DECOLONIZING AND INDIGENIZING EDUCATION IN CANADA

Edited by Sheila Cote-Meek and Taima Moeke-Pickering

CANADIAN SCHOLARS
Toronto | Vancouver

INTRODUCTION

From Colonized Classrooms to Transformative Change in the Academy: We Can and Must Do Better!

Sheila Cote-Meek

> Justice Murray Sinclair statement: "Education is what got us into this mess—the use of education at least in terms of residential schools—but education is the key to reconciliation."
>
> —*Watters, 2015*

In Canada, most, if not all, post-secondary institutions are in the process of dialogue and engagement on how best to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action (2015). There is no doubt that the TRC (2015) has been important in terms of mobilizing action. The TRC calls on post-secondary institutions to engage in the reconciliation process and essentially lead change in education that promotes awareness and understanding and importantly integrates Indigenous histories, knowledges, and pedagogies in the classroom. Recognizing that there are long-standing colonial practices that remain deeply entrenched within the educational system, there are significant challenges and complexities in bringing about meaningful change. This introductory chapter explores critical questions about what might constitute an appropriate pedagogical and institutional response within a decolonizing and indigenizing frame of reference in order to conceptualize how we can bring about sustained transformative change to the post-secondary educational system. Like all the authors in this book, it is important to situate myself before going further.

SITUATING SELF

Boozhoo, Kwe kwe Semaa Kwe ndishnikaaz, Mukwa dodem, Tema-Augama Anishnabai. My spirit name is Tobacco woman, I come from the Bear clan and come from the Teme-Augama Anishnabai, the people of the deep water. I introduce myself in my own language so that, as a reader, you know who I am and how I am connected to this land. It also provides clues about my path and purpose in life. I have worked in Indigenous education for 30 years and, over the course of that time, have always been a strong advocate for change at the post-secondary level—to make education more accessible and meaningful for Indigenous learners. My passion is rooted in who I am and life experiences that include confronting racism at an early age and witnessing countless examples of racism directed to my siblings, family, and friends. This introductory chapter draws on some of my experiences, both personal and academic, to provide some strategies to consider in bringing about change. This chapter also builds upon some of my earlier work in my book *Colonized Classrooms: Racism, Trauma and Resistance in Post-Secondary Education* (Cote-Meek, 2014). Both myself and my co-editor hope this book will stimulate critical thought and conversations about what we do in the academy and how this impacts Indigenous Peoples.

TERMINOLOGY

It is also important that I touch briefly on the use of terminology. I use the term *Indigenous Peoples* to reflect the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues working definition:

> there are more than 370 million indigenous peoples spread across 70 countries worldwide. Practicing unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live … [Indigenous Peoples are the] descendants—according to a common definition—of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means. (Secretariat, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues 2009, n.p.)

In Canada, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are recognized as Indigenous Peoples. It is also important to recognize that there are many Nations of

Indigenous Peoples in Canada, each with their own culture, tradition, and languages. This distinction is important because the stories, languages, cultures, and worldviews held by a Nation are unique.

COLONIZED CLASSROOMS

In reflecting on my work and role in the academy as an academic and as an academic administrator, I often think about what has changed and how far we have or have not moved with respect to inclusion, equity, and diversity, especially where Indigenous Peoples are concerned. I also reflect a lot about reconciliation. What does it mean? And is it even possible? For me, it is difficult to imagine reconciliation without thinking about debwewin, truth. Debwewin is about speaking your truth, from your heart. Have we heard the truth? Have you heard the many truths out there about Canada's history with Indigenous Peoples?

In a paper I co-authored with colleagues Moeke-Pickering, Hardy, Manitowabi, Mawhiney, Faries, Gibson van-Marrewijk, and Taitoko (2006), we discussed the notion of "white amnesia" and defined it as a

> disease rooted in racism [that] is a common strategy used to ignore the historical and ongoing injustices perpetrated on Indigenous peoples. These learned behaviors and associated attitudes stem from a lack of acceptance and continued denial among non-Indigenous academics about their potential roles as anti-colonisers and anti-oppressors. White amnesia allows non-Indigenous peoples to continue in their day to day world without seeing or involving themselves in other worldviews that would challenge their understanding of their oppressive practices. (p. 2)

I have to wonder with all the emphasis on reconciliation (and not truth) whether what is operating is a form of white amnesia, another process to ignore and silence the telling of debwewin. If we do not talk about debwewin, the truth, we will not get to a place of reconciliation. The truth is in the difficult stories, the harder ones to speak out loud. They are the more difficult ones to hear and listen to because they are stories about injustices, abuse, and genocide. They are painful. Importantly, these stories also lay the basis for understanding why we have so much work do and why reconciliation is not a feel-good process or an easy one. They are the stories that easily get forgotten by white amnesia as we barrel on ahead so quickly with reconciliation.

The opening quote from Justice Murray Sinclair, now Senator Murray Sinclair, emphasizes the role that education has played in ongoing colonization and its central role in addressing reconciliation. In order to achieve reconciliation, we also need to understand deeply what colonization is and the impact it has on Indigenous Peoples. Elsewhere, I have defined colonization as having four critical dimensions: "It concerns the land, it requires a specific structure of ideology to proceed, it is violent and it is ongoing" (Cote-Meek, 2014, p. 18). Colonization has always been and continues to be about the land and the resources. See, for example, the Oka crisis of 1990, the more recent dispute in the Wet'suwet'en territory, and in my own territory, Teme Auguama Anishinaabe. Land is still contested.

Briefly, colonization advanced from the East to the West coast of Canada through active appropriation of lands justified through the denigration of Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous Peoples. It is well documented that in order for the colonial project to continue to advance, Indigenous Peoples were reduced as inferior and subordinate. Underlying contestations over land also posit Indigenous Peoples as holding up progress for the benefit of all, which supports the racialized notion of the primitive Other. These racialized constructions include a range of negative attributes that reduce Indigenous Peoples as incapable of taking care of themselves, incapable of taking care of the land, inferior, and ultimately as primitive and standing in the way of progress (Loomba, 1998). The Canadian landscape has often been described as a vast, untouched wilderness (Monet & Skanu'u, 1992), which effectively erased Indigenous Peoples' existence from their lands. These widespread colonial beliefs provided the justification for forced domination and control over the lives of Indigenous Peoples. As a result we are still witnessing government control over the lives of Indigenous Peoples. As Malinda Smith (2013) points out,

> unsettling the durable legacies of settler colonialism will be no easy feat, given the unresolved land claims, chronic under-resourcing of Indigenous health, education, housing; the large numbers of Indigenous children still being removed from homes and placed ineffective child welfare services; the large numbers of Indigenous men and women imprisoned, including for minor infractions; and the violence against women and the growing number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. (p. 12)

While it is beyond the scope of this introduction to detail the full history of ongoing colonization, suffice it to note that land continues to be highly

contested and Indigenous Peoples are always positioned as second-class citizens in their own lands. In order for colonization to continue to advance, the government put in place policies such as the *Indian Act* to take full control of the lives of Indigenous Peoples. Part of taking control also included setting up residential schools where Indigenous culture, languages, and ways of knowing and being were stripped away from the minds of young children under conditions of extreme violence now documented as genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Indigenous knowledges were effectively debased and devalued. This devaluing of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous knowledges was an intentional act to disrupt our ways of knowing and ways of being and to sever the transmission to the next generation. There is no doubt that educational institutions are still very much colonial institutions with deeply held convictions about what constitutes education, research, and pedagogy. Mihesuah and Wilson (2004) note that one way the academy continues to support ongoing colonization is through maintaining control over access to knowledge and knowledge production. This is done through the devaluing of Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous Peoples.

The academy is also a central site of ongoing colonialism. Goldberg (1993) noted that knowledge is not produced in a vacuum; rather, knowledge producers are situated within a social, political, and economic context that influences and frames mainstream ideologies, values, and beliefs. In this way, knowledge that is produced is reflective of worldviews and epistemologies that often exclude Indigenous worldviews. Research then becomes knowledge produced on and about Indigenous Peoples through a very Westernized, Eurocentric lens. Goldberg (1993) further discussed how "Power is exercised epistemologically in the dual practices of naming and evaluating.... Once defined, order has to be maintained, serviced, extended, operationalized. Naming the racial Other, for all intents and purposes, is the Other" (p. 150). Extending his analysis, Goldberg (1993) noted that "social science of Other established limits of knowledge about the Other, for the Other is just what racialized social science knows. It knows best for the Other ..." (p. 150). Knowledge that is produced through academic research then often not only names the Other but also controls, manages, and directs that research through writing about the Other outside the culture, thus silencing and delegitimizing, in this case, Indigenous voices and worldviews. This is critical to understanding what underlying systemic changes need to be made if we are moving toward decolonizing and indigenizing Western-based institutions.

In addition, we need to document the experiences of Indigenous students and faculty in the academy, which I have done in previous research (Cote-Meek, 2014). Since that research, I have continued to hear countless stories of similar experiences from current Indigenous students and professors. Here are a few examples to make my point. With the introduction of mandatory courses on Indigenous content, there has been a backlash from students who effectively dismiss anything Indigenous, who are disengaged and uninterested in anything that pertains to Indigenous Peoples (Hamilton, 2018). This has created a difficult and challenging learning environment for students who are interested in the content and for Indigenous learners who have to witness and experience inappropriate and often racist commentary about the required course content. In my view, it has only been after these requirements have been instituted that post-secondary institutions have begun to look for ways to mitigate racist commentary in the classrooms and are understanding the critical importance of supports for these initiatives. Another example is witnessing racist graffiti on the office doors of Indigenous colleagues being treated with little action. These examples are indicative of the complexities of initiatives and how these initiatives can further perpetuate the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples in the academy.

Therefore, decolonization is a complex process and will take much time, effort, and systemic changes. Simply defined, it is putting an end to ongoing colonization and addressing the impacts of colonization. It is about returning lands and ending the violence against Indigenous Peoples; this includes addressing racism. It requires a divesting of power back to Indigenous Peoples so that self-determination is fully realized and in a meaningful way. Any transformative change to the academy needs also to address this.

TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

What can we do in the academy to engage in debwewin and foster stronger, more respectful communities of learning? What are the possibilities for bringing about a transformative change?

Transformative change is defined in a number of ways. Duffy and Reigeluth (2008) identified six core elements to a transformative systemic change, which include changing the institutional culture, changing the entire institution, change that is intentional and occurs over time, change that creates a system that continually pursues an idealized future for itself, and change that is significant. Similarly, Gass (2010) described transformative

change as "profound, fundamental and irreversible. It is a metamorphosis, a radical change from one form to another" (p. 1). Eckel and Kezar (2003) also identified six specific aspects to bring about transformative change to higher education. These include senior administrative support, collaborative leadership, flexible vision, faculty and staff development, and visible action. In another work (Cote-Meek, 2018a), I framed my discussion around a case example of transformative change using the concepts of the Medicine Wheel, which assisted in depicting a change in a more holistic, inclusive, and encompassing manner. Essentially, transformative change is disruptive. It is a change that moves an organization to a drastically different way of being, doing, and working. It is my contention that deep systemic and transformative changes are needed in the post-secondary system if we are ever to achieve reconciliation. Education plays a significant role in shaping the next generation, and it is important that every citizen is aware, has an understanding of, and takes up responsibility for reconciliation. This requires nothing less than transformation of the educational systems and structures. It also begs the question of what might constitute an appropriate pedagogical and institutional response that would move post-secondary institutions toward sustained transformative change.

A critical step in bringing about any change, large or small, is establishing a clear and concrete vision (Cote-Meek, 2018a). We must ask ourselves questions such as: What do we aspire post-secondary institutions to do? What needs to be changed? How do we imagine that change can occur? Are we open to change? What is decolonization? What is indigenization? Will decolonization and indigenization lead to wider systemic change? Wolverton (1998) similarly noted that "leaders and organisations must ask themselves: Do we want this kind of change? Is it necessary? Is our organisation ready for it?" (p. 29). Institutions like universities rely on the development of strategic plans, academic plans, research plans, and departmental/faculty plans. If done well, these plans are integrated and lead to achievable outcomes and have the potential to contribute to change in a big way, depending on how well they are constructed and implemented. If we want transformative change, we need to think big and boldly and imagine what we want in the academy of the future. A critical part of the development of strategic plans is community engagement. Institutions must get better at engaging with First Peoples of this country. Simply put, we as Indigenous Peoples need to be at the table(s) to ensure our voice is heard and included. Indigenous Peoples have not always had a voice in these plans, and if the academy truly wants to

take up effort to decolonize and respond to the TRC, they must engage with Indigenous Peoples in concrete ways. The vision can then start including attention to larger systemic issues. For example, explicit strategies to transform the academy have to include: coming to terms with ongoing colonization and racism; increasing access and success for Indigenous Peoples whether they are students, staff, or faculty; addressing the underrepresentation of Indigenous students in particular faculties and disciplines; addressing the underrepresentation of Indigenous faculty and staff across the university, including administration and senior leadership; and addressing ethics in research so they are not barriers for Indigenous students and faculty carrying out research. In fact, many Canadian universities have started initiatives aimed at increasing Indigenous representation in the academy through targeted Indigenous faculty hires, enhancing Indigenous student supports and spaces, increasing Indigenous content in the curriculum, and examining research ethics. Changes such as these require continued supportive actions by many people within the system, from the department, faculty, dean, and senior administration levels. It takes an enormous effort to build support across the system.

Foundational to this process is building relationships. Relationships are vital to creating awareness, building trust, and garnering support in order to mobilize action. Responding to the TRC must be an active and meaningful process that includes concerted visible actions that move us away from further colonization. It is important to understand that relationships take time to build and must be nurtured over time. Trust does not come easy when Indigenous Peoples have been subjugated and denied access to meaningful education, excluded from decision-making structures and processes, and largely alienated in the system. Part of the work here is that settler society needs to take a hard look at the history in this country and the impact that colonial imperial relations have had on Indigenous Peoples, communities, and Nations. This also includes deconstructing existing racialized constructions of Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, there needs to be action. Without movement or meaningful action, responding to the TRC will not amount to change. Any sustained change must attend to, at the very least, the colonial structures, control of knowledge and its production, and decision-making. As noted earlier in this chapter, the academy maintains control over the production of knowledge and what gets acknowledged as legitimate knowledge. This is largely through research. Smith and Webber (2018) contend that Indigenous knowledges do not need to be validated through Westernized views; rather

they note that "the prospect of actively applying Indigenous knowledges in ways that disrupt euro-centric knowledge systems is in itself a transformative endeavor" (p. 4). This disruption needs to be supported in the academy, a place where new ideas and ways of understanding the world are supposed to be valued.

Further, post-secondary institutions must consider how they are reproducing conditions whereby Indigenous students are unsuccessful and whereby Indigenous faculty are so over-burdened by seemingly endless requests to sit on committees, provide advice on matters of curriculum and research, provide guest lectures, or be members of teams that are submitting grants under an Indigenous envelope of funding. The increasing expectations placed on Indigenous students and faculty result in a burden of representation. Those in the academy must also take up their responsibility to go out and find the information they need. Having said that, I am not advocating that non-Indigenous people move ahead without consulting with Indigenous Peoples.

Bringing about transformative change is no easy task. Smith and Webber (2018) argue that "multiple interventions, utilizing multiple strategies that respond to multiple issues" are required, highlighting the fact that single-focused projects will not produce any sustained change (p. 3). I would also add that project-based funding will also not result in sustained change because the minute the project funding stops, so will the project. Commitments need to be much larger than specified special funding envelopes. Multiple interventions and strategies also point to working collaboratively across various sectors and institutions versus competing as no one academic institution can be all things.

A comment about leaders. Leaders and leadership are absolutely critical to transforming a system. Within any system, leaders can become key drivers or resistors to change. I like Wolverton's (1998) idea that there are three types of leadership needed to drive change: champions of change, change agents, and collaborators of change. In essence, bringing about change requires leaders who are willing to step up and lead the change. We cannot merely sit back and expect a system to change without people who are actively engaged in making the institution a better place for all. This means that leaders need to figure ways forward when trying to mobilize transformational change.

Wolverton (1998) also notes that change leaders think integratively, in that they understand the importance of involving people in the planning phases so that alignment among goals is increased and resistance is

decreased. In terms of structure, change leaders also understand that for substantive change to occur, processes must be fully integrated into the way the organization operates. This means that when contemplating transformative change, one needs to reflect on process and structure and ensure there are policies in place that will sustain the changes. In a *University Affairs* column, I recommended that at a minimum leaders should consider the following:

- Commit to the inclusion of Indigenous histories, culture, language, and knowledges in the curriculum and include this in senate policies. This will require laying a solid foundation with the academic faculties to ensure support.
- Include Indigenous representation on the board of governors and senate to ensure access to decision-making bodies.
- Embed Indigenous councils into the governance of the university, rather than leaving them as advisory-only. Indigenous councils also require formal links to the board and senate to ensure cross-representation.
- Negotiate formal retention initiatives with the faculty association and administration to support Indigenous faculty and ensure that they are set up to succeed.
- Re-examine research ethics protocols and ensure that they are not creating undue hardship for Indigenous faculty and students who are also doing research.
- Dedicate and name spaces. While many universities already have cultural spaces, there needs to continue to be physical markers of Indigenous presence on the campus by way of bilingual signage and named spaces that use the Indigenous language of the territory. It is also important to erect signage across campuses that accentuate and acknowledge the presence of Indigenous peoples. (Cote-Meek, 2018b)

These are in addition to those identified earlier in this paper. It will also be important to address the burden imposed on current Indigenous faculty and staff.

In closing, as I reflect back on the academy's response to Indigenous Peoples, I recognize the enormous struggle we have had in mobilizing change. I hope that what we are building today will sustain itself and that further changes will come more quickly than those that have been realized. In the chapters ahead, contributors provide their perspectives on decolonizing and indigenizing the academy under two thematic headings.

Theme 1: Indigenous Epistemologies: Exploring the Place of Indigenous Knowledges in Post-Secondary Curriculum, Including Indigenization of the Curriculum and Pedagogy. In this section, five authors share their experiences and insights about: importance of reclaiming land-based pedagogies (Angela Weenie); the strength of Anishinaabekwe (Anishnaabe women; Patricia McGuire); reconciliation strategies for Métis (Bryanna Scott); Indigenous relational networking (Candace Galla and Amanda Holmes); Indigenous theories of assessment (Evelyn Steinhauer, Tracy Cardinal, Marc Higgins, Brooke Madden, Noella Steinhauer, Patricia Steinhauer, Misty Underwood, Angela Wolfe, and Elder Bob Cardinal); and understanding of the struggle of Indigenous women in the academy (Celeste Pedri-Spade).

Theme 2: Decolonizing Post-Secondary Institutions: Building Space in the Academy for Indigenous Peoples, Resistance, and Reconciliation. The chapters in this section cover topics such as: questioning whether decolonization is actually possible in the academy (Lynn Lavallee); examining the dynamics of decolonization and indigenization (Emily Grafton and Jérôme Melançon); ways of decolonizing ourselves (Chantal Fiola and Shauna MacKinnon); education programs as sites of possibility (Fiona Purton, Sandra Styres, and Arlo Kempf); making decolonization a priority (Mary Ellen Donnan, Avril Aiken, and Jean L. Manore); teaching truth and redress (Michelle Coupal); examining white fragility and learning to work beyond comfortable diversity (Linda Pardy and Brett Pardy); reframing reconciliation (Keri Cheechoo), and engaging social media as indigenizing and decolonizing strategies (Taima Moeke-Pickering).

These chapters contain logistical solutions and strategies for decolonizing and indigenizing the academy. The book covers a wide range of current issues in the academy, providing insight into the layers, depths, and breadths of the systemic changes that are needed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the author define colonization?

2. What is the significance of understanding colonization relative to understanding how to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action?

3. How might you apply the learnings of how to transform the academy in your work?

FURTHER READINGS/WEBSITES

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) website: http://www.trc.ca/.

REFERENCES

Cote-Meek, S. (2014). *Colonized classrooms: Racism, trauma and resistance in post-secondary education*. Winnipeg, MB: Fernwood Publishing.

Cote-Meek, S. (2018a). The age of reconciliation: Transforming postsecondary education. In E. McKinley & L. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous education* (pp. 1–10). Singapore: Springer.

Cote-Meek, S. (2018b, November 6). Making a long-term commitment to Indigenous education. *University Affairs*. Retrieved from https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/from-the-admin-chair/making-a-long-term-commitment-to-indigenous-education/

Duffy, F., & Reigeluth, C. (2008). The School System Transformation (SST) Protocol. *Educational Technology, 48*(4), 41–49.

Eckel, P., & Kezar, A. (2003). Key strategies for making new institutional sense: Ingredients to higher education transformation. *High Education Policy, 16*(1), 39–53. doi:10.1057/palgrave.hep.8300001

Gass, R. (2010). What is transformational change? Retrieved from http://hiddenleaf.electricembers.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/What-is-Transformational-Change.pdf

Goldberg, D. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hamilton, G. (2018, May 25). As universities "Indigenize," some see a threat to open inquiry. *National Post*. Retrieved from https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/as-universities-indigenize-some-see-a-threat-to-open-inquiry

Loomba, A. (1998). *Colonialism/postcolonialism*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Mihesuah, D., & Wilson, A. C. (Eds.). (2004). *Indigenizing the academy: Transforming scholarship and empowering communities*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Moeke-Pickering, T., Hardy, S., Manitowabi, S., Mawhiney, A. M., Faries, E., Gibson van-Marrewijk, K., & Taitoko, M. (2006). Keeping our fire alive: Toward decolonising research in the academic setting. *World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium Journal*.

Monet, D., & Skanu'u. (1992). *Colonialism on trial: Indigenous land rights and the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en sovereignty case*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

Secretariat, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. (2009). Indigenous peoples, Indigenous voices factsheet. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf

Smith, G., & Webber, M. (2018). Transforming research and Indigenous education struggle. In E. McKinley & L. Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Indigenous education*. Singapore: Springer.

Smith, M. (Ed). (2013). *Transforming the academy: Essays on Indigenous education, knowledges and relations*. Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *The survivors speak: A report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Survivors_Speak_English_Web.pdf

Wolverton, M. (1998). Champions, agents and collaborators: Leadership keys to successful systemic change. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management, 20*(1), 19–30. doi:10.1080/1360080980200103

Watters, H. (2015, June 1). Truth and Reconciliation chair urges Canada to adopt the UN declaration on Indigenous Peoples. *CBC News*. Retrieved from https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-chair-urges-canada-to-adopt-un-declaration-on-indigenous-peoples-1.3096225