

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

Setting the Context

- The book is written out of the author's experience of teaching Indigenous students in post-secondary classrooms and out of their own experience as an Anishinaabe-kwe learner.
- This led to doctoral research involving in-depth interviews with a mix of 15 Indigenous students, professors, and Elders.
- Two questions are explored:
 1. What is the experience of Indigenous students when confronted with curriculum on colonial history that is marked by violence?
 2. What healing pedagogical practices might be useful in supporting Indigenous students when experiencing topics of colonial violence?

Conceptualizing the Impact of the Colonial Encounter

- This chapter provides a review of the literature from key critical theory and psychoanalytic theory perspectives and conceptualizes colonization in four dimensions:
 1. It concerns the land
 2. It requires a specific structure of ideology to proceed
 3. It is violent
 4. It is ongoing
- Indigenous students may be feeling the ongoing trauma and violence of colonization while simultaneously, for the first time, learning about Indigenous history within the context of post-secondary education, which itself is a colonial institution.
- The risk of further inducing trauma or of retraumatizing is great but we must commit to teaching this history to ensure it is not forgotten.
- It is imperative then that this history be met with *pedagogical healing*.
 - Decolonizing is part of this healing process.
 - Focusing on more than cognitive learning (holism) is another part of the healing process.

Negotiating the Cultural/Colonial Divide in the Post-Secondary Classroom

- Education has always been central in the colonizing project and it is further into this project that Indigenous faculty and students enter during post-secondary education.
- Here they are met with the imagined narratives about who they are supposed to be.
- Some viewpoints **Indigenous faculty** identified encountering:
 - The only real Indian is the spiritual/cultural Indian
 - Having the authenticity of their Indianness challenged
 - Being viewed as not really an academic
 - Being called upon as the Indian expert

- The historical and more contemporary abuses perpetrated against Indigenous people through education are discussed in this chapter, with race and racism being the main focal point.

Negotiating Race in the Post-Secondary Classroom

- Indigenous students face a number of constraints or conditions
 - Discriminatory legislation
 - Being marked as racially and culturally different
 - “At-risk” discourse
 - Not seeing themselves represented in the curriculum or the institution
- Societal, institutional, and personal racism are major challenges for Indigenous students
- Ways in which naming racism is met by Indigenous students in post-secondary spaces include:
 - Denial of racism
 - Being silenced
 - Considered unintelligent
 - Denigration of Native Studies courses
 - Locked into the role of Native Expert
 - Called upon to be the cultural/spiritual Indian
- In addition, Indigenous students are contending with day-to-day racism outside of the classroom

Trauma in the Classroom

- The trauma of racism in post-secondary classrooms is responded to by students in various ways
 - Sadness and anger
 - Shame and embarrassment
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Feeling of being viewed under a microscope
- Another possibility is that these colonial narratives casting light on the factors behind the marginalization and oppression they feel, leads to feelings of validation that strengthen identity

Resisting Ongoing Racism and Colonialism in the Post-Secondary Classroom

- Students identified several ways they negotiate racism
 - Not self-identifying as Indigenous
 - Having safe places to express feelings
 - Educating and raising the critical consciousness of others
 - Accessing Indigenous student services
 - Accessing traditional supports
 - Actively challenging and resisting racism
 - Debriefing and acknowledging the emotional impact of the classroom experience

Closing the Circle: The Possibilities for Transformational Pedagogy

- In this chapter, an anti-colonial framework is coupled with an Anishinaabe worldview, provided by Elders, to suggest possibilities for appropriate pedagogy when dealing with difficult course content.
- Healing from ongoing colonial violence and trauma is central in this pedagogical approach.
- Here are the concrete suggestions coming out of the research:
 - **In the Classroom**
 1. Professors must teach from a position of knowing and understanding that Indigenous learners enter postsecondary education marked by racialized constructions and are likely experiencing ongoing colonial violence in their lives.
 2. Professors must engage in holistic approaches to learning that bring attention and care to Indigenous students' emotions.
 3. Professors must confront racism that arises in the classroom.
 4. Professors must contribute to creating spaces where Indigenous and other racialized students can connect with each other.
 - **Institutionally**
 1. Policies must ensure the hiring and support of Indigenous faculty across all disciplines.
 2. Anti-racism must become the ethos of the institution.
 3. Education policy at the elementary and secondary school levels needs to change so that Indigenous students do not arrive at postsecondary education already marked by racialized constructions.

The book ends with these questions for readers to take up:

1. What is the pedagogical ethic of introducing narratives that are violent and may be traumatic in the classroom?
2. Is it better to altogether abandon mixed classrooms when teaching difficult materials?
3. What places/spaces are best suited for topics that include raising students' critical consciousness about ongoing colonization and its impact on Indigenous peoples?
4. Can the kind of culture-based education, which may include critical consciousness of ongoing colonization, be delivered in a way that does not perpetuate racialized constructions, or are we forever bound in the colonized/colonizer binary?