DEDI PART 1: DECOLONIZATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

> This Food for Thought is part of a special 4-part series exploring approaches to *Decolonization, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion* (DEDI) in the context of teaching. We also encourage you to review York University's full 2023-2028 DEDI Strategy, which includes key principles, approaches, and strategies for the classroom and beyond.

WHAT IS IT?

According to York's DEDI Strategy, "decolonization refers to the social and political movement for Indigenous self-determination, and the liberation of all humans and non-humans from the oppression of colonial systems, institutions, logic and practice" (York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028, p. 9). As such, decolonization in the context of teaching and learning entails recognizing how colonial systems, structures, and discourse manifest within classrooms and actively working to deconstruct and challenge often taken-for-granted structures and practices.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Decolonization is more than simply 'diversifying' one's course or increasing the representation of Indigenous scholars in one's syllabus. It also entails critically engaging with discourse and practices that sustain colonial structures and moving away from reinforcing these through one's practice. Moreover, it involves resisting dominant colonial narratives that result in or support oppressive practices and reorienting one's approach to teaching and learning so that notions of power, hierarchy, and oppression are recognized and that their implications are considered. This also entails ensuring that those within our networks and circles (e.g. students and colleagues) are also encouraged to actively engage in this process. This work is iterative and ongoing, and, as such, reflection is a large part of this process.

Engaging in decolonization and striving to decolonize teaching and learning requires constant learning and reflection. Deconstructing and challenging colonial structures and practices that have such a profound influence on the classrooms and institutions in which we teach, takes time, consistent effort and (re)learning. By reflecting deeply on the courses and learning environments we create, it becomes easier to understand how taken for granted colonial underpinnings are sometimes (unintentionally) foundational in our course design.

HOW CAN INSTRUCTORS DECOLONIZE THEIR CLASSROOMS?

For instructors who are interested in decolonizing their teaching, consider trying some of the following suggestions:

1. **Identify your own responsibility to decolonization and how you can create change.**
   Decolonization requires us to engage in reflexive work, become more comfortable with facing injustices in history as well as those within the present context, and consider what we can do to make real change. This can be uncomfortable and incite apprehension, uncertainty, and doubt. Sometimes navigating this is the first step, as overcoming this discomfort enables us to do the work more meaningfully and effectively as we truly recognize the salience of our role in the process of decolonization.

2. **Avoid treating decolonization as an 'add on'.** Decolonization can often involve 'adding' non-Western and/or non-Eurocentric scholarship and content into one's course. While meaningfully centering marginalized and/or underrepresented scholarship, thought, and approaches within your course is essential, it is important to reflect on whether the course itself reinforces colonial practices and systems. As such, **move away from 'comfortable diversity', or diversity that is surface level or tokenistic.** Rather than building onto existing colonial systems and structures, strive to challenge and dismantle them. You can practice this through the intentional design of: activities (e.g. provide opportunities for peer learning and peer assessment to move away from the notion of the instructor as the only keeper of knowledge); participation (e.g. move away from a 'universally correct' approach to assessment and, instead, welcome diverse knowledge and ways of knowing); assessment (e.g. move away from the idea that all knowledge learning must be assessed and graded, and move towards notions of ungrading); and relational opportunities (e.g. prioritize collaboration and community amongst students over competition, and provide opportunities to foster relationships).

3. **Consider how colonization may actually manifest within your classroom.** Decolonizing involves acknowledging that classrooms are spaces of power and privilege which can fundamentally reinforce colonized structures and oppression. For example, **consider how knowledge is constructed and understood within your classroom.** Is knowledge seen as primarily being passed down from the instructor to the students? Or is it decentralized and seen as reciprocally shared where students have opportunities to teach and learn from one another also? Do you provide diverse ways for knowledge to be both gained and shared? Who gets to teach and who gets to learn, and in what ways? What assumptions are made of the teaching and learning process that reflect broader dominant norms and discourses?

4. **Encourage students to critically reflect on and challenge notions of power, hierarchy, and dominant colonial narratives that permeate their learning.** Building on the point above, reflecting on the influence of colonial systems and the classroom is important for students to engage in also. Support group learning and reflection where students can reflect, teach, and learn together. Some examples of how this can be done include: a group analysis of a foundational disciplinary practice, an individual analysis of dominant discourses within a particular course text of their choice, reflective journaling on how they feel as a learner in your course, and story writing/telling to evoke how lived experiences influence their place in the classroom.

5. **Be transparent about your process of engaging in decolonizing work and seek student input**, so that students understand your intention in doing this work and are provided space to influence the process. If you have made an intentional change or design to your course in moving towards decolonizing your classroom, share this with your students and ask for their feedback. Ask students for their suggestions on course reading materials or course activities that may support decolonizing the classroom, and ask them for feedback on your current decolonizing strategies to assess if they are positively received. Decolonization cannot be done in silos and requires communal effort. As such, invite students to share knowledge and experience that can help to inform the course through a learner perspective, and empower students to lead change as well.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (Internal)

Decolonization, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion at Glendon (DEDI).
https://www.yorku.ca/glendon/decolonization-equity-diversity-and-inclusion/

Indigenous at York University Website: https://indigenous.yorku.ca/

York University Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion. https://rights.info.yorku.ca/

York University Decolonizing, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028.
https://www.yorku.ca/vpepc/wp-content/uploads/sites/310/2023/03/22-201_DEDI-Strategy-2023-28_EN_r3.pdf

York University Indigenous Framework. https://indigenous.yorku.ca/files/2017/08/Indigenous-Framework-for-York-University-A-Guide-to-Action.pdf

York University Indigenous History Month. https://www.yorku.ca/about/indigenous-history-month/

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (External)

Explore in 15-30 Minutes

Dion, S.D. (2022). Seeing yourself in relationship with settler colonialism. In Dion, S. D. (Eds). *Braided Learning: Illuminating Indigenous Presence Through Art and Story (pp.31-73)*. Purich Books.

Mintz, S. (2021, June 21). Decolonizing the academy. Inside Higher Ed.
https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/decolonizing-academy

Phiri, A., & Mupotsa, D. (2020, July 15). On decolonising teaching practices, not just the syllabus. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/on-decolonising-teaching-practices-not-just-the-syllabus-137280

Explore in 30-60 minutes

Davis, L., Hiller, C., James, C., Lloyd, K., Nasca, T., & Taylor, S. (2017). Complicated pathways: Settler Canadians learning to re/frame themselves and their relationships with Indigenous peoples. *Settler Colonial Studies*, *7*(4), 398-414.

Charles, E. (2019) Decolonizing the curriculum. Insights 32 (1), p. 24. ISSN 2048-7754. Available at: https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/28953/1/28953.pdf

Explore in 60+ minutes

Cote-Meek, S., & Moeke-Pickering, T. (Eds.). (2020). *Decolonizing and Indigenizing education in Canada*. Canadian Scholars' Press.

Justice, D. H. (2018). *Why Indigenous literatures matter*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Stein, S., Ahenakew, C., Jimmy, E., Andreotti, V., Valley, W., Amsler, S., & Calhoun, B. (2021). Developing stamina for decolonizing higher education: A workbook for non-Indigenous people. *Gesturing towards decolonial futures collective*.

Would you like to learn more?

Contact us at Teaching Commons for additional resources, handouts, applications, courses, workshops, examples, advice, assistance, one-on-one consulting, and everything else related to teaching and learning. We are happy and eager to assist you!

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