



This booklet can help teachers, parents and learning-community members explore:

- > *What does “decolonizing pedagogies” mean?*
- > *Why are decolonizing pedagogies important?*
- > *What have educational scholars said about decolonizing pedagogies in Aboriginal education?*
- > *How can decolonizing pedagogies be used in history education?*
- > *What are the challenges of using decolonizing pedagogies?*

By: Heather E. McGregor

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Decolonizing Pedagogies Teacher Reference Booklet

Service Project for: Aboriginal Focus School, Vancouver School Board



Introduction

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Musqueam First Nation and Coast Salish Peoples, on whose unceded territory this booklet was conceived and for whom it was intended, as part of a “hands back, hands forward” (Dr. Vince Stogan) learning project. I would also like to acknowledge the caring and courageous educators whose work has informed this booklet, and thank them for sharing their experience with decolonizing pedagogies so that we may learn from and with them. I would also like to thank Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald for leading and supporting service learning projects between UBC graduate students and Vancouver Aboriginal education initiatives.

Overview

Decolonizing Pedagogies Teacher Reference Booklet presents:

- > an overview of what “decolonizing pedagogies” means;
- > how and why educational scholars and Indigenous educators suggest they be used to support learning in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education environments;
- > examples of decolonizing pedagogies (especially in history education); and,
- > some of the opportunities and challenges identified by educators and scholars in implementing decolonizing pedagogies.

Limitations

This project provides an introduction to key concepts in decolonizing pedagogies, based on a literature review that is:

- > sourced from primarily Canadian scholars or research being used in Canada (not comprehensive);
 - > research that focuses on history education (more than science or other subjects);
 - > usually broadly and generally conceived (rather than place-based or community-specific needs);
- and most importantly....*

- > does not provide fail-safe formulas, but rather **pieces of the puzzle that may help you see a more comprehensive picture of connections between decolonizing education and making more space for Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy.**

This booklet has been produced by: Heather E. McGregor
PhD student, Curriculum & Pedagogy
Faculty of Education
University of British Columbia

as part of course work for EDST 591 “Indigenous Epistemology and Curriculum”, March 2012, under the supervision of Dr. Jo-Ann Archibald, and as a service learning project for the Aboriginal Focus School, Vancouver School Board.



Key Terms

Decolonizing

- > a critical response to imperialism and colonialism (including underlying assumptions, motivations, values);
- > working to advance the interests of Indigenous peoples by transforming what is important in settler societies;
- > involves more than changes to formal political power, requires long-term changes to all structures in society (ie. education);
- > not only an Indigenous concern, has deep implications for settler societies; and,
- > desired outcome is re-centering of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing
- > See Linda Smith (1999).

Decolonization is not “integration” or the token inclusion of Indigenous ceremony. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of denial to the making of space for Indigenous political philosophies and knowledge systems as they resurge, thereby shifting cultural perceptions and power relations in real ways.

~ Paulette Regan, 2010, p. 189.

Pedagogies

- > approaches to teaching and learning;
- > the process through which knowledge is produced; and,
- > the transformation of consciousness that takes place through interaction of teacher, learner and knowledge they produce together
- > See Susan Dion (2009).

Decolonizing Pedagogies

- > help learners come to recognize and know the structures of colonization and their implications;
- > while engaging in activities that disrupt those structures on an individual and collective level;
- > result in the re-centring of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing;
- > facilitate engagement with possibilities for making change in the world;
- > particularly in the interests of supporting Indigenous self-determination.



Now that I understand the terms...

Why was this topic chosen for a service project in relation to the Aboriginal Focus School?

A core theme in the study of Indigenous¹ education is seeking approaches to teaching, learning and schooling that result in decolonization and/or re-centering of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Context matters; local contextual clues offer insights to connecting children to their schooling, and academic success follows...

~ Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 48.

Several Indigenous scholars have linked decolonizing pedagogies with the “rewriting and rerighting” (Smith, 1999) of Indigenous histories.

Decolonizing history education is a **stated interest** on the part of Vancouver parents and community members who consulted on the creation of the Aboriginal Focus School (Archibald, Rayner, & Big Head, 2011, p. 13).

Revising the *content* of education to better reflect Indigenous perspectives is often the focus of curricular reform. However, revising *pedagogy* used to produce and transmit Indigenous curriculum content can be equally important to effectively changing educational practice to make it more inclusive, holistic and reflective of Indigenous ways of teaching and learning.



Recognizing the interconnectedness of pedagogy with educational policy, curriculum, teacher preparation and community involvement, this paper will attempt to focus most directly on pedagogical themes associated with decolonization.

This review is also premised on the position that **all students** (regardless of their heritage) can benefit from decolonizing pedagogies.

¹ Castagno and Brayboy define Indigenous peoples as: “those who have inhabited lands before colonization or annexation; have maintained distinct, nuanced cultural and social organizing principles; and claim a nationhood status, Indigenous peoples are both self-identified and are recognized by members of their community.” (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p.944)



What does research say about why decolonizing pedagogies are needed?

Indigenous educational theory and research emphasizes:

- > acknowledgement of the **history** of wrongdoing and mistreatment towards Indigenous peoples by the government and other forces (ie. capitalism);
- > the importance of Indigenous peoples' **involvement** in educational decision-making regarding their own systems of education;
- > recognition and inclusion of **Indigenous ways** of teaching and learning;
- > the importance of parents, Elders and a **commitment to community** in building educational capacity;
- > respect for the environment, all of its inhabitants and more **sustainable relationships** therein;
- > **decolonizing** research and education from pre-school to post-secondary; and,
- > investment in preservation and vitality of Indigenous **language and culture**.

While developing a critical consciousness aimed at understanding precisely how colonialism has affected our health and mindset, we can begin to reaffirm the richness and wisdom inherent in our traditional ways.

~ Angela Cavender Wilson, 2004, p. 72.

Scholars such as Linda Smith, Marie Battiste, Michael Marker and Susan Dion have called on teachers to mobilize in response to the difficult history of cooperation between education and colonization, by disrupting it!

- > The history of education in colonial societies like Canada was (sometimes still is) a history of assimilation of Indigenous peoples.
- > This history produced “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste, 2000), which means the imposition of Euro-centric/Western ways of knowing, teaching and learning as being “superior.”
- > Racism associated with the North American colonial legacy is not a thing of the past but persistent and deeply embedded with questions of Indigenous-settler relations, politics, land rights and identity claims.
- > Teachers must be willing and supported to reflect on and discuss these conflicts with their students and with each other regularly on their journey through education.



What does it mean to use decolonizing pedagogies?

The typical teacher-centered direct instruction approach employed in most classrooms often fails to meet the needs of Indigenous students.

~ Castagno & Brayboy,
2008, p. 961.

To understand the potential of decolonizing pedagogies is partly to understand that **there is no simple or fail-safe formula that can be used to guide teachers.**

Also, that pedagogy cannot easily be detached from the content, resources and teacher-student relationship that shape any particular educational moment.

Puzzle pieces have been used as a metaphor for the information found in this booklet. The purpose of this booklet is to help you *find* or *shape* a few pieces that fit the overall “picture” you are working on in your teaching and learning context.

The first “piece” is a reminder of some commonly used Aboriginal pedagogies - towards which teachers can work, and/or integrate/combine, with a focus on decolonizing.

Kanu’s² list of Aboriginal Pedagogies

- ✓ stories as a teaching method
- ✓ sharing/talking circles
- ✓ learning scaffolds that support differing learning styles and incorporate Aboriginal content
- ✓ field (land) trips
- ✓ guest speakers
- ✓ activities that accommodate multiple learning styles
- ✓ opportunities for student decision-making and problem-solving

Kanu’s Ways to Create a Positive Learning Environment

- ✓ openness for students to speak honestly
- ✓ encouraging students to listen to each other
- ✓ sense of belonging and community
- ✓ students don’t feel unsafe
- ✓ teachers respect student silence
- ✓ opportunity to counter stereotypes
- ✓ help students explore themselves and their values

² See Yatta Kanu, (2011). *Integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the school curriculum: Purposes, possibilities, and challenges*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.



What does it mean to use decolonizing pedagogies? Continued...

Using decolonizing pedagogies also means disrupting taken-for-granted assumptions about where and how “legitimate” learning takes place, and who facilitates it.

This disruption can begin with:

- > **teacher preparation** that examines and decolonizes mainstream education practices;
- > engaging with content that illustrates **the rights of Aboriginal peoples** and allows Aboriginal learners to be empowered;
- > facilitating opportunities to **learn from place** (or the local land and community);
- > an understanding of local customary protocols and **community expectations**;
- > inclusion of **Elders** in instruction, for storytelling, Indigenous language instruction, ceremonies and other pedagogies for learning consistent with Aboriginal pedagogy;
- > taking students **into the bush** or onto the land/sea;
- > employing **community members** to carry out instruction or co-instruction with the teacher in language, arts, environmental knowledge, governance, etc.;
- > using learning **resources or materials** that do not perpetuate colonial myths and stereotypical representations;
- > asking Aboriginal community members for suggestions of appropriate resources or materials that are culturally- and locally-relevant; and
- > matching teachers with **an Aboriginal mentor** from the community to help with networking and creating the right environment for opportunities like Aboriginal community instruction.





Why are decolonizing pedagogies used in history education?

Challenging dominant constructions of history

In order to challenge dominant constructions of history, students need exposure to histories documented by Indigenous peoples from Indigenous perspectives.

This allows students to:

- > resist images and portrayals they see in the media, museums and other sources of stereotypes;
- > identify ways Indigenous peoples demonstrate agency;
- > question myths and oversimplified narratives about colonization in Canada and Eurocentric powers; and,
- > complicate and deconstruct binaries or dichotomies such as colonizer/colonized, oppressor/oppressed, and perpetrator/victim.

Honouring and knowing alternative histories is a way to access Indigenous Knowledges. It allows us to understand and transform colonial understandings.

~Judy M. Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 141.

Changing how meaning is made in history

It is not only differing perspectives on the same events that will assist students, but differing contexts for history and differing ways of making meaning from it, that are more coherent with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

...the deeper problem is that the categories of what counts as history do not often correspond with the ways that traditional indigenous communities make meaning out of the past.

~Michael Marker, 2011, p. 97.

In a critique of Eurocentric history education, Michael Marker has explained that history classrooms can be the most controversial and damaging for Indigenous students.

Marker has suggested key themes around which history education may need to demonstrate more flexibility, in order to become more culturally responsive:

1. circular understandings of time (recurring events with cycles of seasons, rather than notions of progress or linear time);
2. relationships with land and animals and stories that do not separate human life from ecology;
3. local knowledge and local histories as most important (rather than, for example, national narratives); and
4. the complexities of colonization and decolonization as core concerns for Aboriginal communities and scholars.



What are some challenges to using decolonizing pedagogies?

Challenges to implementing decolonizing pedagogies include:

- > the need for teachers to decolonize themselves, their identities and the ways they view education;
- > supports (such as workshops or mentoring) to ensure teachers are confident and prepared in using decolonizing pedagogies;
- > changes to the typical teacher-student relationship (allowing for more student autonomy) and teachers acting more as facilitators;
- > students who disregard transformative learning activities that require them to question established notions of identity and stereotypes about Indigenous peoples;
- > preparation time for teachers to locate appropriate materials and resources;
- > class time needed for experiential learning or deeper activities that cannot be done in one class period;
- > the need to consider what works in each specific community;
- > challenges in assessing students using holistic epistemologies; and,
- > strategies to address potential resistance from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, parents and community members. (Note: very little mention is made in the literature of direct parent or community resistance to decolonizing pedagogies, but one could assume that may also be a barrier in particular contexts).

Talking about traumatic events and one's connection to the suffering of Others is "dangerous" work. However, we cannot use our fear of saying the wrong thing as an excuse for not doing the work...

~Dion, 2009, p. 55.



Sample decolonizing pedagogies

Susan Dion - *Braiding Histories: Learning from Aboriginal Peoples' Experiences and Perspectives* (2009)

The Project

Dion describes in detail a research process - called the Braiding Histories Project - of carefully (re)telling histories from Indigenous perspectives and in relation to Indigenous identity and values. She worked closely with Indigenous storytellers to create classroom resources, attempting to facilitate decolonizing by creating an “alternative listening position” for students, and Dion observed the challenges and opportunities as non-Indigenous teachers introduced those histories to students. She examined teacher identity and knowledge prior to the project, how the histories were introduced to students, discussions that followed the history sharing, and written work completed by students in response.

The Findings

Dion found that students’ existing ways of knowing were reproduced and reinforced rather than disrupted by the use of the Braiding History Project resources. Suggesting this outcome is particularly related to teachers’ prior investments and commitments (such as professional discourses like “citizenship education”), Dion advocates for “a critical pedagogy of remembrance that allows teachers to attend to and learn from what I term the biography of their relationship with Aboriginal people” (Dion, 2009, p. 178). While the detail and complexity of this study cannot be conveyed here, it is essentially the only resource that outlines attempts at decolonizing history education in Canadian public schools.





Sample decolonizing pedagogies

Judy M. Iseke-Barnes - “Pedagogies for Decolonizing” (2008)

Iseke-Barnes’ work, set in the context of teaching pre-service teachers or graduate students, offers the most detailed insights into practical activities that can be used for decolonizing. They are potentially transferrable to the K-12 setting with adaptations. She explains the purpose of her pedagogies for decolonizing as: “to create a sense of the complexity of colonial oppression and how it is systematically exercised” (p. 124).

Iseke-Barnes suggests the following:

- > a sharing circle in which each person identifies themselves, where they come from and the communities they belong to. The teacher speaks about the possibility of encountering difficult knowledge and feelings through the class;
- > a smudge ceremony to prepare for receiving difficult knowledge in a good way;
- > asking students to take the role of the colonizer in a fictitious society
 - the teacher gives them the goal of colonizing their rivals, (who are fictitiously characterized by the values of connection, equal value and cooperation)
 - students work in groups to develop a colonization plan
 - following the discussion the teacher asks students how they know so much about being a colonizer and to question the history of those sources of knowledge
- > following an examination of colonization, students need exposure to equally powerful understandings of decolonization, such as examples of Indigenous art that show how Indigenous peoples are aware of their history and moving beyond it, rather than focusing on the victim role, showing resistance and strength;
- > other decolonizing pedagogies Iseke-Barnes’ work speaks to include:
 - providing examples from history of government policies that have facilitated control over colonized peoples (such as definitions of Indian status);
 - controls asserted over Indigenous spirituality and ceremony such as the outlawing of the potlatch and giving meaning to those practices from Indigenous perspectives;
 - other governance structures or tribal governance systems;
- > opportunities for students to learn from each other through cooperative activities and processes, allowing them to learn from each other, take responsibility for their learning, encourage a sense of community and allow individuals from oppressed groups to reclaim histories.

...it is clear that all groups of students know a great deal about colonization and how they could implement it if they were in the position to do so. I ask them to interrogate the sources of their understandings, and this becomes the basis for many ongoing discussions throughout the course...

~ Judy M. Iseke-Barnes, 2008, p. 131.

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Review and Reflection

Decolonizing pedagogies refers to...

Teaching and learning approaches that both acknowledge and deconstruct structures of power associated with colonization in an effort to create space for, and give legitimacy to, Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Review of issues with decolonizing pedagogies

Indigenous knowledge being mobilized with the intent to decolonize challenges established, normative Western notions of knowledge production, requiring different pedagogies.

A particularly important feature of decolonizing pedagogies is the link between the knowledge being encountered and questions of student and teacher identity, critical ethical action and concerns for self-determination, equity and human rights in the past, present, and for the future.

Reference Material

Iseke-Barnes (2008) provides examples of decolonizing pedagogies in graduate level classrooms, which may be adaptable for use with younger students. Marker (2011) provides a framework for decolonizing history education and Dion (2009) describes use of decolonizing pedagogies in elementary history classrooms.

Limitations to the Literature

The literature is more fully developed with regard for the *need* for decolonizing pedagogies, particularly at the post-secondary level, rather than *describing* the pedagogies themselves or the conditions under which they are successfully implemented.

Documentation of decolonizing pedagogies that focuses on post-secondary classrooms or public spaces can be challenging for teachers to “translate” into the K-12 system, particularly in terms of younger students.

The literature reviewed here provides rich groundwork in terms of guidance and orientation, but would benefit from more material dealing directly with practices such as teacher decolonization supports, classroom modeling, mentoring and Aboriginal partnerships, as well as identifying opportunities and outcomes of decolonizing pedagogies at the K-12 levels.

A take-away

The process of decolonizing schools is not achieved solely through the integration of Indigenous content, but through examining the power relationships that determine questions (and answers) regarding school structures, policy and decision-making, curriculum and pedagogy, teacher-student-community relationships, access to and assessment of student success.



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Resources

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Tejeda, C. (2008). Dancing with the dilemmas of a decolonizing pedagogy. *Radical History Review*, (102), 27-31.

Wilson, A. C. (2004). Reclaiming our humanity: Decolonization and the recovery of indigenous knowledge. In D. A. Mihesuah, & A. C. Wilson (Eds.), *Indigenizing the academy: Transforming scholarship and empowering communities* (pp. 69-87).

Historically, Indigenous peoples have always used an experientially based, embodied pedagogy that is rooted in storytelling, ceremony, and ritual to teach diverse peoples how to once again coexist peacefully after conflict has occurred. They understand, as some Western educators have now discovered, that teaching/learning practices that connect head, heart, and spirit can sometimes transform people in powerful ways that may not be fully understood on a rational level alone.

~ Paulette Regan, 2010, p. 205

