

# Decolonization in an Educational Context



Centre for  
Youth & Society  UVic

*Decolonization is a process, not a one-time event. It is essential to keep reflecting throughout, and not to be discouraged that it's not always straightforward.*

## Why This Matters

Decolonization fits into the broader goals of reconciliation as outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Schools are vital sites for decolonization and student empowerment.

## Key Points

- ❖ Decolonization is the process of undoing colonizing practices. Within the educational context, this means confronting and challenging the colonizing practices that have influenced education in the past, and which are still present today.
- ❖ In the past, schools have been used for colonial purposes of forced assimilation. The TRC reports remind us that residential schools were specifically designed to colonize the mind, the heart, and the spirit.
- ❖ Nowadays, colonialism is more subtle, and is often perpetuated through curriculum, power relations, and institutional structures.

## What the Research Says

- ❖ Curriculum is an important aspect of decolonization. Schools need to consider whose knowledge and ways of knowing are given priority.
- ❖ Decolonized education is rooted in connections to place. Place-based education empowers students and helps restore cultural knowledge.
- ❖ Part of the process of decolonizing education is re-establishing links to the community. Education should not occur in a vacuum, and these links are essential for contextualizing knowledge, deepening understanding, encouraging community involvement, and reconnecting students with a vital support system.
- ❖ It is important, moving forward, to reflect on the goal of education. This reflection often uncovers motives for mandated education deeply rooted in colonialist policy.

***“Consider that for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan—their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system” (Battiste, 2013, p. 23)***

## What the Research Says

- ❖ Decolonization involves reflecting on the structure of educational institutions, and their role within the larger society.
- ❖ It is also important to confront the power relations within these institutions. Some questions to ask are: Who is in control of knowledge? What is their role? How did they gain this role? What maintains their power?
- ❖ Within a diverse population of students, part of decolonization is learning how to be an ally, and to work in solidarity with each other—not just among students, but staff as well.
- ❖ Perhaps the most essential part of decolonization is continual reflection. Schools should be willing to reflect on curriculum, power dynamics, their own structuring, and any action undertaken on behalf of their students.

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## What You Need to Know

Alternative schools are excellent spaces for fostering decolonization, because they can challenge educational norms by:

- ❖ Providing a more individualized approach to education, rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach;
- ❖ Implementing principles of decolonization, such as healing, empowerment, reflection, and connections to place and community;
- ❖ Validating students’ experiences;
- ❖ Fostering strength;
- ❖ Helping students to form their identities, rather than forcing an identity on them;
- ❖ Valuing cultural heritage and place-based knowledge;
- ❖ Focusing on the positive, such as resilience and resolution, rather than a deficit-based approach;
- ❖ Educating the whole person, not just the intellect.

***“The work of decolonization entails not only our self-reflexive efforts to work through mind-numbing alienation and essentializing divides, but also the commitment to transformation in social and educational contexts.” (Asher, 2009, p. 75)***