



# Decolonizing Pedagogy: Using Student-Centred and Culturally-Responsive Learning to Support Indigenous Student Success

## What is this Research About?

Indigenous students are under-represented in post-secondary classrooms. If universities and colleges do not strive to decolonize higher education, Indigenous students may continue to face barriers to making career and economic advances. Decolonized classrooms often include culturally-responsive and Indigenous pedagogy that offer healing. In order to implement these approaches effectively, transformational change of educational systems is required. This kind of substantial change was observed at a high school in Saskatchewan between 2010 and 2014. This high school has a large Indigenous and “non-traditional” student population. Student outcomes improved dramatically during the four-year study period. For example, student graduation rates increased from 3% to 55%, credit completion rates increased from 31% to 81%, and attendance rates increased from 52% to 77%. The researchers explored the changes in the school that may have contributed to these new outcomes. The researchers identify specific teaching strategies, attitudes, cultural considerations, wrap-around support services and physical features that were implemented in the school.

## What did the Researchers Do?

The researchers used a case-study approach to understand which teaching strategies used and changes made at one Saskatchewan high school were most beneficial to Indigenous and “non-traditional” students. The researchers interviewed 7 educational faculty, 3 of whom identify as Indigenous. The staff discussed their teaching methods with the researchers, and the researchers analyzed the information to identify themes.

## What did the Researchers Find?

The researchers identified 6 themes from the interviews: culturally-relevant teaching practices, student-centred education, teacher supports, positive learning environment and social system, relational pedagogy, active learning, and inquiry-based pedagogy. Multiple school-wide support strategies were used by all school staff. A wholistic, student-centred approach was used, including addressing spiritual, academic, physical, medical, social, housing, and financial student needs. The researchers found that teachers worked collaboratively to offer an inclusive and equity-based school environment, which differed dramatically from the students’ previous school experiences. The staff empowered students by supporting Indigenous culture and pride. The school provided childcare, Elders, and ceremonies to foster a sense of belonging and family. Teachers were considered healers and allies for the students. Teachers learned about inquiry-based learning through on-going professional development. These new school dynamics and the non-hierarchical approach were important factors in the decolonization efforts in the school environment.

# SoTL

## Snapshot

A synopsis of a scholarship of teaching and learning journal article

### ➔ How to Implement this Research in Your Classroom

Researchers studied a Canadian high school that implemented new teaching strategies and community-building approaches, resulting in positive outcomes for the students. The researchers found that all staff that they interviewed were invested in the change process and worked collaboratively to change the whole school environment. Student well-being was the priority at this school. The school and the teachers offered many wholistic supports to students including childcare and ceremonies. This information can be used to inform post-secondary classrooms and campuses that are seeking to better support Indigenous students. This information can also be used to make decisions in higher education around how to offer culturally-responsive pedagogy, to decolonize classrooms, to offer equitable and anti-biased education, and to counteract the systemic and structural barriers that exist for Indigenous students.

### ➔ Citation

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### ➔ Keywords

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