Unlearning Colonial Course Descriptions to Transform Learning Culture

ZEN PARRY *Nova Southeastern University*

Pedagogy of Whiteness

Within the last decades, education has undergone multiple transformations including offering preset syllabi and technology-based modes of presentation to learners. Parallel to these changes has been the emergence of efforts addressing diversity, equity and inclusion, leading to critical discussions on issues within higher education and aligned topics embracing social, economic, environmental and racial justice. The author of this paper is Caucasian and is described as "white, middle-class and female." The author has also experienced being a minority employed in a range of international educational institutions delivering hegemonic pedagogy that is overwhelmingly "white" by design and nature, and not necessarily representative of the lived experiences, beliefs, values, and perceptions of the students in the study programs.

Through these lived personal experiences, the author has explored whether the language used in educational settings, specifically hegemonic white language, affects the understandability and relatability of the content by the students of the course. A key factor in acknowledging the understandability and relatability of the content by students can be attached to the primary language spoken by students, either in the home or in their education journey. In this context and within the understanding of hegemony implying a dominant (white) view of reality and truth, reading course descriptions potentially leads to perceptions of the pedagogy of whiteness. The purpose of this paper is for readers to reflect on what is frequently taken for granted in academic catalogs—the colonial language of course descriptions—leading to faculty considering changes in their course descriptions that engage their student population in more inclusive ways. This paper will address some problems encountered when the pedagogy of whiteness exists in a non-white education setting, where non-white students must rely on colonial course descriptions to create their first perceptions and understanding of their syllabi.

Acknowledging an active "pedagogy of whiteness" allows one to critically examine whiteness embedded in course design and invites students to examine the political, social, psychological, and historical aspects of race (Gordon, 2005). A pedagogy of whiteness also locates whiteness as a platform for power and bias (Schneider & Nicolazzo, 2020). The study by Schneider and Nicolazzo (2020) seeks to create an inclusive classroom environment for collaborative engagement, direction for action, and critique. With awareness of the pedagogy of whiteness and what is entailed, educators can construct an environment that encourages active listening, reflexive action, and intellectual humility that may lead to the solving of the challenges of the whiteness dogma.

Statistics of Non-native English Speakers in Higher Education

The population of non-native English-speaking students is rising in the United States as a quarter of the youth are growing up with parents as immigrants and non-English languages spoken in the home. It is estimated that by 2040, over 33% of the youth will be growing up in immigrant homes (Passel, 2011). From the year 2004-2005, the percentage of non-native English speakers rose from 9.1% to 9.4%, representing a rise in the population from 4.3 million students to 4.6 million students (Fry, 2006). With these statistics in mind, this author posits an urgent need to consider the non-native English-speaking students and bi-lingual or tri-lingual students when academics and faculty are crafting a curriculum beginning with the course description. The focus of this paper draws on the author's experience teaching at an accredited tribal college in the USA.

Injustices through Colonial Language

The definition of colonial language includes the technical description contained in a dictionary, and the interpretation of colonial language in the academic setting as discussed by Léglise and Migge (2008). Léglise and Migge emphasize how history and language are entangled and how linguistic and social inequalities emerged in colonized regions of the world. Following similar lines of discussion, race and ethnicity are closely tied to concerns on justice and equality (García & Garcia, 2001). Injustices based on race and ethnicity are seen through colonial language in education systems and include issues around competition, the elevation of a single voice, isolation in the formation of groups, and restriction of some parts of the curriculum. In competition, white students may feel superior to non-white students because of familiarity with the English language. In the elevation of a single voice, the teacher may address issues that only uphold the interests of the whites, excluding the non-whites. When the teacher asks the students to form groups, sometimes white students may avoid being in a group with non-white students because of perceptions of language barriers. A teacher may limit access to some parts of the syllabus to the non-white student, which becomes a limitation to the access of some information by the non-white student (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

In today's K-12 classrooms, it is unlikely one will find students being beaten for speaking their mother tongue. Nor is one likely to find students being forced to wear physical signs to signify their ignorance of the English language. The author asks readers if they know of someone who was not allowed to speak their mother tongue language at home in attempts to facilitate integration into the American culture. Recent public media headlines directly relating to the context for this discussion include the discovery of victims in Residential Schools where native American children were housed and the issue of languages within the Residential Schools (Gillies, 2021; Stirbys & McComber, 2021).

Context of Inquiry

The context of inquiry for this paper is framed within native American tribal colleges as members of the tribal college network within the USA, known as the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. This network hosts 37 Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) in the United States ranging from two-year to four-year colleges offering certificates, associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees, and recently one college offering a doctoral program (AIHEC, n.d.). A catalog of tribal colleges and universities in the USA and the degrees offered is available online (Tribal College Journal, n.d.). There is a similar TCU network for First Nation students in Canada. Students are drawn from communities within the USA and Canada with some institutions also hosting exchanges with other tribal programs internationally. Through participation and onsite studies teaching in tribal communities internationally and nationally within the US, the author presents a small sample of research, presented as a pilot case study with the potential for developing further understanding of the issues of colonial course description language.

Referring to the recent media headlines involving native American (Lajimodiere, D. K., 2016, July) and Canadian First Nation residential schools (Hanson, E., Gamez, D., & Manuel, A., 2020, September), revelations about the loss of languages have underscored well-known and familiar discussions amongst audiences in the research study sites for this case study, highlighting the adoption of language as power being a colonial ideology enforced on native American children under the pretense of pursuing a better life. Tribes are the stewards of their languages, although many tribal students are not fluent in their tribal languages. However, the students are fluent in their cultural practices and beliefs, which can vary significantly tribe to tribe, and also represent similarities.

One example of racial injustice today is when Indigenous students enroll in courses in higher education. Through this experience, they are often confronted with faculty representing different knowledge systems than their own knowledge systems and references through tribal contexts. This situation can be exacerbated through particular academic disciplines such as STEM or individual science topics where versions of western methodology are taught that can contradict Indigenous methodology. Indigenous knowledge can also be presented in different frameworks with a worldview that is holistic in nature and based on cultural ways of knowing, with the author noting that not all Indigenous groups have the same beliefs. An example of this phenomena is when a European-Caucasian scientist states a rock is inanimate, whereas an Indigenous student can identify a relationship to the rock as being part of their culture and the rock is not inanimate. This example supports the research of Bang and Medin (2010), who studied how students in summer science programs learn through multiple ways of knowing with information delivered by mainstream teachers and tribal Elders. Conclusions drawn from the Bang and Medin study stated that "science learning environments that are supportive of cultured meanings of science benefit minority students" (Bang & Medin, 2010). The author extends this observation to the language of course descriptions for similar reasons.

When these belief systems of western and Indigenous students and faculty intersect, language can be crucial, especially if the course description is in English, the teaching is in the English language and the student is from a non-English speaking world and non-western belief system. These factors prompted a more in-depth discussion with the author, colleagues and other students, many of whom identified similar issues, leading to the research study to explore what is labelled as "colonial language to communicate with an audience that is non-colonial in heritage."

Situating Research in Context

There is existing research from multiple disciplines and frameworks showing that diversity has benefits for colleges (Rodriguez, 2015) and showing how the inclusion of a variety of race-based perspectives in the curriculum can assist learners, institutions, and society in general. Students experience the benefits of diversity in college when they can interact with other students freely. Diversity also assists colleges seeking effectiveness in handling a range of student heritages and ethnicities. The benefits of diversity to the general public are the improvements to the quality of life in society as a whole. Societal benefits of diversity include the attainment of educated and informed citizens who can receive the services they require from the government, and the development of democratic goals. The research and information in previous studies pertaining to the benefits of diversity are drawn from economics, health, policies, law, feminist studies, social psychology, and organizational behavior, reflecting how students grow and change while in college.

Research by Chang (2000) states that diversity brings a positive outlook in a student's growth and development both on the campus and off-campus, expanding this influence for the interpersonal, cognitive, and affective areas of the student experience. Besides minority students, even the majority of students can gain from the educational benefit incorporating diversity (Johnson et al., 2001). The representation of students in the student body is a major contributor to the diversity on the campus (Saha, 2014). The impact of the type of diversity is enhanced or influenced by the students' interactions with one another, the students' context (Dong, 2019), and student involvement in extra-curricular activities. Thus, diverse representation on campus aids in the interaction of students and their individual growth and development as citizens. Social commentary on diversity in general and racial diversity on campus is also addressed through a Netflix series available in 2017 (Newkirk II et al., 2017), portraying a group of black students on a mostly white elite university. Space in this essay precludes further discussion, however, viewing the Netflix series offers valuable insights into a complex, real world, contemporary experience, best summarized by the series tag line of "grow through any means necessary."

Diversity in the classroom offers benefits such as the contribution of students to democracy and the economy through their willing ideas (Dills, 2017). Through attending diverse schools and education, students enjoy material benefits in the long run as they also secure jobs and establish professional careers after graduation. With the marketing of a diverse school, institutions create trust in the corporate world through what the institution is offering as top-quality education and, as such, after graduating, these students can secure a job. Students who have engaged in racial studies also have an increased awareness of the aim of enhancing racial understanding in society (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Integrating appropriate vocabulary into course descriptions and classroom interactions while eliminating or minimizing colonial language has the potential to create opportunities for students and faculty to share cultural experiences and content. This sharing can contribute to inclusion through cultural sustainability and lead to innovation in the learning experience. Referring back to the example of how a rock is labelled in a science class, it is possible to imagine the cultural exchange between the Indigenous student and their "ancestor" in the form of a rock, and the European Caucasian scientist realizing that the rock is not in-animate from that student's perspective and that the status of the rock needs to be clarified and free of assumptions derived from the pedagogy of whiteness. If the student had not spoken up in class, the faculty member would not have known how the course language was impacting the student. By encouraging this mutual understanding, it is possible to create an education and learning culture of respect for heritage, ethnicity and knowledge systems represented by the students, while promoting diversity, inclusion and equity within the classroom cohort and faculty.

The research on the benefits of diversity help frame this inquiry approach, supporting the purpose of this research project to identify if cultural concepts are integrated into programs that attract Indigenous students, with the content expressed in a language identifiable to the Indigenous student population. The research project is presented as an exploratory study to collect base data to support further extensive projects addressing the issues of injustice and colonial language in higher education.

Methodological Approach

An accredited tribal college was the priority research site for one course (Site A). A parallel second data capture was completed using 11 departments offering the same qualification that was different from the primary course site. The departments were selected from the pool of 35 tribal colleges within the tribal college network in the U.S. All tribal colleges in the research study accept non-tribal students and depending on the locale and population where the tribal college is, diversity in the classroom can be extensive. Diversity is represented through national and international tribal affiliations and enrollment status and non-tribal students.

Site A offers 4-year and 2-year programs and certificates, with an enrollment of less than 600 students and faculty predominantly being of non-tribal heritage, and with the exception of specific non-English language courses, all course delivery is in the English language. At Site A, diversity is measured by students declaring their tribal affiliations and sovereign nations membership which can be international across geopolitical and state borders and can include declarations of race. For this discussion, one department at Site A was identified to explore the role of language impacting learning, where the majority of students are of tribal identity, the faculty are non-tribal and predominantly European Caucasian, and the course content is the western scientific methodology with no formal inclusion of native American perspectives. Site B included a total of 11 tribal colleges including Site A with a focus on a different discipline 4-year program that also includes a 2-year associate's degree. This data capture was not designed as a control group, but more of a general survey of a well-known and established education program common to all tribal colleges and non-tribal colleges.

The courses researched at Site A and Site B are equivalent courses in non-tribal schools across the nation and internationally. Site A was selected due to the unique feature that it is the only college to offer this particular course that has equivalent courses in non-tribal colleges. Site B with its 11 departments was selected because the course being studied is common in the tribal colleges and non-tribal colleges. Research on the course descriptions was conducted using secondary research. Secondary research was structured to review websites and course descriptions provided by the institution for a course. The wording of the course descriptions was copied into an Excel workbook, along with course codes and credits between the research sites (e.g., a general education course being researched at Site A and the 10 colleges samples as Site B), then compared to equivalent courses at non-tribal institutions including a community college and two local universities in the region where Site A is located. To triangulate the collected information from Site A and Site B, equivalent courses were reviewed at non-tribal institutions within the geographic region, with the comparisons identified as Site C.

Overall, this case study was explored through collecting secondary data at both research sites A and B through the language of course descriptions. The researcher's positionality in relation to the populations being researched was neutral, deduced from the fact that the researcher's first and second languages are European, and English is regarded as a foreign language. The language frameworks to be researched were (1) utilizing epistemology to identify culturally conscious vocabulary (Bang & Medin, 2010) and (2) identifying Indigenous knowledge and language equivalents for western topic concepts presented in the curricula (Band & Medin, 2010; Tierney, 1991). This gap in comparative and contextual language knowledge can impact inclusion and equity of Indigenous students. As an educator, the author believes it is important to understand the complexities inherent in the Indigenous students' cultures for communicating their concepts and the difficulty they could be experiencing adapting to the western education language and concepts, referred to as the pedagogy of whiteness. Thus, diversity in the respective student and faculty body presents a research opportunity to understand the role of culturally conscious vocabulary and equivalents in Indigenous and western knowledge systems, across epistemological rationalities, and be ontologically, axiologically and paradigmatically applicable. An example of a culturally conscious vocabulary in the tribal college context is the use of descriptions for objects and whether the western view perceives the object as inanimate and the Indigenous view perceives the object as animate. At the end of the day, the question driving the research is: does the catalog language present diversity, equity, and inclusion opportunities for students?

Data Collection

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) provide a description of basic procedures in implementing a mixed methods explorative research design. The research plan was divided into Phase I for secondary research, Phase II for in-depth semi-structured interviews, and Phase III for analysis and discussion of findings. The results achieved came from Phase I secondary research for data capture. Two research study sites for data capture were developed; Site A: to explore one discipline with specific study programs for all courses required for graduation with one qualification, and Site B to survey a program that has multiple streams and majors within the department and available across 11 tribal colleges. The limitation of Site A is the small academic community in the department. The limitation of Site B is the severely limited access to establish faculty ethnicity and validate student diversity. At Site A, the research methodology was informed by the insights gained from secondary research conducted for Site B, which was able to commence earlier data collection than for Site A.

For Site A and Site B, Phase I as secondary data capture required copying all course descriptions assigned as a 4-year study plan for graduation, then pasting the course descriptions into www.wordclouds.com, a free online application that generates ”word clouds.” This application was used to identify the frequency of words appearing in course descriptions across the 59 courses.

For Site A, 59 courses were identified as the 4-year degree program. Data capture included collecting all 59 course descriptions, then copying the compiled course descriptions into the word cloud application. All word clouds were generated for the “top ten” and “top twenty” words contained in the course descriptions.

At Site B, the research method was repeated to analyze the 48 courses in the 4year degree course from 11 institutions. Phase II of this research study was suspended due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the limited access to the research project. The Phase II research design intended to interview students and faculty using semi-structured interviews to obtain detailed information on diversity, the use of language, the mother tongue spoken within the family homes, and student and faculty perceptions of the use of language in their western education learning. Anecdotally, faculty in both study arenas noted that it is a common experience to have a class of students that represent individual tribal affiliations, presenting a version of an international class. One faculty mentioned specific conversations witnessed at the time where students pointedly explained they couldn’t listen to the (white) faculty because of the faculty member being European Caucasian and “the enemy” despite the faculty member having decades of teaching experience in non-tribal environments and not connected to the countries where colonial experiences were part of the student’s context. Given this anecdote is quite a common discussion in some settings, and drawing from these types of anecdotes, faculty that do not represent Indigenous heritage can be perceived as the enemy or “foreigners” depending on the history presented through the students’ life experiences.

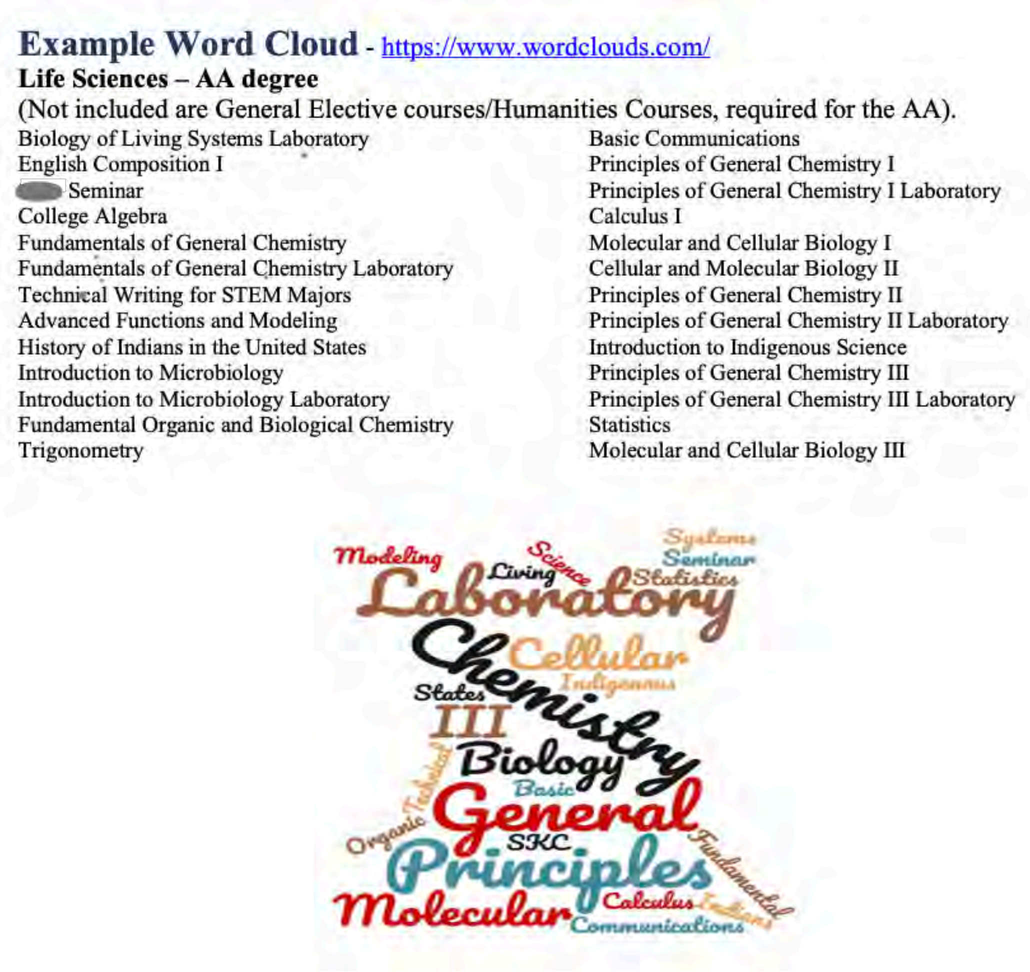
The original research plan (prior to COVID-19) was a mixed methods explorative study with semi-structured interviews to be coded using NVivo software. The intention of coding the interviews was to identify themes and understand the impact of language on participants at the research sites. The conditions around COVID-19 pandemic led to this step in the data collection process being cancelled, thus “word clouds” were utilized.

Data Analysis and Results

Some similarities between Site A and Site B emerged within the lists of dominant words displayed as word clouds. In both data sets, expanding the top word count from 10 to 20 words did not produce non-English words reflecting tribal languages or uncover English-language words relevant to the diversity of the student population. Even English-language words in the descriptions that might represent some nod toward diversity were not included in the top 20 most frequent words of either data set, including English-language words such as “Native American,” “American Indian,” “aboriginal,” “Indigenous,” “native,” “reservation,” “tribal,” “ancestral,” “traditional,” “cultural,” and specific tribal names or examples of learning connected to tribal contexts including reservation-based or community-based examples. When the top word count was expanded from 50 to 100 to 200, derived from a common word count total of 381 for the same courses, the same results emerged, in that there were no non-English words in the course descriptions and no English-language words that might represent some nod toward diversity by representing the student population taking these courses.

Shown below in Figure 1 is an example from Site A of the 26 course listings for a 2-year associate’s degree in a Life Sciences program at a tribal college. The word cloud result is based on identifying the top ten words from the 26 course descriptions.

Shown below is an analysis of 26 course descriptions from the Life Sciences program at Site A and a sequence of graphics reflecting the different word clouds generated by increasing the number of frequently mentioned words in course descriptions. For the analysis of 26 course description, a total of 381 words were available as generated by the word cloud application, with results presented as the top key words:



Example Word Cloud - https://www.wordclouds.com/

Life Sciences – AA degree

(Not included are General Elective courses/Humanities Courses, required for the AA).

- Biology of Living Systems Laboratory
- English Composition I
- [redacted] Seminar
- College Algebra
- Fundamentals of General Chemistry
- Fundamentals of General Chemistry Laboratory
- Technical Writing for STEM Majors
- Advanced Functions and Modeling
- History of Indians in the United States
- Introduction to Microbiology
- Introduction to Microbiology Laboratory
- Fundamental Organic and Biological Chemistry
- Trigonometry
- Basic Communications
- Principles of General Chemistry I
- Principles of General Chemistry I Laboratory
- Calculus I
- Molecular and Cellular Biology I
- Cellular and Molecular Biology II
- Principles of General Chemistry II
- Principles of General Chemistry II Laboratory
- Introduction to Indigenous Science
- Principles of General Chemistry III
- Principles of General Chemistry III Laboratory
- Statistics
- Molecular and Cellular Biology III

Figure 1: Site A - List of courses the provided 26 course descriptions and Word Cloud result with a top ten word count.

- Sort 1 – 50 key words
- Sort 2 – 100 key words
- Sort 3 – 200 key words

This process was repeated for a 59-course analysis from the same academic study program using the same techniques of copying the 59 course descriptions into the word cloud application that then identified 580 words qualifying for representation. This data set was then recategorized as a 50-word sort, a 100-word sort and a 200-word sort with the same overall results showing no non-English language words in the course descriptions and no English-language words acknowledging the diversity in the student population taking these courses. A similar analysis was conducted with a subset of data for the 59 course descriptions from the same study program, with categorization based on the credit value of the course. Analysis of course descriptions was compared between 1-credit, 2-credit, 3-credit, 4-credit and 5-credit courses across two different word cloud applications, with no significant results noted. An interesting sidebar was this analysis highlighted where students spend the majority of their academic class time, in this the result being 39% of their time is invested in 5-credit courses, which opened up a discussion for ongoing research into the language aspects of those courses specifically.

For both data sets of 26 course descriptions and 59 course descriptions from the same study program, two different word cloud applications

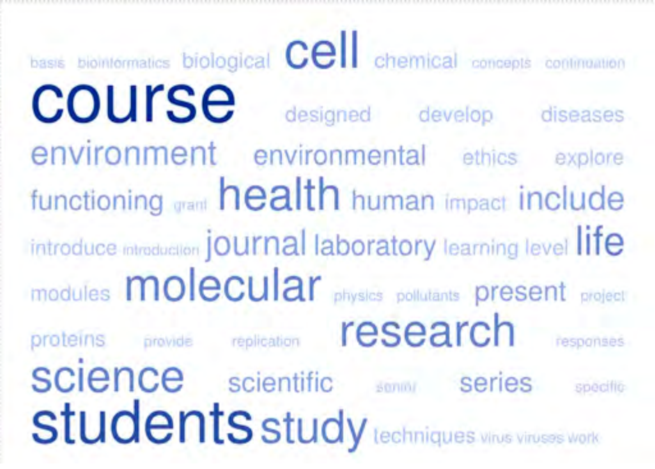


Figure 2: Site A – 26 course descriptions - 50-word sort

were utilized to test the logic of key word selection, with identical results, thus, the researchers concluded that the word cloud application is not a significant factor in presenting the key word counts graphically. The word cloud applications used for testing the integrity of the word rankings are

- wordclouds.com (https://www.wordclouds.com) and
- monkeylearn.com (https://monkeylearn.com)

For the figures included in this article, unless noted otherwise, the graphics are generated by Wordcloud.com.

The over-riding observation from the data is that the words copied from course descriptions and presented in the word clouds indicate more about the course descriptions than the students enrolling in these courses and how these students relate this information to their learning. In one example discovered in Site B, one 4-year degree program included language in the introduction to the degree and reflected a change of language for one course in the course description. This degree description included the wording “reservation-based” as a single example (see figure 5 below) that is present in archived online course catalogs dating back to 2017-2018. Within this

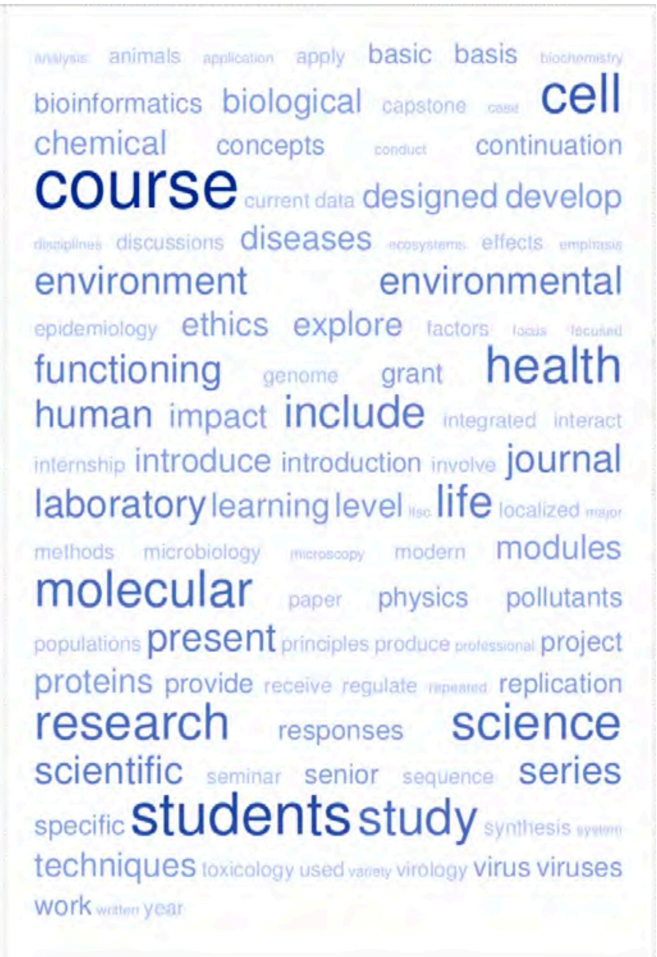


Figure 3: Site A – 26 course descriptions - 100-word sort

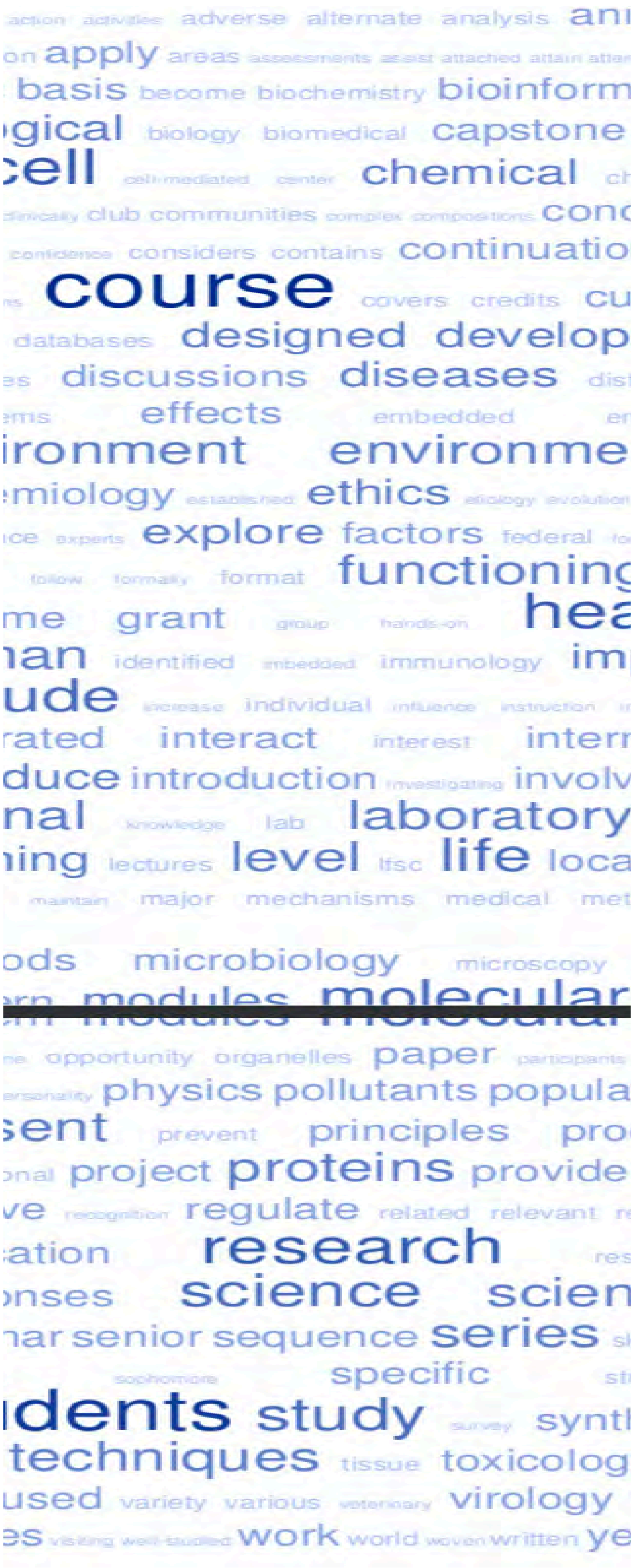
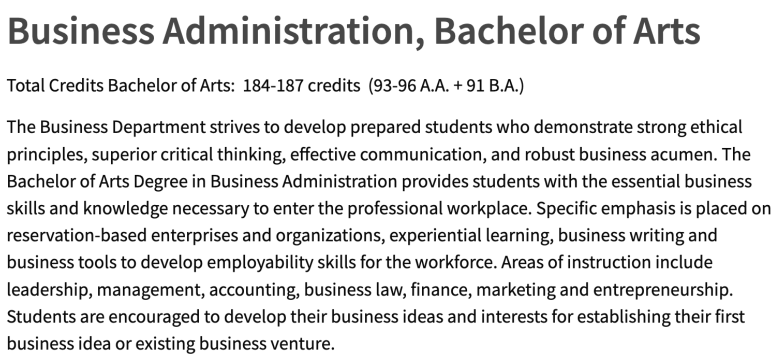


Figure 4: Site A – 26 course descriptions - 200-word sort

degree program, a change of language was noted for the one course between catalog versions, again with the introduction of two words “tribal contexts” This was one example noted across hundreds of course descriptions analyzed across both programs and a total of 11 institutions. This example stood out because of the incorporation of these words, while the other programs analyzed for Site B did not reflect the same use of language to indicate diversity in the institution. Figure 5 below presents a copy of this degree wording. Figure 6 presents a course description from the 2018-2019 catalog. Figure 7 presents the same course description from the 2019-2020 catalog. What was noted generally across Site B (11 sites) was the similarity of colonial wording in course descriptions for similar courses verified by their course codes across institutions.

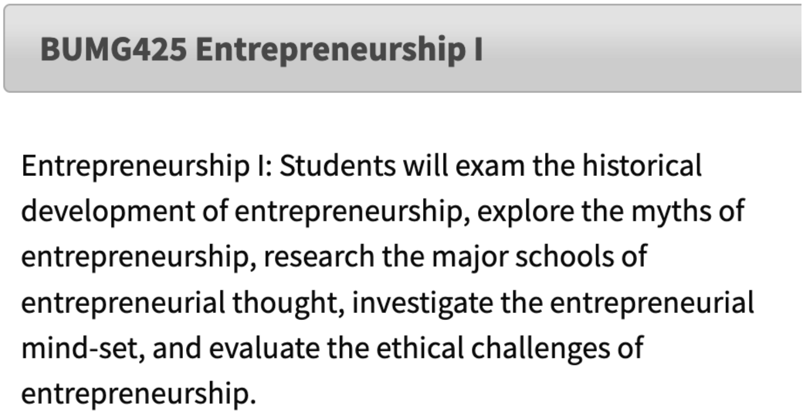


Business Administration, Bachelor of Arts

Total Credits Bachelor of Arts: 184-187 credits (93-96 A.A. + 91 B.A.)

The Business Department strives to develop prepared students who demonstrate strong ethical principles, superior critical thinking, effective communication, and robust business acumen. The Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business Administration provides students with the essential business skills and knowledge necessary to enter the professional workplace. Specific emphasis is placed on reservation-based enterprises and organizations, experiential learning, business writing and business tools to develop employability skills for the workforce. Areas of instruction include leadership, management, accounting, business law, finance, marketing and entrepreneurship. Students are encouraged to develop their business ideas and interests for establishing their first business idea or existing business venture.

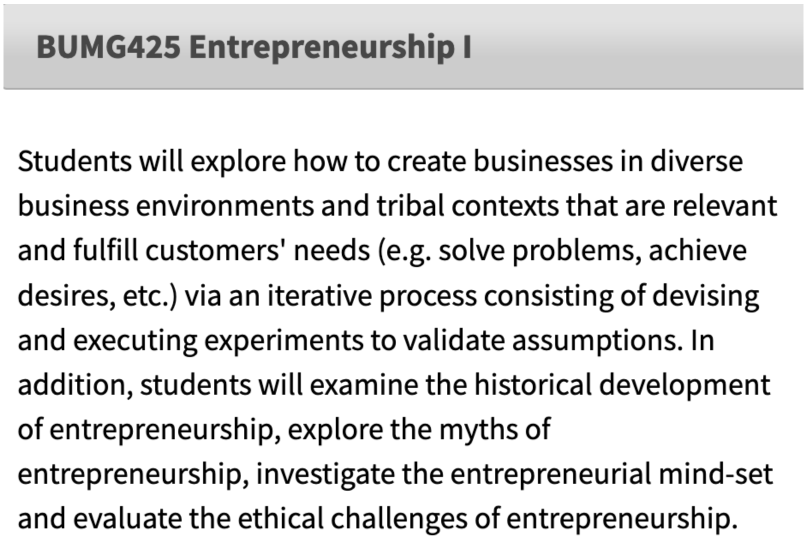
Figure 5: Site B - Degree description 2019-2020 catalog



BUMG425 Entrepreneurship I

Entrepreneurship I: Students will exam the historical development of entrepreneurship, explore the myths of entrepreneurship, research the major schools of entrepreneurial thought, investigate the entrepreneurial mind-set, and evaluate the ethical challenges of entrepreneurship.

Figure 6: Site B - Course description 2018-2019 catalog



BUMG425 Entrepreneurship I

Students will explore how to create businesses in diverse business environments and tribal contexts that are relevant and fulfill customers' needs (e.g. solve problems, achieve desires, etc.) via an iterative process consisting of devising and executing experiments to validate assumptions. In addition, students will examine the historical development of entrepreneurship, explore the myths of entrepreneurship, investigate the entrepreneurial mind-set and evaluate the ethical challenges of entrepreneurship.

Figure 7: Site B - Course description 2019-2020 catalog

After reviewing the word clouds and the published course descriptions, the author drew this conclusion: none of the 20 - 200 most frequent words generated across the compiled course descriptions represent a level of cultural responsiveness reflecting institutional diversity for a tribal student in a tribal college (Ragoonaden, 2017).

Discussion

From both data sets, a question that emerged was whether faculty teaching these courses would deliver an adaptive and integrative curriculum. This intention requires a plan and method to achieve a fully integrated approach for students to overcome colonial language and the perceptions of colonial language in their cultural context. The scope of the research project produced a range of words that correlate to workforce development and not specifically to the courses, including vocabulary words for communication, guidelines, and management. The one course description presented in Figure 7 seems to be attempting to show the relevance of the course to the student population by including the wording ‘tribal contexts.”

In the research by Chang (2000), there is mention that diversity brings a positive outlook in a student’s growth and development both on the campus and off-campus. While this may be true, it is a partial assumption as there are other factors besides diversity that encompass a student. Johnson et al. (2001) go further to mention the influence on the interpersonal, cognitive, and affective areas of the student. There is a slight assumption from this statement that there are many other areas of the student experience that diversity can affect. Encouraging the status quo encourages a bad relationship between the minority and majority or dominant students.

Decolonization, being defined as place-based and a process (University of Victoria, n.d.) requires that there are sustainable methods of cooperation and experimentation between groups of teachers and students (Asher, 2009). The lecturer needs to be aware that there is a specialized program for each group of class, course, or academic level and that language has an impact on those groups. Similarly, if a tutor is a part of the student learning relationship, they must also have the ability to implement periodic systematic changes which address the factors impacting the groups of students (Howell et al., 2008). This point resonates strongly with the tribal student audience and context, knowing the documented history of traumatization due to racism and colonization.

This experience is not limited to tribal students at tribal colleges, with international examples available describing similar observations and contexts (Sweeting & Vickers, 2005; Shakib, 2011). Educators have the responsibility to create space for students of all backgrounds, and language is a key way to create such space." It is important to listen to the student regardless of their cultural background, for the faculty to provide a safe and fair opportunity for everyone in the course (Noguera, 2007). Besides being aware of the impact of language and decolonization (Asher, 2009), students also need to have a mindful experience of the course (Ungemah, 2015). Students can most certainly experience this from what they derive from their learning. However, if the students' first point of contact with the course is through the course description and if the language is colonial in tone, a barrier can be created from the first impression and perception (Corradi, 2017).

In the situation where the faculty members are recognized as a colonial culture such as European Caucasian, and their students are not the same ethnicity or same race, care must be taken to avoid implicit bias (Lindsay & Hart, 2017). Implicit bias includes the unconscious reactions, attitudes, and groupings that affect the behavior and the understanding of all participants in the experience, and in this report, of students (Desmond-Harris, 2016). Through implicit bias, the question of pedagogical value and if good pedagogy is always the best pedagogy, is discussed in the research by Kecskemeti (2013) and worthy of further discussion with more research by the author. Without awareness of implicit bias, instructors can apply misleading assumptions about their students' capabilities and can be hypothesized in the reverse direction that students can apply misleading assumptions about their faculty capabilities. During the research at Site A, prior experience with some students allowed the faculty to customize a limited selection of learning elements to incorporate the background of the students and overcome the colonial language in the course description. This experience also suggests that course descriptions are not necessarily an accurate measure of the degree to which the course is inclusive or offers adaptive learning elements. Many faculty members at Site A have shared experiences where implicit bias emanates from students about the faculty, demonstrating that implicit bias and inherent assumptions can be a two-way experience. However, this practice is not reflected in the course description. Without further evaluation and completing Phase II for qualitative data collection, it is difficult to interpret the results of the various groups of students and faculty, and further investigation is necessary.

At both research sites, some words that emerged as dominant in the word clouds of course descriptions include "project," "management," "learn," "knowledge," "teams" and "skills." From these words, the lecturer may have the perception that the course description will be easily understood by every student enrolling in the course. As a simple example, the phrase "project management" can have a gestalt resonance in the western world but is a phrase that might not carry context in the non-western world. Potential opportunities to bring diversity into course descriptions include connecting the context the students are from to the learning described in the course description. In a business course this could be comparing and contrasting the western practice with the Indigenous practice and including that wording in the course description. Education using the colonial language in this tribal college environment has not engaged a way to decolonize the classroom and has not promoted an all-inclusive approach in the curriculum to sustain the diversity among students.

Implications for Practice

Although this exploratory study requires ongoing and extensive research and further study, the evidence to date and the available literature provide highlights and offers insights around this sensitive issue of colonial language that has been absorbed and not acted upon, with potential aspects to be uncovered when further qualitative research such as interviews are employed. Developing non-colonial language in course descriptions is far from straightforward. The issue of modifying colonial language in course descriptions will also require engagement from administrators and institutional leadership, as outlined by Pete (2016) in her list of "100 Ways: Indigenizing & Decolonizing Academic Programs." In this document Pete states that her list is "not meant to be prescriptive. This list provides suggestions"(Pete, 2016).

One technique that can broach the topic is to acknowledge your own understanding of what colonial language is and means, then identify ways to address any inequities and gaps between your dominant language and the student context reading your course description. Examples from other disciplines such as STEM refer to perceptions of what a scientist looks like being dominated by images of white men in white lab coats, which is not the attire that tribal Elders wear. One example in a business program is the perception of entrepreneurs and their attitudes towards raising business capital. These perceptions might not apply to other ethnicities, including the role of banks in the discussion or the financing systems within communities or even the use of the phrase 'killer pitch." A simple exercise of a written reflection based on a cultural perspective can create important conversations.

To help develop your framework for dismantling colonial language in your course descriptions, acknowledge that what might appear as opposing methodologies, practices and theories can co-exist, can be qualitative and can be described accordingly. Unpacking these stereotypes and using accurate inclusive language in course descriptions can build new connections between faculty, students and curriculum (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Within the context of inquiry for this study, the author notes that increasing numbers of tribal colleges and universities and traditional non-tribal higher education institutions are utilizing tribal local Indigenous educators, Elders, students, Indigenous alumni, and community members (Pete, 2016) and minority community leaders as educators and co-educators in their courses (Hatcher et al., 2009), which raises more questions around the possibilities of including non-traditional expert insights into the language of course descriptions. Informal suggestions to begin the process to decolonize course descriptions include incorporating key points from the Hatcher et al. (2009) study through the principle of "two-eyed seeing" where Indigenous and western cultural perspectives are represented, followed by diversifying your course materials and the content of your course, then reflecting on the diversity represented in your course description language. This language can extend to how you design your assessments that also reflect the diversity in your students, and also how you engage your students in creating knowledge from their context and what your course requires. Course descriptions are frequently vetted by curriculum committees, which can provide an opportunity for an institution to address their policies on diversity, equity and inclusion, exercised through course descriptions.

Reviewing the language of existing course descriptions and having a general awareness of the students enrolling in the institution and courses creates an opportunity to decolonize the classroom, the relationships and the learning experiences overall. Another suggestion is to consider engaging students in ways they can contribute their languages to your content, including their contributions to the wording of the course description (NCTE, 2019), such as including a local Indigenous word for a concept or theory or word descriptors connecting the student context to the course content. The course description language can be decolonized to be inclusive, represent diversity and present information to overcome implicit bias and the pedagogy of whiteness. Including changes in wording of a course description offers the value of creating a co-learning connection with the culture and communities represented by your students, which in turn can also create a safe classroom where diversity and inclusion are active elements in the curriculum.

The author proposes avoiding the hegemonic approach of knowledge domination and assimilation through the pedagogy of whiteness and identify the value of recognizing the best of all worlds from your students' context, starting with the wording and language used in course descriptions. Based on the early results of this case study, the author concludes that the language used in your educational setting, specifically hegemonic white language that affects understandability and relatability of the content by the students, can be improved upon. One small and important step towards decolonizing a course description can be capitalizing the word Indigenous. In closing, the question posed to readers is "have you reviewed your course descriptions through the lens of language being a colonizing tool, and how that can impact your students' perceptions of their learning?". ■

References

About AIHEC. (n.d.). AIHEC. Retrieved September 29, 2021, from http://www.aihec.org/who-we-are/index.htm

Asher, N. (2009). Decolonization and education: Locating pedagogy and self at the interstices in global times. *Counterpoints, 369*, 67–77.

Bang, M, and Medin, D. (2010). Cultural processes in science education: Supporting the navigation of multiple epistemologies. *Science Education, 94*, 1008–1026. https://doi.org/10.1002/sce.20392

Bhattacharyya, G. (2015). Racialized consciousness and class mobilizations. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *38*(13), 2244–2250. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1058500

Chang, M. J. (2000). Improving campus racial dynamics: A balancing act among competing interests. *The Review of Higher Education*, *23*(2), 153–175. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2000.0003

Corradi, A. (2017, April 25). The linguistic colonialism of English. *The Brown Political Review.* https://brownpoliticalreview.org/2017/04/linguistic-colonialism-english/

Creswell, J. W. and Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Newkirk II, V. R., Green, A., White, G. B., & Coates, T. (2017, May 17). *How insightful is* Dear White People? *The Atlantic.* https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/05/dear-white-people-season-one-roundtable/526920/

Desmond-Harris, J. (2016, August 15). *Implicit bias means we're all probably at least a little bit racist.* Vox. https://www.vox.com/2014/12/26/7443979/racism-implicit-racial-bias

Dills, A. K. (2017). Classroom diversity and academic outcomes. *Economic Inquiry*, *56*(1), 304–316. https://doi.org/10.1111/ecin.12481

Dong, S. (2019). The effects of first-generation status on student engagement and outcomes at liberal arts colleges. *Journal of College Student Development*, *60*(1), 17–34.

Ford, D. Y., & Grantham, T. C. (2003). Providing access for culturally diverse gifted students: From deficit to dynamic thinking. *Theory into Practice*, *42*(3), 217–225. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4203_8

Fry, R. A. (2006). The changing landscape of American public education: New students, new schools. *Pew Hispanic Center.*

García A. M., & Garcia, R. A. (2001). *Race and ethnicity*. Greenhaven Press.

Gaudry, A., & Lorenz, D. (2018). Indigenization as inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonization: navigating the different visions for indigenizing the Canadian Academy. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, *14*(3), 218–227. https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180118785382

Gillies, R. (2021, June 1). Trudeau: Residential schools part of Canada's colonial past. *AP News.* https://apnews.com/article/canada-2d5ad1c36849f5ad02c70f4640f25108

Gordon, S. (2005). Making meaning of whiteness: A pedagogical approach for multicultural education. *Journal of Physical Therapy Education, 19*(1), 21–27.

Hanson, E., Gamez, D., & Manuel, A. (2020, September). *The Residential School System.* Indigenous Foundations. https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/residential-school-system-2020/

Hatcher, A., Bartlett, C., Marshall, A., & Marshall M. (2009). Two-eyed seeing in the classroom environment: Concepts, approaches, and challenges. *Canadian Journal of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education, 9*(3), 141–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/14926150903118342

Howell, R. J., Deiotte, M. T., & Patton, S. L. (2008). *Understanding response to intervention: A practice guide for systemic implementation.* Solution Tree.

Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R., and Tiffany, M. (2001). Structuring academic conflicts between majority and minority students: Hindrance or help to integration. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *9*(1), 61–73. https://doi.org/10.1016/0361-476X(84)90008-0

Kecskemeti, M. (2013). Competent students and caring teachers: Is a good pedagogy always the best pedagogy? *Teachers and Curriculum*, *13*, 91–96. https://doi.org/10.15663/tandc.v13i0.18

Lajimodiere, D. K. (2016, June 14). The sad legacy of American Indian boarding schools in Minnesota and the U.S. MinnPost. https://www.minnpost.com/mnopedia/2016/06/sad-legacy-american-indian-boarding-schools-minnesota-and-us/?gclid=Cj0KCQiAt8WOBhDbARIsANQLp97KGgoYPwwMsInFXyNOTm1rdxCDsiMcZED74Sk0C7i1JU4SQB-Kg00aAm39EALw_wcB

Léglise, I., and Migge, B. (2007). Language and colonialism. Applied linguistics in the context of creole communities. In M. Hellinger & A. Pauwels (Eds.), *Language and Communication: Diversity and Change.* Mouton de Gruyter. (Reprinted from *Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, pp. 297–338)

Lindsay, C. A., and Hart, C. M. D. (2017). Exposure to same-race teachers and student disciplinary outcomes for black students in North Carolina. *Educational Evaluation and*

Policy Analysis, *39*(3), 485–510. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373717693109

Decolonizing the classroom: Step 1. (2019, April 11). NCTE. https://ncte.org/blog/2019/04/decolonizing-the-classroom/

Noguera, P. A. (2007). How listening to students can help schools to improve. *Theory into Practice*, *46*(3), 205–211. https://doi.org/10.1080/14241270701402165

Passel, J. S. (2011). Demography of immigrant youth: Past, present, and future. *The Future of Children*, *21*(1), 19–41. https://doi.org/10.1353/foc.2011.0001

Pete, S. (2016). 100 ways: indigenizing & decolonizing academic programs. *Aboriginal Policy Studies,* 6(1), 81–89. https://doi.org/10.5663/aps.v6i1.27455

Ragoonaden, K. (2017). Culturally responsive pedagogy: Indigenizing curriculum. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *47*(2), 2017,22–46. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1154077.pdf

Rodriguez, F. C. (2015). Why diversity and equity matter: Reflections from a community college president. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2015*(172), 15–24. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20160

Saha, S. (2014). Taking diversity seriously: the merits of increasing minority representation in medicine. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, *174*(2), 291. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamainternmed.2013.12736

Schneider, F.J., and Nicolazzo, Z. (2020). Whiteness and antiracist pedagogy: A critical discourse analysis of two trans* educators' classroom experiences. *Whiteness and Education*, 5(2), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2020.1734963

Shakib, K. M. (2011). The position of language in development of colonization. *Journal of Languages and Culture, 2*(7), 117–123. https://doi.org/10.5897/JLC.9000028

Smith, E. (2015). Cultural logics, impact, and the state of "scholarship in composition." *College Composition and Communication*, *66*(3), 531–536. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43490947

Stirbys, C., & McComber, A. (2021, June 15). *Indian residential schools: Acts of genocide, deceit and control by church and state*. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/indian-residential-schools-acts-of-genocide-deceit-and-control-by-church-and-state-162145

Sweeting, A., & Vickers, E. (2007). Language and the history of colonial education: The case of Hong Kong. *Modern Asian Studies, 41*(1), 1–40.

Tierney, W. G. (1991) Native voices in academe: Strategies for empowerment. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning, 23*(2), 36–39. https://doi.org/10.1080/00091383.1991.9937678

Tribal College Journal. (n.d.) Degree programs at tribal colleges and universities 2019-2020. https://tribalcollegejournal.org/pdfs/Degree-Programs-at-Tribal-Colleges-and-Universities.pdf

Ungemah, L. D. (2015). Diverse classrooms, diverse curriculum, diverse complications: Three teacher perspectives. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *46*(4), 431–439. https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12143

University of Victoria. (n.d.) *Decolonization in an educational context. Centre for Youth and*

Society. University of Victoria, Canada. https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/youthsociety/assets/docs/briefs/decolonizing-education-research-brief.pdf

Weldon, T. L. (2006). African American English: A linguistic introduction (review). *Language*, *82*(4), https://doi.org/10.1353/lan.2006.0237