

Providing for Indigenous Nations in the Dewey Decimal Classification¹

Rebecca Green, Senior Editor, Dewey Decimal Classification & Dewey Editorial Operations
Program Manager, OCLC

When European explorers and colonists came to the Americas, the lands they laid claim to were already inhabited by peoples whose systems of language, religion, governance, medicine, and so forth, differed significantly from their own. Now centuries later, the descendants of the earlier inhabitants struggle to maintain their cultures and their sovereignty in contexts now largely dominated by descendants of the later arrivals. Similar circumstances have played out in areas around the world, frequently resulting in situations in which the perspectives of indigenous peoples have been sublimated to the perspectives of other peoples who have become dominant politically or in other ways in those areas. This sublimation of indigenous perspective may occur, for example, in mainstream knowledge organization systems (Moulaison Sandy & Bossaller, 2017).

A [factsheet](#) put out by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues characterizes indigenous peoples in terms of their “historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; distinct language, culture and beliefs; . . . [and] resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.” At the same time, the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain lands, communities, resources, and the various cultural, linguistic, religious, economic, political, etc., systems at the heart of their identity are often challenged.

Among the many rights of indigenous peoples recognized in [The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) are certain political rights, namely the rights to self-determination of political status; to self-government over internal and local matters; to recognition and enforcement of treaties and other agreements made with other political entities; and to ownership, control, and use of traditional lands and resources. When an indigenous people acts as a political entity or when the people’s territorial sovereignty or jurisdiction over associated lands is involved, we may say that the indigenous people functions as an indigenous nation.

In a knowledge organization system like the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, the difference between an indigenous people and an indigenous nation is crucial. As is well known, the DDC often builds notation for complex topics by appending the notation for one topic to some base notation (which may itself be built). The system includes several tables with notation for certain kinds of topics that recur in different contexts. Among these tables are Table 2, which gives notation for geographic areas, and Table 5, which gives notation for ethnic and national groups. Table 2 notation is used to reflect not only geographic areas, but also the political entities with sovereignty over those areas.

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² However, the Brian Deer Classification (BDC), reflecting an indigenous viewpoint, divides first by discipline, then by tribe. Cherry & Mukunda (2015), Doyle, Lawson, & Dupont (2015), and Swanson

The DDC currently gives notation for various indigenous peoples in Table 5, but there is at present no Table 2 notation for indigenous nations. This gap matters because add instructions specify the source of notation to be added to a base number. If an add instruction calls for notation to be added from Table 5, notation for indigenous peoples can be added, but if an add instruction calls for notation to be added from Table 2, there currently is no way to add notation for indigenous peoples as political entities.

Over the past several years, the Dewey editorial team and the Dewey Editorial Policy Committee (EPC) have explored several approaches to providing Table 2 notation for indigenous nations. (See, for example, Green, 2015.) Three options have been considered:

1. Add indigenous nations to class-here or including notes in existing Table 2 classes where the area associated with the current Table 2 class is the most nearly coterminous with the traditional lands of the indigenous people.
2. Create Table 2 classes for indigenous nations in the downward hierarchy of classes for the most specific locality within which the traditional lands of an indigenous people lies.
3. Develop provision for indigenous nations in unused notation within Table 2.

Several basic issues affect the wisdom and practicability of these options for providing Table 2 notation for indigenous nations:

- Existing Table 2 notation is closely aligned with United Nations (UN) member states and other territories with UN status.
- Traditional lands of indigenous peoples and areas associated with UN member states typically are co-located. That is, a specific spot on the earth may simultaneously be part of the traditional lands of an indigenous people and also be part of a UN member state.
- Standard Dewey practice for establishing Table 2 notation for geographic areas other than jurisdictions with UN status (e.g., for jurisdictions, regions, geographic features) is to mention the area in an including or class-here note of an existing class and to add a footnote reading: “For a specific part of this jurisdiction, region, or feature, see the part and follow instructions under T2—4–9.” This practice was designed to accommodate areas such as the Canadian Shield, the Andes, the Durban-Pinetown industrial area, and the Great Barrier Reef. Option 1 is compatible with standard Dewey practice for handling areas that overlap, but it would reinforce the perspective of the dominant state at the expense of the perspective of the indigenous nation.
- Option 2 would likewise reinforce the perspective of the dominant state at the expense of the perspective of the indigenous nation, since notation for the indigenous nation would be subordinate to notation for the dominant state.
- Option 3 faces the challenge that “unused notation within Table 2” refers to but few numbers at the same level as existing Table 2 notation. Some portions of Table 2 have no unused notation.

The approach currently under consideration (and approved in principle by EPC) is to adopt as the base Table 2 notation (that is, the notation to which Table 5 notation for the indigenous people is added) the notation for continent. This solves the problem caused when an indigenous nation overlaps the boundaries of multiple UN member states that are part of the same continent (e.g., the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne, whose boundaries overlap both Canada and the United States).

Specifically, we propose using the following Table 2 notation for indigenous nations:

- T2—404 + T5 Indigenous nations of Europe
- T2—504 + T5 Indigenous nations of Asia
- T2—604 + T5 Indigenous nations of Africa
- T2—704 + T5 Indigenous nations of North America
- T2—804 + T5 Indigenous nations of South America
- T2—904 + T5 Indigenous nations of Australasia, Pacific Ocean islands, Atlantic Ocean islands, Arctic islands, Antarctica, extraterrestrial worlds

Figure 1 shows, for example, the proposed entry for T2—404, while Figure 2 shows the adjustments required when building a number using the add table under 930–990.

Figure 1. Representative Table 2 entry for indigenous nations of a continent

T2—404 Indigenous nations of Europe

Add to base number —404 notation –1–9 from Table 5, e.g., the Sami as an indigenous nation —4049457, the Basque as an indigenous nation —4049992

See Manual at T2—4–9 vs. T2—4–9 + 04 + T5, 930-990:00404

Figure 2. Representative adjusted entry under 930–990:004

>	930–990	<p>History of specific continents, countries, localities; extraterrestrial worlds</p> <p>Civilization and events</p> <p>Class here interdisciplinary works on geography and history of ancient world, of specific continents, countries, localities</p> <p>Add to base number 9 notation 3–9 from Table 2, e.g., general history of Europe 940, of England 942, of Norfolk, England 942.61; then add further as follows:</p> <p>...</p> <p>004 Ethnic and national groups (Option: Class in 909.04)</p> <p>00404 Indigenous nations</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Use notation 3–9 from Table 2 for the continent only before adding 00404; then to the result add notation 1–9 from Table 5, e.g., the Basque as an indigenous nation 940.004049992, the Inuit as an indigenous nation 970.004049712</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>See Manual at T2—4–9 vs. T2—4–9 + 04 + T5, 930-990:00404</i></p>
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The DDC already has precedent in Table 2 for classing the same geographic location in two numbers. Every geographic location that can be designated with a T2—3 (“Ancient world”) number can also be designated with a T2—4–9 (“Modern world; extraterrestrial worlds”) number. Which of the two numbers to use depends on the temporal perspective of the work being classified. We propose to adopt a parallel approach for classing the same geographic location in two numbers, where which of the two numbers to use depends on the perspective of territorial sovereignty in the work being classified, whether that of an indigenous nation or that of a UN member state.

The preferred solution for classification of indigenous materials by at least some indigenous information seekers in North America² is to collocate the literature by indigenous people, for example, to use tribe, and not subject, as the initial element in the citation order. Such an arrangement would effectively produce special collections of indigenous materials separate from the general collection. The solution suggested above—T2 continent notation + 04 + T5 notation—addresses only the provision of notation for indigenous nations as a Table 2 concept, and otherwise assumes that literature about indigenous peoples is dispersed by subject, as is

² However, the Brian Deer Classification (BDC), reflecting an indigenous viewpoint, divides first by discipline, then by tribe. Cherry & Mukunda (2015), Doyle, Lawson, & Dupont (2015), and Swanson (2015) discuss BDC-based implementations at specific institutions.

common throughout the DDC. But given the reported collocational preferences of indigenous information seekers, we sense the need to provide an option for adding notation 001–999 for any subject to the notation for an indigenous people. (Note that this option does not distinguish between an indigenous people and an indigenous nation, and is independent of the rest of the proposal.) What would the best base notation be for such an option? We believe it would be 305.81–.89 [Sociology and anthropology / Groups of people /] Specific ethnic and national groups. Figure 3 shows the proposed option note there. Table 1 shows the kinds of differences that would result from exercising this option.

Figure 3. Option note for collocating literature for indigenous peoples

305.81–.89	<p>Specific ethnic and national groups</p> <p>Add to base number 305.8 notation 1–9 from Table 5, e.g., comprehensive works on Jews 305.8924, Chinese 305.8951, Chinese Australians 305.8951094, Inuit 305.89712</p> <p><i>For Jews as a religious group, see 305.696</i></p> <p>Option: For indigenous peoples, then, without adding notation –1 or –3–9 from Table 2 as instructed at beginning of Table 5, add 0 and to the result add notation 001–999, e.g., Inuit education 305.89712037 (<i>not</i> 305.89712071), Inuit folk literature 305.8971203982</p>
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We hope by recognizing the sovereignty of indigenous nations and their independence from UN member states with which they may have overlapping territoriality, as well as by acknowledging the centrality of the indigenous people/tribe as a principle of organization for resources relevant to the people, to allow the perspective of indigenous peoples to be reflected in the DDC.

Table 1. Examples of numbers involving indigenous peoples and indigenous nations—comparison of proposed standard approach and option:

Topic	Standard Dewey number, based on proposal outlined here	Optional Dewey number
Sami people	T5—9457	T5—9457
Inuit people	T5—9712	T5—9712
Seminole people	T5—973859	T5—973859
Basque people	T5—9992	T5—9992
Inuit nation	T2—7049712	T5—9712
International relations between Inuit nation and Canada	327.700049712071*	305.89712032771
Bilateral treaties between Inuit nation and Canada	341.0266700049712071*	305.897120341026671
Inuit criminal law	345.7049712	305.897120345
History of Inuit nation	970.004049712	305.8971209
History of Inuit people	971.90049712	305.8971209

* Adjustments would be required when addition of Table 2 notation is followed by 0 before adding other notation; 341.0266 and 327.3–327.9 are numbers where such adjustments would be needed when adding indigenous nation notation. Here we assume that the add instructions would call for the use of 000 between the Table 2 and Table 5 elements of indigenous nation notation.

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