

Decolonizing Pedagogy: Guiding Principles for CEGEP Teachers

Decolonizing Pedagogy: Unlearning Settler Colonialism and Settler Colonial Logics

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John Abbott College, Column D Released Group on “Decolonizing Pedagogies: Unlearning Settler Colonialism and Settler Colonial Logics,” Fall 2016 - August 2017.

Ten Guiding Principles for CEGEP Teachers in Decolonizing their Pedagogies

“For every educator, our responsibility is making a commitment to both unlearn and learn – to unlearn racism and superiority in all its manifestations, while examining our own social constructions in our judgements and learn new ways of knowing, valuing others, accepting diversity, and making equity and inclusion foundations for all learners” (Battiste, 2013, p. 166).

“Every school is either a site of reproduction or a site of change. In other words, education can be liberating, or it can domesticate and maintain domination. It can sustain colonization in neo-colonial ways or it can decolonize” (Battiste, 2013, p. 175).

These principles are meant to invite reflection and dialogue on what CEGEP teachers can do to recognize and challenge ongoing colonial legacies in the classroom, course content, and pedagogical practices. The points below often presume a non-Indigenous teacher positionality, as there is a serious underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers in the CEGEP system. Wherever you find yourself in your teaching practice and your thinking around questions of Indigenizing/decolonizing pedagogies, we hope this document offers you an entry point. Where references to texts exist, please see the bibliography within the “Indigenizing and Decolonizing Pedagogy” Portal Community to find these sources. Hyperlinks to online glossaries are provided to keep the document readable for both those who want further explanation of key concepts and those who are already familiar with the language of "decolonizing pedagogies."

1. Commit to educating yourself about Settler colonialism and Native issues and peoples in Canada.

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (see for ex. Nos. 57, 62-65), educators are specifically asked to change how we teach Indigenous content. This involves unlearning dominant narratives, learning Indigenous perspectives, and coming to recognise the (sometimes unconscious and unintended) ways that our pedagogies reproduce aspects of [settler colonialism and related power relations and knowledges](#). This is difficult, sobering, and inspiring work. There is now greater access than ever before to Indigenous resources to read, listen, and watch as we un/learn our way towards more balanced, respectful understanding of the contemporary and historical context of Indigenous-settler relations in Quebec and Canada. We hope that this document helps you to take on the challenge of [“decolonizing pedagogies”](#). See links below as well as our bibliography and videography to get started.

2. Recognize colonization and racism as *ongoing* and *diverse* processes in Quebec and Canada.

- *Acknowledge the ongoing practices and legacies of colonization.*

Too often [colonization](#) is presented as an historical event, something that happened and remains in the past. This implies that we now live in a 'post'-colonial society which is engaged in righting some of the wrongs of settler colonialism – whether through acknowledgement of past injustices like the residential schools, or by paying homage to Indigenous cultural practices. While these moves are significant, when presented as the only legacy of colonialism they obscure current practices of domination over Indigenous peoples that the state is engaged in. Teachers need to understand and emphasize the present and ongoing nature of colonial practices that continue to oppress Indigenous people, such as violated treaties, unaddressed land claims, the criminalization of dissent, systemic underfunding of Native education, as well as the colonial legacies of intergenerational trauma, and more.

- *Acknowledge varied experiences of colonization; learn specifics about settler colonialism; use comparative and relational approaches.*

The practices of colonial domination are often presented as homogenous across regions and times. Indigenous peoples are also often homogenised. European colonialism in the global South has both similar and different practices and logics to Canadian colonialism. Teachers should understand and emphasize the unique features of settler colonialism, which is marked by land theft, the colonizers staying, cultural genocide, and assimilation, and has variously impacted different Indigenous nations and peoples. The ways that sexism, racism, and capitalism contribute to colonization also need to be understood. Decolonial struggles therefore involve specific local responses/resistances to colonial rule.

3. Learn how Eurocentrism and Eurocentric education function as tools of colonization.

Teachers need to recognize how Eurocentrism and domination are normalized and naturalized in the educational system. This often goes unacknowledged because modern Western education is assumed to be neutral and beneficial. (See Battiste, 2013, Chapter 2; especially p. 30 on how this ‘neutral’ approach is actually complicit in racism.) She argues: “[E]ducation and literacy have not been benign processes, for cognitive imperialism, licensed by dominant English languages and Eurocentric discourse, has tragically diminished Indigenous languages and knowledges and contributed to the discontinuity and trauma Aboriginal peoples continue to experience” (Battiste, 2013, p. 26). Critically acknowledging this and the ways that education informs one’s ideas, syllabi, and sources opens paths to re-envisioning transformative pedagogical praxis. Scientific knowledge is no less cultural and implicated (see Battiste Chapter 5 broadly and p. 119 specifically).

Teachers need to understand the specific role of residential school education in attempting to assimilate Native children as a form of “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste, 2013) that imposed Christianity and Eurocentric values as well as damaged cultural continuity, language survival, family bonds, and individual wellbeing. We also need to understand how contemporary approaches to education in Quebec/Canada contribute to the problems Indigenous peoples face.

- Learn how residential schools, cultural genocide, and intergenerational trauma have impacted Indigenous lives and attitudes to mainstream education.
- Counter the stereotypical and ahistorical representation of Native content in public schooling.
- Recognize systemic barriers such as underfunding of native education and related obstacles such as poverty, disproportionately adverse health conditions, etc.
- Diversify pedagogical practices so that Eurocentric pedagogies are not the norm (a number of links to handbooks for educators can be found in the bibliography).
- Engage analyses of how research, theory, specific disciplines, and conceptual frameworks have played a role in colonization and decolonization.
- *Teach research critically and contextually.* Strike a balance between critique of oppressive aspects of research (such as its role in oppressing and governing Indigenous peoples) and the use of research for social justice.
- *Acknowledge the productive and oppressive uses of theory.* Theory is not innocent in these ongoing colonial processes. We need to expose how the Eurocentric theoretical constructs of modernity pertaining to race, gender, society (primitive/civilized), economy, etc. have been used in the exercise of power. Theory can be made meaningful to students by considering it as a lens (or an explanatory framework) and using applied examples.

- *Be critical of the universalist assumptions of History as a category.* The idea of History as a totalizing narrative that tracks human history in a progressive way – from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized’ – needs to be critically re-examined. Linda T. Smith’s nine points (1999, pp. 31-33) address the assumptions embedded in Eurocentric history and provide a valuable guide to begin the process of deconstructing history.
- Analyse how Western viewpoints are not universal but grounded in specific social locations and the power imbalances enacted therein.

4. Model self-reflexivity: Share how you have learned about Indigenous issues and settler colonialism.

Share one's own un/learning to demonstrate for students some concrete ways that we can reflect, locate ourselves, take accountability, and act. Inviting students into the process of critical self-reflection around settler colonialism can be seen as modelling reflexivity. This involves both grappling with awareness of how settler colonialism privileges non-Indigenous peoples, including to varying degrees, people of colour, as well as recognising (unconscious) complicities with settler colonialism. (For an Indigenous example, see Battiste, 2013, pp. 13-22; for a settler example, see Lowman & Barker, 2015; for an intersectional social justice educators' example see Adams et al., 2016, Chapter 16, and note how they omit settler colonialism from their understanding of systemic oppression in North America. For an accessible introduction to the concept of settler colonialism and the importance of acknowledging Canadian settler identity see Lowman & Barker, 2015.)

- *Learn about intersectionality and positionality.*
Most teachers who teach about systemic forms of oppression know how important it is to acknowledge power relations as they shape our own and students' social location or [positionalities](#). To avoid the "silo approach" of addressing only one system of oppression at a time, familiarize yourself with [intersectional approaches](#). Intersectionality looks at multiple systems of oppression simultaneously and in terms of their co-constitutive functions. For example, sexism or colonialism or racism or poverty cannot alone explain the root causes of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Teachers need to understand how these systems come together to make some people highly vulnerable. Learn to be aware of your social location and what it enables you to see, what it makes you less likely to recognize, etc. Relevant aspects of identity include, gender, race, class, etc and relevant system of oppression include ableism, heterosexism, etc.
- *Locate yourself in relationship to the land.*
Think about and share as appropriate: where are you from (place-based)? What is your relationship to the land that you live, work, and study upon? For Indigenous peoples, one's relationship to land is an important aspect of identity and being. Not having to think about this is a marker of settler colonial privilege. For many of us these questions invite us to consider the (sometimes uncomfortable) label of settler. Non-Indigenous teachers can share how they are rethinking their relationship to land and Indigenous peoples and related implications.
- *Learn to recognize how settler colonial privilege and common sense shape your worldview and experiences.*
How does this manifest in our own thinking, learning, teaching, research, and lives? In our disciplines? In the ideas, theories, and facts that we deem important to teach? In what we expect of students?

- *Share with students how you un/learn, including managing the uncomfortable emotional terrain of the content and its implications for all of us.*

Integrate some of these activities into the pedagogy of the course. Include ways to recognizing and dealing with emotional blocks to learning about privilege and oppression (Boler, 1999; Adams et al., 2016).

- *Learn the importance of land and treaties.*

Realize that insofar as we are here, whether we are Indigenous or settlers, that we are all Treaty people, whose lives here are predicated on nation-to-nation agreements that have not been honoured by the Canadian state. Even on non-Treaty lands (such as in Quebec and British Columbia), the Treaty process itself reflects an acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignties and further unsettles the legitimacy of ongoing Canadian colonialism both on and off Treaty lands.

5. Expect and prepare to navigate difficulties and settler/Indigenous students' different discomforts in the classroom.

Be ready to address settler student resistance to anticolonial content in class. Learn about Indigenous students' post-secondary classroom experiences (see Cote-Meek, 2014, for interview-based research on this).

- *Establish ground rules for your class discussions* (Adams et al., 2016).
- *Confront racism and prejudice in the classroom.* Directly engage with and respond to racist remarks right away. Avoid focusing on the specific student making racist remarks, rather focus on the issue by explaining the underlying framework and injustice of racism and other forms of discrimination. Help students to see how dominant discourses influence their opinions. There are some good guides to anti-racism education (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Ng, Staton & Scane, 1995; Dei & Caliste, 2000; Adams et al, 2016; Bishop, 2015).
- *Be aware of issues of self-identification.* Do not put Indigenous students on the spot by directing questions to them. Allow students to set their own boundaries for sharing.
- *Be aware of classroom dynamics and students' response to discomfort.* Non-Indigenous students might try to re-center the class discussion on issues and topics that they are more comfortable and familiar with, or try to shift the blame for oppression onto oppressed people. Learn how to engage students in non-judgemental critical self-awareness of classroom dynamics. (For discussion of “settler moves to innocence”, see Yang & Tuck, 2012; of “settler moves to comfort”, see Chapter 5 of Lowman & Barker, 2015; and of common responses to anti-racism education, see Bishop, 2015.)
- A teacher's as well as a student's race, gender, class, etc. can impact how critical perspectives are perceived and engaged in the classroom. Share and strategize with colleagues, and be aware that white, racialised, and Indigenous teachers face different responses and challenges in the classroom and need an array of different strategies.

6. Carefully navigate potential trauma for Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students.

When teaching “difficult content,” prepare students in advance before broaching traumatic topics that students and their families and communities might have experienced, such as discussion of suicides, missing and murdered Indigenous women, and residential schools. Take the time beforehand to provide the necessary background and address the possible emotional impact, particularly on Indigenous students. (See Cote-Meek, 2014, for a discussion of Indigenous student postsecondary experiences and suggestions of how to create less harmful experiences of these crucial classroom conversations. Many of the points below are elaborated therein.)

- Let students know beforehand of the difficult nature of the content to be discussed and remind them of the class ground rules around sensitivity in class discussions.
- If you can do so appropriately, speak to Indigenous students privately before the class in question, without asking invasive personal questions.
- Be prepared to allow different ways to access the material and assignments where the need be. Do not insist that Indigenous students watch films related to these issues in a classroom setting.
- Do not make Indigenous students in the classroom speak for their nations or all Indigenous peoples, that is do not treat your Indigenous students as “Native informants”. Do not inquire into their own or families' experiences of trauma.
- Validate Indigenous students' sharing of personal stories/experience. When a student chooses to share their experiences, take the time to listen and acknowledge the experience and the emotional impact respectfully (Cote-Meek, 2014, pp. 124-126).
- Attend to students' reaction after teaching difficult content. This can take the form of moments of silence, quiet reflective writing, the teacher acknowledging the emotional difficulty of the topic and material. Provide time for debriefing and acknowledgement of personal responses.
- Have contact information ready for counselling and culturally appropriate healing services if requested.
- Be ready to emphasize Indigenous-led responses, healing and activism on these issues.
- Cultivate new and creative practices to respond to Indigenous students' needs.
- Cultivate a relationship with campus and community based resources for Indigenous students.
- Advocate at your institution for greater access to Indigenous healing modalities, without appropriating them.

7. Explore and commit to principles for Indigenizing education.

Curricula should include more elements of local Indigenous cultures. One of the important steps to take is territorial acknowledgement. Equally important is hiring elders and getting them involved in college life and teaching. More Native teachers should be hired. New non-Indigenous teachers must learn about the colonial past and the continuing inequality inside and outside the education system between Canadians and Indigenous communities. Indigenous teachers and advisors should direct curriculum and resource creation where at all possible.

- Include Indigenous authors in your course materials. Engage Indigenous thinkers and explore conceptual and concrete thinking about what the repatriation of Indigenous life and land would mean.
- Include Indigenous sources on any topic, not just Indigenous content.
- Find guest speakers, films, texts, blogs, clips that allow Native people to speak directly to our students. (See Videography.)
- Do not make Indigenous students in the classroom speak for their nations or all Indigenous peoples. Do not inquire into their own or their families' experiences of trauma.
- Balance distressing content with uplifting content by introducing the richness of Indigenous cultures/knowledges, resistances, and various approaches to decolonization, reconciliation, resurgence, etc.
- Encourage pride in cultures, languages, and Indigenous traditions.
- Advocate for Indigenous hires and support them once hired, learn about systemic barriers to better Indigenous representation in all areas of college employment, and start the dialogue with colleagues about how to address this colonial legacy within the education system.
- Advocate for the college to hire consultants when there is a lack of Native teachers.

8. Be aware that Indigenizing is insufficient without Decolonizing.

“The ‘add and stir’ model of bringing Aboriginal education into the curricula, environment and teaching practices has not achieved the needed change (RCAP, 1996), but rather continues to sustain the superiority of Eurocentric knowledge and processes” (Battiste, 2013, p. 28). Indigenizing curricula alone is not decolonizing, yet decolonizing cannot occur without Indigenizing. On how to Indigenize in a decolonial manner, see Battiste (especially Chapters 6 through 8). Furthermore, recognize that “decolonization” is not a metaphor to be used for numerous sorts of injustice. Decolonization centres the primacy of the land, and minimally begins with an acknowledgement of the land JAC is on, though it goes much further to include engagement with the ideas of what decolonizing that land might mean, especially from Indigenous perspectives. (For more on this, see the article "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor" by Tuck & Yang, 2012.)

9. Get to know your individual students, their nations, and their challenges and strengths.

At minimum, get to know cultural specificities of Inuit, Cree, and Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) nations insofar as they represent the majority of Indigenous students at JAC. What other Nations are there in Quebec? Expand your learning. Many students feel more comfortable when there is a degree of personal relationship and trust between student and teacher.

10. Develop a dialogue within and across disciplines, departments, and programs about disciplinary complicity in Eurocentrism and develop ways to unsettle commonsense settler colonial discourses.

Do you know if or how your discipline relies on Eurocentric values, epistemologies, and categories? What is the relationship of your discipline to Indigenous knowledges and decolonial critiques? Certain disciplines such as Anthropology and History have been implicated in colonialism, yet so too have Women's Studies, English, and Creative Arts. Learn how both the content and overriding frameworks of our disciplines reflect Eurocentric epistemologies that can be disrupted by engaging Indigenous thought. Decolonization is a process. So is your work in decolonization with both your students and your colleagues as we are all deeply embedded in Eurocentrism and colonialism. The onus is on all of Academia to commit to decolonization within and across disciplinary bounds.