because of its potential to touch every faculty member we interact with and every student they teach—so long as each library instructor incorporates the curriculum into practice. In this way, decolonization scholars tell us that curriculum reform is an important decolonization mechanism, as it states whose knowledge is valued by teams, departments, or universities, as well as individual educators (Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002; Cote-Meek and Moeke-Pickering 2020).

Acknowledging the complexity and paradoxes of decolonizing academia, we looked for methods or frameworks that our team could use to guide our curriculum decolonization work. Along with searching the literature, this included attending professional development initiatives, listening to Black and Indigenous decolonization experts on social media, consulting with campus experts, and conducting web searches. Their advice can be summarized in a few key themes, which we apply to Western Libraries’ context.

The first theme is that settlers must act as allies and accomplices to Indigenous Peoples (Edwards 2022; Seneca College 2022a; Stein et al. 2021). Part of this involves unpacking our positionalities and reflecting on our resulting power and privileges (Seneca College 2022a; Lavery and Berish 2022). Decolonization’s connections with critical theory and anti-racism work are evident here, again, with many scholars and activists encouraging white settlers to explore the concepts of white supremacy and white fragility, to identify where they manifest in our daily lives (Okun 2022; Edwards 2022; hooks 1994; Kendi 2019). The Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures Collective asks settlers to consider:

“Do you want to deepen your understanding of colonialism, learn about/from/with other knowledge systems, and/or acknowledge or right past wrongs? Or perhaps you are motivated by some of the “red flag” reasons for decolonization such as...

- making a benevolent gesture seeking redemption, forgiveness, or gratitude from Indigenous people...;
- enhancing your CV to become more employable;
- [or] meeting requirements to secure funding or employment stability.” (Stein et al. 2021, 32)

Teams of settlers engaging in decolonization together, like Western Libraries, will want to articulate their motivation for starting this work, what they envision decolonized programs to look like, what fears or barriers they may be experiencing as they begin (Seneca College 2022a; Stein et al. 2021).

Another, related theme is that of truth-seeking. As Sheila Cote-Meek describes, “the truth is in the difficult stories, the hardest ones to speak out loud... Importantly, these stories lay the basis for understanding why we have so much work to do” (Cote-Meek 2020, xiii). It is likely that participants in curriculum decolonization will have a range of prior knowledge about Canada’s true history and ongoing treatment of Indigenous Peoples, their institution’s colonial roots, or the meaning of intersecting terms like Indigenization, Reconciliation, decolonization, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (Brunette-Debassige 2022; Edwards 2022; Cote-Meek 2020). The decolonization frameworks we found described the importance of interrogating western epistemologies and research traditions, as nearly all university curricula, regardless of discipline and on a global scale, are grounded in European ways of knowing (Stein et al. 2021; Battiste 2018; Cote-Meek 2020; Curriculum Change Working Group 2018). Part of truth-seeking is accepting that decolonization does not ask settlers to vilify western ways of knowing, but rather come to understand the world from an Indigenous worldview through a multi-epistemological lens (Leibowitz 2017; Stein et al. 2021; Curriculum Change Working Group 2018; Ahenakew 2016). For our team, this included learning about the Haudenosaunee Two Row Wampum (Keeler 2014), Elder Albert Marshall’s description of Two-Eyed Seeing (Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall 2012; “Guiding Principles (Two Eyed Seeing)” n.d.), the Indigenous concept of braiding (Jimmy, Andreotti and Stein 2019; Snively and Williams 2016), and cognitive or epistemic justice (Leibowitz 2017; Sousa Santos 2011) as approaches that could support our decolonization work.

As Sharon Stein describes, the aim of decolonization is not to pick and choose which Indigenous knowledge fits into western epistemology but to collectively “encounter other ways of knowing and being on their own terms, and to be open to being changed by the encounter in unexpected ways” (Stein 2019, 677). This learning must, of course, be done “in a good way” (Seneca College 2022b) and in community with Indigenous Peoples, with many Indigenous authors and educators emphasizing the importance of using a six Rs approach (Brunette-Debassige 2022; Tsosie et al. 2022). Ojibway and Oneida cultural educator Liz Akiwenzie described decolonization to Heather as “leaving our shoes at the door” so that we may learn from one another, in reciprocity (personal communication, April 14, 2023).

We also took inspiration from the *Spiral of Inquiry Framework* (Timperley, Kaser, and Halbert 2014) for its student-centred approach to truth-seeking. As its authors describe, the framework “asks you to adopt a curiosity mindset to identify what is going on for learners... before deciding what to do about it” (Timperley, Kaser, and Halbert 2014, 6). This builds on the expertise of critical theorists and feminist pedagogues like bell hooks and Sara Ahmed, who emphasize the importance of not speaking for racialized students when engaging in truth-seeking (Ahmed 2012; hooks 1994, 2000). For our team, using a multi-epistemological lens means being open to

learning from and with our students, and approaching them as critical partners in Western University's decolonization work (Western University Anti-Racism Working Group 2020).

A third theme we found is that of threshold concepts or, within the context of decolonization, the idea that there are certain moments of unlearning that are distinct from one another, even while they are overlapping and fluid. Scholars including Ngūgī wa Thiong'o (1998), Linda and Brett Pardy (2020), and Ann Lopez (2021) say that the first step for settlers must be the decolonization of our minds, so that we learn to acknowledge and address our complicity in maintaining colonialism. This builds on the ideas of bell hooks (1994), who calls on educators to approach teaching from a place of self-actualization—so long as decolonization work continues to centre Indigenous futurity as its goal (Moodie 2017; Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013). Poka Laenui (2000) and the University of Capetown (Curriculum Change Working Group 2018), meanwhile, name distinct decolonization phases, each with unique lessons that settlers must learn before moving onto the next aspect of decolonization work. These frameworks, along with the work of the Gesturing Toward Decolonial Futures collective, describe how participants in decolonization work may run up against barriers or disruptions in each phase, which they must overcome so the work does not stall (Laenui 2000; Stein et al. 2021; Curriculum Change Working Group 2018; Battiste 2018). For our team, these barriers had connections to Tema Okun's (2022) description of white supremacy culture, as decolonizing academia is often described as too time-consuming, too uncomfortable, or too complex (Pardy and Pardy 2020).

Methodology: Western Libraries' Approach to Curriculum Decolonization

A team of fourteen Western University library staff participated in our curriculum decolonization work. This included the library's entire Teaching and Learning team along with volunteer representatives from our user services, archives and special collections, user experience, and scholarly communications units. We also involved students in most of the work: MLIS co-op student Hailey Zanth helped develop meeting agendas and aggregate shared reflections for most phases and led our group through an interrogation exercise; we also invited twelve student partners to the rebuilding phase, as we detail below.

Each phase was facilitated by Heather and consisted of three types of reflective work:

1. Prior to meeting, team members completed individual pre-work, such as reading, watching videos, or attending professional development. We then each responded to some of the reflection questions found in Appendix A.
2. The group then attended longer meetings or retreats (all online due to the pandemic), typically one per term, which focused on the same or additional questions from that phase of Appendix A. These meetings provided opportunities for small- and large-group discussion, group brainstorming, and shared writing exercises. We spent a lot of these meetings working together, but sometimes in reflective silence. The exception to this was the rebuilding phase where our group meeting used a more traditional curriculum retreat format.
3. Finally, standing meetings, held in-between large retreats, were used to provide updates, share resources, and reflect on our large-group experiences.

Since this work happened while our team navigated more than one COVID-19 lockdown, the five phases took us eighteen months to complete this first time. Western Libraries' new library learning outcomes were drafted in Summer 2022.

Grounding

As Stein et al. (2021) describe, grounding work is when teams discuss what 'decolonization' means in their context, where they commit to the work as a group, and identify any risks members may take by participating (Stein et al. 2021). The phase is where participants explore the colonial roots of their institution and critique academia's relationship with white supremacy (Brunette-Debassige 2022; Battiste 2018; Cote-Meek and Moeke-Pickering 2020). To ensure our approach aligned with the rest of our institution, our team attended professional development with Marie Battiste on the colonial history of Western University (see also Brunette Debassige 2022) and had training from Candace Brunette-Debassige (Western's Special Advisor to the Provost on Indigenous Initiatives at the time) and Aisha Haque on Indigenous and anti-racist approaches to decolonizing curriculum and pedagogy. We also discussed the final report from Western University's Anti-Racism Working Group (2020) and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (2015) as a group.

This stage is where our team considered the definitions of decolonization shared above and reflected on how this work is connected to, but also separate from, our team's shared Reconciliation, accessibility, and anti-racism responsibilities. We then spent time collecting professional development opportunities, readings, names of activists, and other resources that might help with our group's later decolonization phases, and had a full meeting dedicated to summarizing resources that had influenced our thinking. Stein et al. (2021) say that the grounding phase is where teams can name the support and resources required to sustain decolonization work

long term, and to overcome known or anticipated barriers (Stein et al. 2021; see also Laenui 2000). Balancing time with other responsibilities is commonly identified as a barrier, but Stein et al. encourage teams to also consider “how equipped are you to have difficult conversations without relationships falling apart? How do you usually respond to having your assumptions or innocence challenged in a workplace setting, or in general?” (2021, 32). It was at this initial stage that we addressed the iterative nature of decolonization work by letting go of project deadlines and accepting that 2021 was not going to be 'productive' in the neoliberal sense (Nicholson 2016, 2018; Seale 2013; Pagowsky and McElroy 2016). Luckily, we had the support of our team Head and our Associate University Librarian with these decisions.

Interrogation

This second decolonization phase asks teams to interrogate the origins of their field and to critique the impacts their discipline has on modern colonization and related systemic injustices (Curriculum Change Working Group 2018; Stein 2020; Battiste and Henderson 2009). For our team, this meant learning how to unpack western epistemology through answering questions like “Who created our discipline?” and “Whose voices are missing from our literature?” (See Appendix A for the full list of Interrogation questions; Stein et. al 2021; Cote-Meek 2020). Under the leadership of Hailey Zanth, our MLIS co-op student, we explored the implications that library science, like most academic disciplines, was created by and for white, English-speaking, cis-hetero settlers (Littletree, Belarde-Lewis, and Duarte 2020; Behrens 2017; Owusu-Ansah 2005). We questioned the hegemony of the American Library Association’s definition of information literacy (ACRL 2015; Hill et al. 2021; Burgess and Fowler 2022) and acknowledged our agency in choosing whether to use the Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy* (2015) as the foundation of our instruction program.

Interrogation is also where those new to unsettling work identify and unpack their positionalities, biases, and societal privileges (Mallon et al. 2023). We completed the Flower of Power exercise (‘Power Flower’ n.d.; Laverty and Berish 2022; Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002; Strmic-Pawl 2015) and reflected on the works of Sofia Leung (2022), Jen Brown (Brown et al. 2018), Fobazi Ettarh (2018), and Jessie Loyer (2018). It was during this phase that we explored Tema Okun’s description of white supremacist culture in connection to libraries’ contributions to epistemic injustice and epistemicide (Okun 2022; Patin et al. 2020). The University of Capetown framework tells us that the interrogation phase can lead to defensiveness and fear that traditions from the discipline will be lost, replaced, or demonized (Curriculum Change Working Group 2018). We exercised care during our discussions, recalling that the purpose

of decolonization is not to eliminate western ways of knowing but to recognize its limitations so that our IL program can start to use a multi-epistemological lens (Leibowitz 2017).

New Learning

The new learning phase is an important shift, as programs reframe their understanding of the discipline by learning from Indigenous and non-western perspectives (Timperley, Kaser, and Halbert 2014; Laenui 2000). As a team of settlers, this meant taking time to learn about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit epistemologies, and relating these to our understanding of anti-racist pedagogies and critical librarianship (Shahjahan et al. 2022). We spent time completing *Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers* (Allan et al. 2018), which describes knowledge as a shared resource—a gift from our educators, Elders, Creator, Ancestors, the Land, family, and friends—rather than something one can own or sell. Descriptions of holistic lifelong learning from the Canadian Council of Learning (2009) encouraged us to reflect on the place of postsecondary education within students' lives: universities are an important learning environment, but they are only one learning community to which students belong, and for a relatively short time (Canadian Council on Learning 2009, 12-13). In this phase, our team also considered how university classrooms and libraries are not always designed to incorporate the diverse and rich knowledges students bring to university campuses, particularly Indigenous learners (Battiste 2018).

When choosing how best to engage in new learning, we reflected on Stein et al.'s question, "how can you try to ensure that your [decolonization] strategies do not create additional burdens for Indigenous Peoples?" (2021, 32). We understood that building relationships with Indigenous communities is an essential element of decolonization for settler-teams like ours but were also keenly aware of the demands placed on Indigenous colleagues outside our team. Colleague Sara Mai Chitty (Western's Indigenous Curriculum and Pedagogy advisor), encouraged us to consider what is meant by the phrase 'nothing about us without us?' What role do Indigenous-created readings, videos, and podcasts play in our decolonization work, for example? And when must we sit in a room with members of local Indigenous communities? (personal communication with Heather Campbell, June 2021). Team members spent time participating in the myriad learning opportunities available through Western's Office of Indigenous Initiative or online, including the KAIROS Blanket exercise, Candace Brunette-Debassige's Indigenous Learning Modules (2022), and attending professional development with Mikayla Redden, a librarian of Anishinaabe and settler heritage.

We then reflected on how these learning opportunities impacted our understanding of information literacy, and of libraries' contributions to harmful and extractive knowledge practices, including the academic publishing system. This phase brought our group a sense of possibility, as we could start to envision a library curriculum that focuses on living beings, and a library instruction program designed to support those who create, care for, and share knowledge rather than “worshipping the written word” (Okun 2022; Oliphant 2021; Lavery and Berish 2022). We worked through Jessie Loyer's chapter on *Indigenous Information Literacy* (2018) as a group, which articulated our team's shared desire to build meaningful relationships with students and partners through our teaching.

The literature tells us that common sticking points for settlers in this phase can include fears of ‘getting it wrong’ and feelings of shame or guilt over past choices (Stein et al. 2021; Shuman, Knowles, and Goldenberg 2023). Team members needed to sit with these emotions for some time, as our reading shone a light on the mistakes we each make in our teaching. Exploring the principle of *Etuaptmumk*, or Two-Eyed Seeing, shared by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall (Hatcher et al. 2009; Bartlett, Marshall, and Marshall 2012), helped us see that we must still teach learners about the purpose and value of academic research, but that privileging journal articles as ‘best’ is simply dishonest and perpetuates epistemic injustice (Leung 2022).

Feelings of overwhelm returned in the new learning phase as we grappled with the scope of decolonizing academia. We could not separate discussions about scholarly publishing from those about faculty tenure and promotion criteria or university funding (Stein 2020). We recognized that our team will need to go through the decolonization cycle again and again, continuing our new learning about Indigenous ways of knowing and being. We saw that the focus of our teaching must shift too, as we will inevitably be asked to partner with faculty who have not yet started their own decolonization work—and, therefore, may be resistant to our new curriculum. Poka Laenui (2000) encourages participants in this phase to re-examine our personal relationships with our field, much like how Fobazi Ettarh (2018) asks librarians to critique our ‘vocational awe’: how does this new learning change our thinking about information literacy, about librarianship, and the choices we make every day? Where do we have power to affect change today? (Laenui 2000; See also Appendix A reflection questions for New Learning).

Commitment

In this next phase, teams move beyond critical reflection by making public commitments for the future (Curriculum Change Working Group 2018; Laenui 2000). For our team, commitment asked us to deconstruct our curriculum and to identify specific changes that we wish to see, such as the elements that needed to

be withdrawn or the perspectives that were missing (Curriculum Change Working Group 2018). In this phase we also started the more important process of considering the “full panorama of possibilities” (Laenui 2000, 155) including envisioning a multi-dimensional program. The goal was to name the essential knowledge that should be taught in the program, discard harmful practices, and picture how the program might deliver a multi-perspective curriculum (Curriculum Change Working Group 2018).

We spent the most time in this phase, as we learned to sit with the discomfort of not knowing what or how we should teach moving forward. The commitment phase is the main reason we chose to describe decolonization phases in this article: it felt essential to name out loud, as a group, the IL practices and traditions we must give up, and to leave space for the emotions that accompany such decisions (Behari-Leak et al. 2021). Given that the Teaching and Learning team does not speak on behalf of all Western Libraries staff, our senior leadership, or Western University as an institution, we needed to consider what impacts our commitment to a non-neutral library curriculum might have on our colleagues and their work.

This phase was an important threshold moment in our decolonization work. We agreed to a shared teaching philosophy for our entire team, centred on a relationship-based approach inspired by the work of Jessie Loyer (2018) and James Elmborg (2011), among others (Western Libraries 2023). We collectively rejected the false premise that libraries are neutral (Ettarh 2018; Gibson et al. 2017), agreeing that our new curriculum would be explicitly justice-oriented. We also committed to our students as whole people, who come to our campuses with sophisticated understandings of knowledge from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and lived experiences. Our new curriculum needed to consider their learning needs in every context and not focus solely on research in a university setting.

Rebuilding

We reached the final phase of this decolonization cycle when we wrote Western Libraries’ new, multidimensional curriculum in partnership with students (Western Libraries 2022; Timperley, Kaser, and Halbert 2014). To achieve this, our team solicited the help of six undergraduate and six graduate student partners from a broad spectrum of disciplines and programs. Students were recruited through their academic advisors, and Western Libraries’ senior leadership team provided funding to compensate them for their time. Students attended a 2.5-hour training session facilitated by Heather and a 3-hour curriculum retreat with the team. A smaller subgroup, led by the authors, then produced a draft set of learning outcomes, on which members of the Western community were invited to provide feedback. Our

student partners also joined us for a separate 2.5-hour feedback session where they reviewed our draft learning outcomes and provided ideas for the future of library instruction. We share some of their reflections in the discussion section, below.

We made three decisions during the rebuilding phase which influenced the curriculum's final format (Western Libraries 2022). The first was to include three different representations of the curriculum in our document:

1. A narrative, which we expand on below, to use when telling the story of our curriculum or when speaking about library education in-person;
2. A list of plain-language learning outcomes to use with students and our user services and other front-line staff;
3. A detailed curriculum, for use by library educators and faculty.

Our student partners helped us decide to create only one set of learning outcomes, rather than separate expectations for undergraduate and graduate students. As we expand upon in the Discussion section below, they felt that many of our learning outcomes are 'stretch goals' for everyone and that our library instruction efforts should be expanded to include faculty. While our new curriculum is currently aimed at students, future iterations may need to better target faculty learners. We also did not receive extensive input from Indigenous colleagues, either from Western or across the library profession. While we share our new learning outcomes in the next section, we recognize they will likely change as our team continues to decolonize our teaching and receives more feedback.

The most meaningful decision team members made in this phase was to centre our new curriculum around epistemic justice—which we called “knowledge justice,” as per Sofia Leung and Jorge López-McKnight, to help make the document more accessible for student audiences (Leung and López-McKnight 2021; Leung 2022; Nataraj and Siqueiros 2022). We no longer teach Western Libraries' previous *Information Literacy Learning Outcomes* (Western Libraries 2015) or reference the ACRL *Framework* (2015). We understand that knowledge has many forms and so determined that “in an academic context, the word ‘information’ implicitly privileges scholarly publications and the written word” (Western Libraries 2022). Our curriculum seeks to abandon this idealization of academic sources and uses the word “knowledge” in many places, along with the term “creator” instead of exclusively using “author.” We hope this shows that our learning outcomes can also apply to students' personal lives and social media experiences (Okun 2022; Leung 2022).

We also reject the binary that a learner either is or isn't knowledge 'literate' and accept that epistemic justice and decolonization are lifelong pursuits (Tewell 2020; Stein and Andreotti 2016). As one peer reviewer of this paper helpfully described, the idea that students are not information literate discounts the rich “information

dissemination and knowledge practices within communities that are illegible to the library” (personal communication with authors, July 2023). We have as much to learn from our students as they do from us—but it is our responsibility as educators to create an environment where students can safely share this knowledge. As a result, we have yet to land on a satisfactorily descriptive name for our new “Library Curriculum” and the work for which it calls.

Ultimately, decolonizing universities would mean doing away with prescriptive learning outcomes altogether and embracing individualized learning pathways for each student (Lavallee 2020). Our institution is not yet at this point as our faculty programs, like all Ontario universities, still rely on learning outcomes for quality assurance processes (“Ontario Universities Council on Quality Assurance” 2023). For now, we present our curriculum in the form of six broad learning outcomes. The following section lays these out in detail, with the caveat that we may still be passing along unchallenged elements of colonial epistemologies. Our work is ongoing.

Western Libraries’ Library Curriculum

1. Knowledge Justice

Learners respect others by considering the value and limitations of all forms of knowledge.

Knowledge justice is the heart of our curriculum and is where we ask learners to situate themselves within different knowledge systems, including academia (Andreotti, Ahenakew, Cooper 2011, 68). Our learning outcomes use an expansive definition of knowledge throughout, encouraging learners to “respectfully explore diverse forms of knowledge, accepting that knowledge can come in many forms (e.g., spiritual, scientific, Land-based, creative) that are assigned value differently according to context” (Western Libraries 2022, 4). Teaching students to consider the value and limitations of all forms of knowledge, including their own, influences how we teach each of our other five learning outcomes. Our knowledge justice outcome focuses on learners, acknowledging the uniqueness of their lived experiences outside of university. Whatever positionalities they hold, we want to honour who learners are and who they are becoming (Battiste and Henderson 2009; Antoine et al. 2018). One way is by supporting learners to recognize the value and scope of their own unique knowledge.

Our curriculum asks learners to make space for unfamiliar knowledge, encouraging them to push for understanding rather than making quick value judgements. We want settler students, especially, to “practise... relational [and critical] thinking by reflecting on how to integrate [First Nations, Métis, and Inuit]

epistemologies with their personal views and practices” (Western Libraries 2022, 4). This reflective work is often done individually, as each person must take the time to try to reconcile new-to-them knowledge with their past experiences (Laenui 2000; Stein et al. 2021; Antoine et al. 2018).

Championing social justice issues—whether in class, in social situations, or on social media—can expose marginalized speakers to criticism or abuse from those who hold racist and bigoted views (Ozmet 2018; Behari-Leak et al. 2021). When amplifying underrepresented voices, we advise learners to ensure their own personal safety when speaking out. Learners, though, will be encouraged to “use the knowledge, skills, and values from this curriculum to courageously and safely advocate for social and cognitive justices” (Western Libraries 2022, 4). Part of this is teaching students about their place of privilege as members of the university community: we have access, through library subscriptions, to a wealth of information that others do not (Lavery and Berish 2022). Students may also experience barriers to accessing knowledge. We will ask learners to “examine and critique information privilege, both generally and as members of a university community” (Western Libraries 2022, 4).

Critical Reflection

Every person has their own unique knowledge. Learners critique the scope of their knowledge and investigate who can help them grow.

Critical reflection is the jumping off point for our new curriculum and how learners will connect the concept of epistemic justice with who they are (Clarke 2021a, 2). We hope to teach learners that when they meet someone who is different from them, or when they hear something that doesn’t resonate with their current understanding, they can stop and pause to consider where others are coming from and how the world may have shaped their perspectives (Loyer 2018). Part of this work will be encouraging settlers to name and reflect upon their positionalities (Chong and Edwards 2021; Strmic-Pawl 2015). Future versions of the curriculum may also need to rearticulate this learning outcome from the Indigenous perspectives of relationality or wâhkôhtowin (Edwards 2019; Loyer 2018; Chong and Edwards 2021).

Teaching critical reflection could look like our Teaching and Learning team’s interrogation phase, described above, where we ask learners: what do you know and how did you come to know it? Who helped you along the way? (see Appendix A). We want to encourage learners to “use a holistic lens to reflect on what they know, evaluating their sources of knowledge for bias and whether they are exclusionary, contradictory, or incomplete” (Western Libraries 2022, 4; Nataraj and Siqueiros

2022). Critical reflection may be especially useful when our learners are faculty, as we explore in the Discussion section below. Having “assess[ed] how their knowledge is influenced by their positionalities,” learners may be better equipped to “explore gaps in their understanding” (Western Libraries 2022, 4), suggesting potential avenues for their future exploration and growth (Antoine et al. 2018; Ball and Lar-Son 2021). We may want to encourage learners to identify learning opportunities that might be worth investigating.

Epistemic justice encourages learners to fill their gaps in knowledge with unfamiliar epistemologies, so we want students to think about where different voices are allowed to speak, as marginalized communities are often absent from academia or mainstream media (Noble 2018; Howard and Knowlton 2018; Stevens, Hoffmann, and Florini 2021). Another element of critical reflection is thinking about who is likely to safeguard the knowledge that belongs to equity-denied groups, including Indigenous communities, and how that knowledge is communicated or protected (Antoine et al. 2018). With this outcome, learners will be taught to, “investigate whose perspectives can fill their knowledge gaps, where those voices are allowed to speak, and how they communicate” (Western Libraries 2022, 4).

3. Searching

Learners search for new and diverse knowledge in inclusive and ethical ways.

For many of our readers, 'searching' will be our curriculum's most familiar learning outcome but an epistemic justice lens asks us to search holistically (Loyer 2018). The learner, their positionalities, and their knowledge gaps are the focal point again here, meaning the critical reflection and searching outcomes work together. To begin searching, learners should “address knowledge gaps by articulating a question, search string, or specific need” (Western Libraries 2022, 5).

An epistemic justice lens also encourages us to acknowledge that search tools, media, and algorithms have inherent biases and limitations, of which learners may not even be aware (Noble 2018; Howard and Knowlton 2018; Stevens, Hoffmann, and Florini 2021). Search engines and artificial intelligence often amplify hegemonic biases, for example (Bjork 2023; van der Made 2023). We want to encourage learners to use an inclusive approach to searching, such as in how they choose search terms (Mallon et al. 2023; Brookbank and Haigh 2021). Since knowledge is not only contained in academic, peer-reviewed journal articles, we must encourage learners to go beyond the library to search the internet, social media, speak with experts and communities, or listen to Elders (Edwards 2020; Antoine et al. 2018). A role librarians can play is in encouraging faculty to accept these sources as evidence in their

students' assignments. As learners determine where to search, we need to teach them to "identify the biases of search tools in order to design inclusive search strategies that lead to sources that fill their knowledge gaps" (Western Libraries 2022, 5).

Using a justice lens also means that knowledge should not be viewed as a commodity that can be obtained through transactions; some knowledge is sacred, meaning keepers and creators of knowledge have the right to choose how and with whom their knowledge is shared (Antoine et al. 2018; Taylor and Kukutai 2016; Canadian Council on Learning 2009). Not only must learners observe and abide by copyright law, fair use, and licence agreements, they must consider local protocols or cultural norms when seeking traditional or sensitive knowledge (Local Contexts 2023). Knowledge keepers may require evidence that the requestor appropriately values the knowledge in question, has earned the privilege of receiving it, and will respectfully abide by the limitations placed upon its usage and further sharing (Taylor and Kukutai 2016). We hope to teach learners to "use an ethic of care when seeking knowledge from living beings, accepting that we do not always have the right to receive it" (Western Libraries 2022, 5; Owens and Ennis 2005; hooks 2000).

There is potential that the research process, or the knowledge uncovered, will result in intense emotions for learners (Mazari and Hobscheid 2022). For example, the words used to describe an individual or a people matter and cause harm when they're discriminatory, and students may encounter academic research that demonstrates epistemicide or other forms of violence (Stevens, Hoffmann, and Florini 2021; Loyer 2018). We need to ask how searching is affecting our learners: are students seeing themselves reflected in their studies, or in the media around them, or are their communities shut out? We want to teach learners to "acknowledge that searching can be emotional: the process can be overwhelming or inspiring, and the product can expose discrimination and violence" (Western Libraries 2022, 5).

4. Identifying and Evaluating Sources

Learners critically evaluate sources of knowledge before using them.

While the ACRL *Framework* tells us that "authority is constructed and contextual" (ACRL 2015), decolonization work helped our team see that equity-denied experts can be exploited, silenced, or not appropriately credited or compensated for their creations (Patin et al. 2020; Battiste 2000; Brown et al. 2018). Many information literacy strategies still apply with Western Libraries' new curriculum, but there is more to source evaluation than applying the CRAAP test ("CRAAP Test" 2023). Epistemic justice requires that we ask whose perspectives are missing from our available knowledge, and that we critique the information in front of us. Just as we

reflect on our own positionalities, we want to do the same for authors and creators: do they have the authority, for example, to speak for the identities they claim (Lewis 2023)? Does a particular creator have an agenda, and what do marginalized communities say about that creator? Through our curriculum, we want students to “determine the authority of a source by critically evaluating creator positionality and intended purpose(s) and audience(s) in consideration of students’ context and needs” (Western Libraries 2022, 5).

We recognize that creators’ positionalities and intent can determine how and whether they choose to share their knowledge in certain formats or locations. Scholarly sources, for example, are disproportionately written in English by white authors, meaning library educators should be open and transparent about the biases in academic peer review (Inefuku 2021). Similarly, many academic researchers are reluctant to cite social media or lived experience as evidence, but this can overlook the influence that real people have on our thinking and ideas (Sara Mai Chitty, personal communication with Heather Campbell, February, 2022). This means students need to “question the rules and customs governing source creation, including their effects on access, use, inclusivity, and the exploitation of others’ ideas” (Western Libraries 2022, 5). An epistemic justice approach to source evaluation encourages learners to use critical reflection to fight against confirmation bias: if they find that their knowledge sources all say the same thing, for example, is it because of their own worldviews, epistemicide, algorithmic bias, or truth?

We recognize that evaluation can be challenging in the information age. For example, it can sometimes be difficult to determine the authority and provenance of knowledge presented via social media. We are just barely beginning to understand the impacts of artificial intelligence on our work, as well (Cox 2023). Given the role of media in the spread of propaganda and disinformation (Pashia 2021; Pérez-Escolar, Lilleker, and Tapia-Frade 2023), we must teach learners to think critically, and check multiple knowledge sources, before endorsing or further disseminating others’ ideas (Caulfield 2019). When using information, they should “evaluate a source’s accuracy and contextual value by assessing how it might be used to misinform, lead, falsify, persuade, promote, or coerce” (Western Libraries 2022, 5). This requires that learners “differentiate between various source types by examining their characteristics and creation processes” (Western Libraries 2022, 5).

5. Responsible Use of Knowledge

Learners can make culturally respectful choices about their use of knowledge.

We can further epistemic justice when we choose to share ideas, whether someone else’s or our own. Not only do white settlers have a responsibility to elevate

marginalized and silenced voices, but a decolonized lens asks us to consider whether we have the right to share others' knowledge at all (Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002). At the same time, we want students to feel safe to experiment with new ideas while they are in our learning spaces. At Western Libraries, we want to encourage learners to “[critically] evaluate what impact using or sharing others' knowledge may have on diverse audiences, particularly marginalized groups” (Western Libraries 2022, 6). This could include teaching learners (including faculty) about citation justice within their reference lists, or to think carefully before hitting the ‘like’ or ‘share’ buttons on social media (Lacey 2023; University of Maryland Libraries 2022).

We also want learners to “explore legal, cultural, and ethical implications of using others' knowledge, including Copyright Law, Creative Commons Licensing, Traditional Knowledge and Biocultural Labels, privacy legislation, and intellectual property” (Western Libraries 2022, 6). Universities protect the intellectual property of researchers' knowledge through Copyright Law and academic integrity policies, but we must teach students that these are cultural choices and not universal to all communities (Edwards 2020; Brigg 2016). Libraries must also teach about protocols and permissions developed to protect marginalized peoples from harm or exploitation, and to appropriately compensate people for their labour (Local Contexts 2023). We hope our learners will “demonstrate respect for diverse forms of knowledge by using culturally appropriate forms of attribution, providing fair payment, and requesting all necessary permissions” (Western Libraries 2022, 6).

We want learners to continue using an ethic of care in how they choose to “ethically manage and store collected knowledge and data” (Western Libraries 2022, 6). Knowledge is a gift (Canadian Council on Learning 2009), and librarians are responsible for protecting any gifts we have been given, considering how we have contributed to the misuse, appropriation, and theft of Indigenous knowledges (Patin et al. 2020; Okun 2022; de Sousa Santos 2018; Inefuku 2021; Leung 2022; Jimenez, Vannini, and Cox 2022). While university ethics boards dictate how research data must be stored to protect participant anonymity, the library needs to teach learners to care for their own ideas as they are formulating them.

6. Creation and Dissemination of Knowledge

Learners will acknowledge their power to responsibly influence others when sharing ideas.

We want learners to recognize that they are knowledgeable and that their voices have power (hooks 1994). Each person has agency to share knowledge when, where, and how they choose. At the same time, we want learners to think about how their ideas may influence or benefit others. What should they consider before sharing or

supporting ideas, such as on social media? Is there any risk that their ideas might be misused by others in ways that run counter to their original intent? Conversely, by staying silent, do they risk that their unique perspectives will go unsaid, or that their community may suffer or be disadvantaged? We want to teach learners to “decide how, where, and when to disseminate their ideas, reflecting on whether their work can be used or misused by others, and their rights and responsibilities as creators” (Western Libraries 2022, 6). Students’ knowledge matters, and we encourage them to share their ideas in the ways that best suit their positionality and goals. The knowledge one shares or supports online may be taken, rightly or wrongly, as an indicator of one’s character. Potential employers may search for applicants’ names online to obtain additional information about them (Acquisti and Fong 2020). By thinking critically about online privacy and their own positionalities, learners can “create and maintain an online presence consistent with their values, identities, and goals” (Western Libraries 2022, 6).

An epistemic justice perspective also means librarians promote barrier-free access for a broad audience. When deciding how best to share their ideas, learners must consider accessibility, whether that means captioning and alternative text, or plain language translation for non-academic partners (Edgell and Rosenberg 2022). Our curriculum is non-neutral in its promotion of open access, as well. Given that Canadian universities are publicly funded, librarians have a responsibility to teach all sides of the scholarly communication cycle, whether that’s the value of academic research to knowledge production, or publishers’ profiting from free labour (Nous 2021; CALJ Board of Directors 2019). We want learners to “choose methods of dissemination that are accessible, equitable, and easy to maintain, choosing open whenever appropriate” (Western Libraries 2022, 6). We also recognize that learners may share their ideas in any number of contexts, such as in class, online, in academic assignments, in publications, or with family, friends and colleagues. In so doing, they learn different languages and communication norms, each with rules for how they must credit those who helped inform them. Regardless of where they speak with others, we want to help learners “contribute to contextual dialogue(s), giving proper attribution to others’ knowledge and recognizing scholarly sources as one type of evidence [among many]” (Western Libraries 2022, 6).

Curriculum Reception and Next Steps

The Teaching and Learning team spent the 2022-2023 academic year getting to know our new curriculum and thinking about how it will impact our teaching and relationships with partners. Early experimentations with it have been rewarding, but complex. We observe visible relief from students during consults, for example, when

we discuss the emotional impacts of research with them. But students may not always be free to use a knowledge justice lens when completing course assignments. As one of our undergraduate partners articulated, “if students learn about knowledge justice and then, perhaps, cite a non-traditional source in a paper, they may lose marks for not following the assignment instructions” (Anonymous, personal communication with Heather Campbell, April 2022). Using our curriculum in classroom instruction may take time and planning, as reactions from faculty colleagues have been mixed. Dan, for example, met to discuss his intended teaching approach with a faculty colleague after they expressed concern regarding his framing of libraries as colonial institutions. The instructor agreed in principle but was not prepared for such direct language in the classroom, not wanting their students to leave with a negative impression of our institution’s excellent library collections (Anonymous, personal communication with Dan Sich, September 2022). On the other hand, Heather is actively partnering with a faculty colleague from Nursing to redesign their courses around epistemic justice.

After launching Western Libraries’ new learning outcomes, we anticipated that many requests for library instruction would not align with them, leaving our team to decide how best to introduce the curriculum to faculty. Teaching about epistemic justice in STEM disciplines, for example, requires careful consideration given the oft-perceived neutrality and superiority of the western scientific method (Andreotti, Ahenakew and Cooper 2011). As much as we may desire to “re-envision the information literacy classroom as a site of radical possibility in which we celebrate the co-existence of multiple epistemologies” (Nataraj and Siqueiros 2022, 822), most of our faculty partners have not yet decolonized their thinking, let alone their curriculum or pedagogy. On Western University’s campus, many faculty are still accustomed to requesting one-shot library sessions—and we, the librarians, are used to delivering them (Pagowsky 2022). Ongoing budget cuts, staffing shortages, and the demands of returning to campus have so far prevented some library units on our campus from engaging in deep decolonization work, even though they want to. Decolonizing Western Libraries’ instruction program means eventually using the curriculum in our full spectrum of library instruction, from virtual chat and drop-in help, to embedded instruction and scholarly communication. But many library colleagues, much like our faculty partners, have limited capacity to take on more mental or emotional labour. The push to ‘return to normal’ after COVID-19 lockdowns ignores the collective trauma we experienced during the pandemic, creating more cognitive dissonance for decolonization work: we are different people from before 2020, meaning the ‘old’ ways of doing things no longer fit. But will EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization continue to be prioritized in university budgets and operational goals?

We have found that it is individuals' personal commitment to decolonization that most significantly predicts their reception of our new curriculum—regardless of the person's role, discipline, or level of authority. As others have found, colleagues already engaged with EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization are the greatest supporters of our work (Paton et al. 2020; Chong and Edwards 2021). After engaging in the decolonization exercises described above, we are better able to articulate why: the university is not a monolith but a large group of humans, each with their own individual agency (and some more than others). While Western Libraries' curriculum is neither perfect nor complete, our team only reached this stage of decolonization because each person involved saw a role they could play in the work. Critical scholars like Sara Ahmed (2012) advise that to truly change the university we must dismantle and unlearn colonial ways of being at every level of academia—individual, program, departmental, institutional, and systemic. Reflecting on our context, we felt supported at the institutional level through Western University's strategic plan (Western University 2021) and the creation of the Office of Indigenous Initiatives. Within Western Libraries, senior leadership funded our twelve student partners and enabled members of other library units to participate on our curriculum committee; the Head of the Teaching and Learning team also released our regular meeting times and shuffled other responsibilities so we could prioritize this work.

Knowing that our decolonization work will continue long-term, we implemented a few permanent changes to our team's workflow in the 2022-2023 academic year. We hold a one hour meeting each week, during which team members (or guests from other units) share curriculum successes, stumbles, and questions. We dedicate a full meeting per month to 'new learning,' with one team member choosing something for us to read, watch, listen to, or experience, and then lead a group discussion. Heather also started a teaching community of practice, where library staff from the Western University community are invited to discuss their instruction. In all three of these opportunities, we normalize trial-and-error, resource sharing, and community-based reflection. In Spring 2023, we also identified the desire to return to the larger decolonization retreats; we need to dig into the disconnect between our new curriculum and existing library instruction and information literacy traditions. What work do we say no to? What teaching should we prioritize? Going through the decolonization cycle again—this time focused on pedagogy, but also involving all Western Libraries' units—is one possible approach.

A major limitation of this work is that our curriculum was predominantly articulated by white settlers. We know it needs revision. We encourage readers to use and adapt Western Libraries' learning outcomes and have posted them to our website with a Creative Commons license (Western Libraries 2022). We also invite review by

Indigenous readers, especially those local to Western University, and by colleagues in academic librarianship and related fields. We feel ready share the learning outcomes here, though, because our initial decolonization work was so impactful —our team is a fundamentally different group of people than when we started. Decolonization work has changed us, our understanding of information literacy, and the future of library instruction at Western Libraries.

Discussion

In our current environment, with its many competing and sometimes opposing demands, what is the library's role in the decolonization of "higher education"? And where does library instruction fit within it, especially as white-settler librarians learn to acknowledge our contributions towards epistemic injustice (Patin et al. 2020; Patin, Sebastian, et al. 2021a)? Scholars like Jessie Loyer (2018), Tami Oliphant (2021), and Sofia Leung (2022) encourage us to decentre 'the library' when answering these questions, and use a relationship-based lens instead—to consider where we hold the most power to influence change. Our student partners provided an important suggestion in their final reflections: to be effective, Western Libraries' new curriculum must be for students *and* faculty—and that our top priority should be teaching faculty. One graduate student, for example, suggested that "creating some sort of librarian-faculty-student triad partnership would be more meaningful than simply librarians collaborating with faculty on updating curriculum/assignments alone" (Anonymous, personal communication with Heather Campbell, April 2022). In our limited experience teaching the new curriculum so far, this has proven true. Heather worked with a faculty member and two graduate student partners in Summer 2023 to revise first-year Nursing course assignments around epistemic justice, create teaching cases our team can use in instruction, draft a new evaluation tool to replace CRAAP and RADAR, and write a plain-language definition of epistemic justice for use with undergraduate students.

Critical pedagogues and librarians have long advocated for partnering with students (hooks 1994; Ahmed 2012) but expanding library instruction to specifically focus on faculty development will require a shift in thinking. What responsibilities do instruction librarians have when teaching our learners to explore and embrace multiple epistemologies, be they students submitting assignments, faculty conducting research, or librarians or archivists striving to collect and share knowledge? In the absence of widespread use of our curriculum, one of our undergraduate student partners said they "could envision a space where [students] want to ask hard questions about your field, your discipline, but you can't because [instructors] wouldn't want

it in the classroom” (Anonymous, personal communication with Heather Campbell, April 2022).

Faculty members have power to effect change in the classroom, but many settler-faculty will need help with starting major reform or program-level decolonization. In the same way that Western Libraries’ Teaching and Learning team needed to determine our individual and unique roles in decolonization work, so too must libraries consider our place in supporting major reform (Stein 2019). It may not be suitable for librarians, the majority of whom are white, to decide where we best fit, and we must follow the guidance of local Indigenous and Black communities and decolonization leaders. Given our familiarity with western research approaches, though, and our contributions to the epistemicide of Indigenous knowledges, librarians may be uniquely placed to teach faculty about epistemic justice and model the vulnerability this work requires. As Elizabeth Charles explains:

The aim is not to tell academics what should be included on their reading lists, but to make visible the lack of other voices, thus leaving the subject experts to review their curriculum with a new, critical perspective, to investigate and widen their scope on what else should be included (2019, 4).

Library instruction’s place, in order words, may be in helping faculty programs navigate the ‘interrogation’ phase of the decolonization cycle outlined above. White-settler librarians can do this only by engaging in the work ourselves—first acknowledging our field’s contributions to epistemic injustice, and then learning to recognize and dismantle our relationships with white supremacy and colonialism (Hudson 2017a; 2018b; Chiu et al. 2021; Gohr 2017). Decolonization experts are unlikely to fill the role of faculty ‘interrogation partner’ as they are already overburdened with leading EDI, decolonization, and Indigenization work for our entire institutions, and often belong to equity-deserving groups themselves (Chancellor 2019; Doharty, Madriaga, and Joseph-Salisbury 2021; Ahmed 2012; Leung 2022).

Conclusion

Librarians’ teaching efforts for the past thirty years have focused heavily on one thing—teaching students the western academic research cycle, to the exclusion of all other forms of knowledge (ACRL 2015; Patin et al. 2020). While we believe academic libraries must still teach academic research skills, our decolonization work enabled us to see our role as partners to students in helping faculty make room for multiple epistemologies. Academic librarians have power to help create safe environments for students to be able to share their whole selves—a power our students do not have in our current system. Many librarians have already been demonstrating this influence through their use of critical and anti-racist pedagogies in the classroom.

But library educators can also work as change-agents by engaging in major reform, or decolonization work at the program and institutional level (Stein 2019; Brunette-Debassige et al. 2022).

The way we envision doing this work at Western Libraries is via a faculty development model where we partner with other campus units engaged in educational development (ED), including our Centre for Teaching and Learning, and Offices of Quality Assurance, Indigenous Initiatives, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and Research. Understanding how major reform happens at our institution has helped our team learn to redefine who our ‘partners’ are in decolonization work. Reorienting our instruction program around epistemic justice, and prioritizing faculty development work, may require our library instructors to reconsider which relationships to foster, what opportunities to say ‘yes’ to, and where our efforts will have the greatest impact (Campbell 2023; brown 2017). How might we redefine a meeting with program chairs as ‘library instruction’? How might collaborating with other university libraries free up time for faculty development, such as through the creation of common library teaching resources? While each library team must act according to the needs of their local context, faculty development work could include leading “curriculum interrogation” retreats using the questions in Appendix A, or helping faculty find marginalized voices from within (and about) their disciplines. In another example, Heather collaborated with Western’s Office of Academic Quality and Enhancement and Office of Indigenous Initiatives to create a resource guide that helps faculty programs undertaking quality assurance work identify their EDI, decolonization, Indigenization, anti-racism, and accessibility goals and next steps (Western University 2023).

For libraries’ decolonization and Reconciliation work to move forward, white-settler librarians must accept our responsibility to learn and teach others about epistemic justice (Oliphant 2021; Leung 2022). For Western Libraries’ Teaching and Learning team, this work began when we willingly interrogated our own discipline and engaged in some of the ‘heart work’ required to start decolonizing our minds. Through this experience, we learned that academia’s white supremacy culture holds us back from engaging in major reform, as librarians like Jennifer Brown (Brown et al. 2018), Fobazi Ettarh (2018), Sofia Leung (2022), and Dave Hudson (2017) have long described: worship of the written word, perfectionism, individualism, and the either/or binary harm us all (Okun 2022). We plan to focus our next steps in decolonization work on building more respectful, reciprocal relationships with campus and Indigenous partners. We must continue to be vulnerable, willing to share half-formed ideas, to reconsider our priorities, and ask for help. Engaging in major reform will,

we hope, help to reduce our contributions to the ongoing colonization of Indigenous Peoples, and move our university one step closer to a decolonized future.

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Appendix A – Decolonization Guiding Reflection Questions

Grounding

- What does decolonization mean? How does decolonization relate to Indigenization, or to equity, diversity, and inclusion?
- What does a decolonized program, or university look like?
- Why are you undertaking this work as a team?
- What are the risks to the people involved?
- What kind of learning are you willing to do?
- What values are important for ensuring you are successful?
- Are you committed to addressing the individual and group conflicts or anxieties that will probably arise?

(Stein et al. 2021; Launei 2000; Cote-Meek 2020, xvii)

Interrogation

- What are the origins of our discipline or field? Who created it and why? Where and when are they from?
- How is knowledge defined? What do we already ‘know’? How did we come to know it?
- Who is allowed to be knowledgeable or an ‘expert’ in our field? How is knowledge shared? Whose voices are missing or excluded?
- What and whose interests does our discipline or field serve? How do Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+, women and gender non-conforming, and disabled members of our discipline experience our field?
- What impact does our field or discipline have on equity-deserving groups outside the university?

(Curriculum Change Working Group 2018; Stein et al. 2021; Aisha Haque and Sara Mai Chitty, personal communication, January 2022)

New Learning

- How do Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews encourage us to rethink our discipline or field?
- Which of our readings, pedagogies, assessments, research methods, and other disciplinary traditions may continue to uphold a colonial approach? How do Eurocentric and colonial epistemologies influence our daily work?
- Where do we have the power to effect change, today?

(Aisha Haque and Sara Mai Chitty, personal communication, January 2022; Stein et al., 2021)

Commitment

- What traditions, ideas, and values do we want to withdraw, reprioritize, or change from our existing curriculum? Which are we missing?
- How will we decolonize our program in partnership with local Indigenous communities and with students? What steps will we take to ensure we are effecting 'major' reform? (Brunette-Debassige et al. 2022; Stein 2019)
- What are the essential knowledge, skills, values, and abilities of our program?

(Curriculum Change Working Group 2018; Launei, 2000)

Rebuilding

If writing new learning outcomes, consider whether they:

- Use an inclusive definition of knowledge?
- Braid in Indigenous epistemologies?
- Centre diverse methods, theories, experiences, worldviews, and ways of being?
- Encourage students to develop social justice skills?
- Leave space for anti-racist, accessible, and Indigenous pedagogies?
- Enable your program to meet the four standards of the Building a Strong Fire framework? (2023)

(Aisha Haque and Sara Mai Chitty, personal communication, January 2022)