

Title: **TEACHING PRACTICES THAT DECOLONIZE STUDENTS**

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Project Timeframe: September 2012- January 2013

Location of Project: La Ronge Saskatchewan

Delivery Organization: Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies

Abstract:

“Colonization” is defined as “The establishment of a colony or colonies involving one country taking political and economic control of another country or territory and attempting to change the existing culture often by importing many people as settlers or administrators to encourage social transformation. The colonized country is usually exploited for the benefit of the colonizing country.” — *Aboriginal Studies 30 Contemporary Issues, 2005 (236)*

Our educational systems have institutionalized the colonization process for Aboriginal students. Teaching practices and strategies typically serve to promote socialization and reinforce colonization practices. **The question I asked my Adult 12 Native Studies class was: “What teaching practices will enable my students to decolonize themselves?”**

The Research Question: Would introducing decolonizing interventions in my Adult 12 Native Studies 30 class help my Aboriginal Adult students decolonize themselves?

The Intervention (including Baseline and Timeline):

The class I taught in Native Studies 30 in La Ronge was comprised of 15 students. All students were members of Lac La Ronge Indian Band. The Adult 12 class was composed of 3 males and 12 females and was taught from September 03 to January 2012/13.

I noticed when I began teaching my class in September 2012 that students were often absent, came in late and were not prepared for class. Students cited childcare, finances, housing and health issues as reasons for absence. I realized all these problems were related to lack of Life/Parenting skills. Could this problem be the residual effect of Residential schools?

I completed an oral survey with students and found that 5 students had attended residential school and 10 students had parents that had attended residential school. All students had someone in their immediate family that attended residential school.

Since we were discussing colonization in Native Studies 30 in September 2012, I decided to personalize this issue and create a project that addressed the residual impact of residential schools—colonization. I created a survey entitled “Colonization.” The questions on the

survey were:

Intervention: Colonization Survey

- What does colonization mean to you?
- Are you colonized?
- What evidence do you have that you have been colonized?
- In your opinion what are the biggest problems stemming from colonization?

Data Collection Techniques and Assessment of Outcomes:

- Student Survey (questionnaire)
- Reflective Journaling
- Project completion & Assessment?

Students completed this survey during the Native Studies 30 class.

Students completed the following activities:

- **Brainstorming the term “ colonization”**
- **Researching, defining and comparing the term colonization**
- **Students completed a reflective journal entry entitled “What have you learned about colonization.”**

And, they completed the following (second) survey questionnaire:

- . Decolonization survey
- If you consider yourself colonized what would you like to do to decolonize yourself?
- Do you believe our community is colonized?
- If you believe our community is colonized how can we decolonize ourselves?
- Has colonization affected you spiritually, physically, mentally, or emotionally?
- What activities can we initiate in our classroom to decolonize ourselves?

The Findings: Colonization Survey

Of the 15 surveys handed out, 15 surveys were returned (100%)

In reply to the following questions:

A) Are you colonized?

88% agreed / 11% undecided

B) What evidence do you have that you have been colonized?

Students responses are divided into three areas of focus:

- 52% indicate language loss as evidence
- 33% indicated lack of education as evidence
- 11% indicate they are ashamed of themselves

C) In your opinion what are the biggest problems stemming from colonization?

- 88% indicated problems of loss of .language, loss of culture, loss of power.

- One student did not understand the question.
- One student did not fill out the answer.

Reflective Journal Entries “What have you learned about colonization?”

- We are colonized but we have enough pride and strength to decolonize ourselves.
- It seems that we cannot keep our traditions and other things our ancestors cherished.
- It was the colonizers’ way by converting Aboriginals to their social world view. So we wouldn’t know ours but theirs.
- Colonization is taking away who we are and what we believe in and values that we have.
- Colonization is a constant daily process that attempts to change or overrule our way of life.
- Colonization is everywhere. It is in our schools Band Offices, government buildings. I feel it’s everywhere; people treat each other unfairly because they know they can get away with things.
- Colonization is the federal and provincial government’s way of controlling and continuing to control people’s way of life as well as culture.
- They are trying to take and make us the way they are. My brother and sister went to residence and for a long time we couldn’t understand each other but we made it.
- Colonization is all over the world.
- People abusing our culture and language.
- I am going to stay being an Indian or a Human being.
- We have changed a lot from the way we used to live.

Students discovered their problems related to the holistic world view of the medicine wheel. With these findings, we embarked on a multi-faceted approach to exploring decolonization.

INTERVENTIONS

Following this survey, further questions were asked and discussed as we moved towards our best decisions for interventions that might help decolonize learners in the class.

Second Action: Decolonization

- **Brainstorm decolonization**
- **Researching, defining and comparing the definition of decolonization.**

Decolonization Survey

The second action was to ask:

1. If you consider yourself colonized what would you like to do to decolonize yourself?
2. Do you believe our community is colonized?
3. If you believe our community is colonized how can we decolonize ourselves?
4. Has colonization affected you spiritually, physically, mentally, or emotionally?
5. What activities can we initiate in our classroom to decolonize ourselves?

The Findings: Decolonization Survey

In reply to the following questions:

A) “If you consider yourself colonized what would you like to do to decolonize yourself?”

78 % of students indicated they would like to go the trap line.
21% of students said to learn language

B) “If you believe our community is colonized how can we decolonize ourselves?”

- 100% of students indicated that they believed our community was colonized.
- 60% of the students said introduce native culture
- 26% of the students said make our own laws
- 13% of the students said become more involved in community

C) “Has colonization affected you spiritually, physically, mentally, or emotionally?”

Spiritual 0% no influence	Mental 0% no influence
26% little influence	42% little influence
33% more influence	28% more influence
40 % great influence	28 % great influence
Physical 7% no influence	Emotional 0% no influence
35% little influence	21% little influence
42% more influence	40% more influence
14% great influence	35% great influence

D) What activities can we initiate in our classroom to decolonize ourselves?

Spiritual-Power

- 100% of students surveyed indicated
- Increased student involvement in educational program
- **Suggestions:** keep track of their own attendance, input into curriculum activities
- Involvement in community and band policy

Mental-Language

- 100% of the students surveyed indicated: they would like to increase usage of Cree language in daily activities.
- **Suggestions:** Instructors try to learn language
- Practice language at home

.Physical-Cultural

- 100% of the students surveyed indicated: they would like to increase cultural activities in classroom

Suggestions:

- make moccasins, mitts, tobacco pouches, beadwork , prepare hides
- Hunt , Trap and prepare meat, collect birch bark, set nets, pick berries

Emotional- Community

- 100% of the students surveyed indicated they would like to increase cultural activities in community.

Suggestions:

- give mitts and moccasins away to elders, give meat and fish away to Elders,
- Help out at Long Term Care,
- More involvement with community activities

DISCUSSION

After completing the month long project it was discovered that engaging in holistic teaching practices empowers the students to decolonize themselves.

Some of the activities we experimented with included the following:

- Beading and making moccasins for elder's gifts.
 - Students tracking their own attendance in morning and afternoon classes on monthly attendance form
 - Students encouraged to explore different modalities of expression in curriculum activities such , oral presentations, PowerPoint presentations ,writing music, painting, sketching ,
 - Culture activities will be embedded within curriculum context. For example cultural art activities, quillwork (cleaning preparing and dying porcupine quills) Fish scale art(cleaning preparing and dying fish scales) Preparing a moose hide as part of the Native Studies, Science and ELA curriculums.
 - Elders and community members will be approached with tobacco and asked to share their knowledge (all subject areas)
- Students will receive credit for participating in community activities,
- Beading daffodil pins and donating the money to Cancer research relay for life.
 - Volunteering at the long term care home on the reserve and in La Ronge. Planning and hosting elders Christmas tea.
 - Beading and conversational Cree classes are offered over the noon hour by Fluent Cree speaking students.

We began begin implementing Cree Language into our daily programming. Fluent Cree speaking students wrote the date in both Cree and English on the board daily. Students had the choice to write the date in either Cree or English. Oral conversations in Cree inspired journal entries.

Students, staff, and Education administration are planning student orientation at Cultural camp in fall. Cultural camp activities will focus on exploring student's strengths through building teamwork and communication skills.

We completed the **Representational Self Identity Art 30 Project** and it was very successful. Students have published their reflective essays in a book. Each student is taking a copy with them when they graduate. They donated their projects to our school where they remain on display.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH NEEDED

I have informally tracked the student progress towards decolonization from February 2013 to May 2013 and offer the following recommendations for other practitioners and further study .

Holistic Spiritual Activities: Power: Attendance Responsibility

Students continue to mark their own attendance daily. I have collected student attendance forms and noticed that they have been marking their reasons for absence on their sheets. Many students have been figuring out their percentage attendance and made comments regarding their low attendance.

Holistic Physical: Activities: Cultural Activities

Students have continued to bead and make moccasins this term. Students replicated and beaded Six Nation wampum belt with our school name on it. Students have also collected birch bark to make baskets. Students have plans for a hunting trip this fall .

Holistic Mental Activities: Cree Language

~50% of the students wrote the date in their journal in the Cree Language in February
~30% of students continue to write the date in their journal in Cree in May.

Holistic Emotional Activities: Community Involvement

Students increased involvement in community by walking in the Relay for Life Cancer Drive. Students also donated money to the Cancer Association in Saskatoon. I feel that increased student involvement in these activities have made an impact on students' lives.

In addition to repeating this project in the fall I will further explore activities that encourage responsibility in adult students (Planning and organizing a cultural camp and hunting trip) I would also like to explore and create further activities which address and equalize the power structure between adult students and instructor in the classroom. I believe future research is needed in holistic education for Aboriginal Adult students. I would like to explore the application of Circle of Courage model. (Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity) and create and integrate Circle of Courage activities to adult curriculum.

Future projects exploring the Circle of Courage model could include:

“The Circle of Courage”: Representational Self Identity Art (30) Activity

Create a SQUILT block: a piece of art work the size of a quilt block approximately 8x 11 that you have designed to represent yourself.

Choose your material: If special material or colours are needed, please inquire.

Paint, draw, bead or quill your quilt block with symbols that reflect your life. Please choose from a variety of media, plasticized, paper, felt, construction paper, cardboard, leather, rawhide etc.

Write a 2 page reflective essay double spaced (12 point font) explaining your quilt.

Together students and instructors can discover and create teaching practices which move our communities towards decolonization. Any or all of these activities showed promise and helped move my students towards a reduction in colonization, as self-identified.