Learning from the best:
Teacher self-efficacy, equitable classrooms and Aboriginal education

By:

Graham Shular

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I would like to credit Wilmer Nadjiwon, whom I met during a chance meeting at the launch of his book *Neither wolf, nor dog*, for teaching me about how truth is easily misunderstood across cultures. Wilmer’s story of survival inspired me to think differently about my relationships, and how I can learn to better understand the meaning of truth. Thank you to my Master of Teaching cohort at OISE for helping me to grow as a teacher. You are all marvelous teachers, and I hope to work alongside all of you at some point during our careers. To Dr. Hilary Inwood, my MTRP supervisor, for your guidance and patience, and for your unwavering support from start to finish, goes a huge thank you (thanks also for keeping OISE green). Finally, to my three participants for showing me that the task of engaging in Aboriginal education and critical pedagogy is not insurmountable. While you are all protected by anonymity, please know that your voices have greatly influenced the way that I think about my future task as a teacher. Thank you for helping me, and others, to understand that we can all learn to be better pedagogues, in theory and practice.

On wanting to teach Aboriginal education:

“From the beginning, I wanted to do this because it sounded cool. No question. I had been here about a day and a half before I realized I had to shift my mindset incredibly dramatically. Now? Well, I could never teach anywhere else.” – Gerald
Abstract

Through a multi-case study qualitative approach, this research seeks to understand how teachers develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. Three teachers from across Ontario were interviewed and the following themes became emergent: community and quality relationships; safety of Aboriginal students; Aboriginal leadership; poverty of Aboriginal families; and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. The personal accounts of teachers who have high levels of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students may help other teachers to develop more confidence in their teaching practice, perhaps leading to a focus on decolonization and equity as integral components of their pedagogical frameworks. In turn, teachers with a low degree of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students may be able to develop the necessary pedagogies to develop their teaching practice, and to make their classrooms more equitable. The confidence teachers have will help them to better understand the ways that they are able to push against systematic oppression, and the historically racist and paternalistic structure of some Canadian schools. Teachers who understand the role of decolonization within a pedagogical framework will be better suited to teach Aboriginal students, and make their classrooms more equitable learning spaces.

Key Words: teacher self-efficacy, Aboriginal education, equity, decolonization
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction to the research study

At the root of good teaching practice is a commitment to good pedagogy. Pedagogy not only allows teachers to deliver curriculum content in appropriate and meaningful ways, but it also directs the quality of the relationships that teachers have with their students. A teacher’s pedagogy is the actualization of his or her beliefs and ethical considerations regarding learning, and cultivating relationships. Gaztambide-Fernández and Arráiz Matute (2013) have best deconstructed pedagogy as having intention (the delivery of curriculum, for example), constructing relationships (between students and teachers, for example), and as ethically, and morally imperative. Teaching relies on the directive power of pedagogy, yet as Donald Macedo (2000) explains in his introduction to Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pedagogy is inherently transformative as well. Considering the innate ethical imperative of pedagogy and its underpinnings of teaching, it should be expected that teachers will have adopted Indigenous pedagogies across Canada and have worked with Aboriginal people to address the issues of Aboriginal student success and culturally relevant curriculum (Toulouse, 2011). Yet, considering the ethical dimension of a teacher’s pedagogy, the shameful reality of education in Canada reminds pedagogues that education remains inequitable, especially for students who are Aboriginal.¹

¹ Throughout this study I followed the lead of Marie Battiste (2013), in acknowledging that many people on this land refer to themselves by specific names and terms. Except when referencing my participants directly, I use the term Aboriginal to encompass all Indigenous peoples within the borders of Canada. While problematic, I admit that my lack of knowledge necessitated consistency at the very least. Non-Aboriginal is used throughout this paper to identify non-Indigenous people within the borders of Canada.
Aboriginal students in Canada fail to succeed academically, unlike non-aboriginal students (Batiste, 1998, & Caillou, 1998). More specifically, the Assembly of First Nation’s report, “A portrait of First Nations and Education” (2012) lists the high school graduation rate for Aboriginal people at 36%, compared with the Canadian graduation rate of 72%. The report also identifies that 61% of Aboriginal young people between the ages of 20-24 have not completed high school, compared with 13% of non-Aboriginal people in Canada. The Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal dichotomy that has so often occurred in Canada has obscured the nuanced and interrelated issues of class, gender and other forms of discrimination that play out in the perpetuation of racial stereotyping that many Aboriginal people experience in Canada today (Caillou, 1998). As Batiste (1998) explains, “through ill-conceived federal government policies Aboriginal peoples have been subjected to a combination of unquestionably powerful but profoundly debilitating forces of assimilation and colonization” (p. 19). As Battiste (2013) explains in her updated work, “no educational system is perfect … The racism inherent in the system drains students of their capacity for achievement in all aspects of their lives” (p. 180). The complex history of schooling and policies directing the education of Aboriginal children has resulted in both the systematic mistrust of schooling, but also the elimination of Aboriginal worldviews, languages and cultures in our schools, and in our greater societies as well. In Canada, the federal state continues to reproduce a system steeped in the politics of settler colonialism, where the settler population remains and benefits from the Indigenous population and the exploitation of the land and other natural resources (Coulthard, 2014). Canadian schools are just one of the many places where state policies meet with the complexities of social interaction to produce this biopolitics of settler colonialism.
Classrooms can be equitable places where Aboriginal students learn resiliency and the skills of resurgence, and self-determination, but as some studies have shown, some teachers feel ill prepared to teach Aboriginal students in their classrooms (Deer, 2013, Kanu, 2005). A teacher’s practice and their sense of self-efficacy\(^2\), and of course, their pedagogy, directly affect the deep learning of students in their classrooms. Classrooms have played an important role in shaping and redefining the way both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students think about Indigenous issues and Indigeneity in Canada. For example, students are now taught to deconstruct the Indian Residential School (IRS) system, which aimed to eliminate Aboriginal cultures from existing in Canadian settler-society, and to address what the implications of this racist policy are today in Canada. In 1996 – the same year that the last Residential School closed – the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended that public education programs better serve Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people through innovative educational programs, designed to better serve all learners in helping them to learn about Aboriginal culture.

As part of this recommendation, it is important to examine how elementary school teachers develop a sense of self-efficacy when teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. In determining how teachers develop self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students, we will begin to better understand how Ontario schools perpetuate systems of settler colonialism. The ethical imperative of teacher self-efficacy rests on the belief that Canadian students need confident teachers who support and use Indigenous pedagogies, battle ignorance, and adopt anti-racist, critical, and culturally relevant pedagogy. The pedagogies used by these teachers can help other teachers to improve their practice by thinking more critically about how their teaching practices

\[^2\]“A teacher’s sense of efficacy … connotes judgments about the teacher’s own perceptions of his or her capability to accomplish a task. Compared to teachers with low self-efficacy beliefs, teachers with strong perceptions of their own capability tend to employ classroom strategies that produce the courses of action required to have positive effects on students” (Kanu, 2011, p. 145).
can (and do) contribute to making education more equitable in Canada. Decolonization of education is beneficial because it produces a system that is more democratic, sustainable and equitable for all students, especially those students who are Aboriginal.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study is to explain how teachers become comfortable teaching Aboriginal students. The implications of this research are important: the personal accounts of teachers who have high levels of self-efficacy may help other teachers to develop more confidence in their teaching practice, perhaps leading to a focus on decolonization and equity as integral components of their pedagogical frameworks. In turn, teachers with a low degree of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students may be able to develop the necessary pedagogies to decolonize their practice, and their classrooms. The confidence teachers have will help them to better understand the ways that they are able to push against systematic oppression, and the historically racist and paternalistic construction of some Canadian schools. Teachers who understand the role of decolonization within a pedagogical framework will be better suited to teach Aboriginal students, and make their classrooms more equitable learning spaces.

**Research Questions**

The primary research question of this research study is: How have elementary teachers in Ontario developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms? In addition to this research question, the following secondary research questions help to guide the research. Firstly, what are the experiences of teachers with Aboriginal students? Secondly, who and what influences the self-efficacy of teachers of Aboriginal students? Thirdly, what strategies can teachers use to improve their self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students? The final subsidiary
research question asks whether there is a relationship between teachers with high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students and their beliefs about equity in classrooms?

**Background of the Researcher**

The interest I have in this topic began while attending an elementary school in small-town Ontario, where Aboriginal students comprised over half of the total student population. My experiences in this school taught me about some of the different ways that relationships between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people develop. The school had a Native Second Language (NSL) program, which taught students Ojibwe. The teacher who taught NSL was a member of the Aboriginal community and also taught the non-Aboriginal students in the school Ojibwe in the younger grades. The school, for me, was a place of negotiation. My peers and I participated in the daily organization of timetabling, the different systems of classroom management, the development of different types of relationships amongst students (a wide variety of relationships), and the overt and subtle forms of racism that penetrated many of our day-to-day activities and learning environments. I believe that my youth incubated a praxis for reflection on my role as participant in the settler-colonial polity of contemporary Canadian society. I began to better understand that the history (and contemporary systems) of schooling in Canada was fraught with sadness and misery. These systems have resulted in school systems bent on perpetuating racism. As I moved through Ontario’s school system, and into post-secondary school, and now as a teacher, I have developed a reflective praxis, and I now question the ways that my pedagogy might influence how I understand my role within this greater system of colonialism and oppression as a teacher.

In part, my pedagogy has been impacted by the different relationships that I have developed with other people. For example, I became very reflective when I first met and talked
to Wilmer Nadjiwon, who is an Indian Residential School (IRS) survivor. The greatest lesson I learned from him was that truth-telling is not just about telling stories or retelling events that had once happened. He told me that to tell the truth is to connect what you are saying and doing to your spirit and being. This perplexed me, but reading Paulette Regan’s (2010) book *Unsettling the Settler Within* has helped me to understand the concept of truth-telling in a different way. Regan uses Wahpetunwan Dakota scholar Waziyatawin’s theory of justice and truthfulness to explain that the issue with truth telling is that settler-people (in a colonial relationship) may respond with empathy, but they may lack the appropriate strategies for taking personal and political action. According to Waziyatawin, the tendency towards understanding the truth is that settler people will simply intellectualize and compartmentalize their newfound knowledge and do nothing. I believe that the philosophy of truth telling has helped me in numerous ways, and I know that these teachings are important for teaching and learning. They have helped to frame my pedagogy, and have influenced the decisions I make as a teacher. These relationships and close readings have also influenced me as a researcher. I now understand the imperative of understanding my own truth, and how these beliefs will impact the way that I interpret my research data.

Historian John S. Milloy (1999) explained in his watershed history, *A National Crime*, that, “the Indian Residential School system is not someone else’s history, nor is it just a footnote or a paragraph, a preface or chapter, in Canadian history. It is our history, our shaping of the ‘new world’; it is our swallowing of the land and its First Nations peoples and spitting them out as cities and farms and hydroelectric project and as strangers in their own land and communities” (p. xviii). All Canadians should try to better understand the importance of education as it has both perpetuated, and now aims to diminish, cycles of poverty, and disenfranchisement.
Education has contributed to the misunderstanding of Aboriginal people in Canada, and many people, myself included, feel that education is one way we can combat overt racism and ignorance in Canadian society. I feel that by considering the framework of settler colonialism I have become a more reflective practitioner. As a non-Aboriginal teacher, I have a duty to understand how my epistemology affects the way that I treat, understand and communicate with other people. This research study is part of my contribution to the teaching profession, but also an artifact demonstrating my learning.

**Overview of the Master of Teaching Research Project**

This research study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One, the Introduction, clearly outlines the purposes of the study, as well as the central and supportive research questions. The background of the researcher serves to identify why I am qualified to undertake this research, and acknowledges my pedagogical journey and philosophical beliefs. Chapter Two presents an extensive literature review, which is organized thematically. These themes include: teacher self-efficacy; integration of Aboriginal content and worldviews into the curriculum; culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy; theoretical underpinnings of settler colonialism; and lastly, decolonization. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and procedures of the project. This includes information regarding participant selection, the limitations of the research, and the instruments of data collection. The fourth chapter will present the findings of the research, built within the themes evident in the data. The final chapter includes the implications of the research for changing (and making better) teaching practice as well as further recommendations for practice and research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature

The literature of Aboriginal education in Canada is extensive. Historians, political scientists, curators, post-colonialists, anthropologists, archivists, family historians and many others have contributed to the study of Aboriginal people in Canada. Educators have also researched extensively on this topic and have helped Canadians to better understand the unique connections between the teaching and learning of Aboriginal students (Battiste, 2013; Kanu, 2011; Deer, 2013). Yet, there remains a missing component in the literature in that the research into Aboriginal education fails to bridge the gaps between teachers’ senses of self-efficacy, equity in classrooms and the theoretical underpinnings of settler colonialism and possibilities for decolonization. The literature groundwork will help to determine how teachers who teach Aboriginal students have developed a high sense of self-efficacy, and the components needed for better understanding of the issue is addressed in the summary. The following review of the literature includes five sections: teacher self-efficacy; integration and infusion of indigenous content and worldviews into the curriculum; culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy; settler colonialism; and decolonization. The summary addresses the shortcomings in the literature, and provides a vantage for further study within this field of study.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is at the root of this research paper because it is through teaching practice that positive change can happen for education in Canada. Self-efficacy is a teacher’s beliefs that they can make a difference as teachers in classrooms (Hargreaves, & Fullan, 2012). Teachers’ self-efficacy has been studied using student-achievement (or the lack of student-achievement) as
the basis for understanding a teacher’s confidence in teaching practice (Ashton, & Webb, 1986). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2008) document different themes that exist in the literature that relate to teacher self-efficacy, including behavioral responses towards teachers’ goals and aspirations, teachers’ attitudes towards innovation and change, teachers’ tendencies to refer difficult students to special education, teachers’ use of teaching strategies, and the likelihood that teachers stay in the teaching profession. Yet, measuring a teacher’s self-efficacy remains a difficult task for researchers because self-efficacy is subjective, and depends on the unique perspective and agency of the particular subject (in this case, the individual teacher).

In this qualitative study, a more nuanced approach will be used to decipher what a high level of self-efficacy means for individual teachers who teach Aboriginal students in their classrooms. Bandura (1986) offers a formal definition of self-efficacy: “Perceived self-efficacy is defined as a people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performance” (p. 391). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2008) expand on this definition of self-efficacy by explaining that: “self-efficacy is based on expectations of what one can do and has been conceptualized as an important aspect of perceived control” (p. 224). Self-efficacy, then, is not about competence, but rather a belief a person has in their ability to complete a task, given a certain set of circumstances.

There are many different reasons why non-Aboriginal teachers may feel apprehensive teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. Many of these anxieties begin while teachers are receiving their pre-service teacher training (Kronowitz, 2003). Still, anxieties develop as teachers enter the profession as well (Kanu, 2005, 2011). Deer (2013) explains that pre-service teachers who are apprehensive teaching Aboriginal material in their classrooms have a fear of failure, a discomfort with Aboriginal subject matter, and feelings of guilt. Deer also found that
non-Aboriginal teachers feel apprehensive teaching Aboriginal content in their classrooms because they themselves are not Aboriginal. Aboriginal topics seem to take up a lot of space in the media, he argues, and much of this airtime revolves around negative issues such as marginalization, harsh and substandard Canadian living conditions, (such as in the community of Attawapiskat in northern Ontario), and emotionally-charged narratives of Aboriginal life that may seem incomprehensible to non-Aboriginal people. This charge leaves room for research to better understand why it is not the case that all non-Aboriginal teachers feel so far-removed from being able to teach Aboriginal students in their classroom.

Teachers contend with many different issues that affect their self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. One aspect of teaching Aboriginal students that has been studied are the perceptions that teachers have in integrating Aboriginal culture into the regular school curriculum. Kanu (2005) found that teachers who consistently integrate Aboriginal perspectives in their classes admit to experiencing professional vulnerability and isolation. This vulnerability, which has a significant impact on a teacher’s self-efficacy, is just one of the many challenges that teachers face as they pursue integrating Aboriginal content in their lessons.

While some teachers feel culturally, ethnically, and linguistically removed from the Aboriginal experience (Deer, 2013), Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) explain that all teachers, especially new teachers, experience everyday challenges in their teaching practice. In a sense, feeling uncomfortable teaching is part of the job of teaching students. However, while this might be true, it is important not to mitigate the important research that explains the phenomenon of teacher-apprehensions regarding teaching Aboriginal students, specifically (Kanu, 2005, Deer, 2013).
In diverse classrooms, including those that include Aboriginal students, issues around self-efficacy arise. As Silverman (2010) explains, “to build teachers’ efficacy around teaching for and about equity, it is essential that teachers recognize their capacity as individuals and as a profession to bring about desirable outcomes for students” (p. 324). Teachers need to be aware of why their work is important, and they must understand what the implications are for students who are diverse in their classrooms when they take responsibility for teaching about equity appropriately. An issue that Silverman (2010) found is that, while teachers acknowledge the importance of having high self-efficacy teaching for or about specific identity groups, they do not consider their responsibility for teaching for and about specific identity groups when addressing their self-efficacy. So, while some teachers might acknowledge having high self-efficacy teaching diverse classrooms, including classrooms with Aboriginal students, they might not be considering their responsibility for teaching their students about what equity is and why it is important. As a result of perhaps false senses of high self-efficacy, some educators, who ultimately have excellent intentions for teaching about diversity and multicultural and intercultural education, end up perpetuating rather than dismantling existing racist, and discriminatory social and political systems (Gorski, 2008). For teachers who acknowledge that certain aspects of intercultural education maintain the marginalization of students, it can be unsettling, especially when the goal is equity (Gorski, 2008). Kumashiro (2000) explains that one of the goals of anti-oppressive education is overcoming the resistance to change and learning that occurs when teachers co-opt systems which produce known truths that do little, if anything, to construct new, disruptive knowledges. Teachers may be resistant to such forms of teaching, because they do not necessarily place the Other, the oppressed student, under the microscope; instead, disruptive knowledges are born from the critique of hegemonic systems that privilege
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the privileged in society, and this is difficult for many teachers. Talking about diversity is difficult because it troubles and disrupts the beliefs that teachers have about themselves, and their students (Kumashiro, 2000). As a result of these systems, teachers do find it difficult to teach, with a high degree of efficacy, the Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

For teachers who intend on developing their practice, and who want to incorporate Aboriginal content into their lessons, self-assurance is absolutely necessary. As Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) explain:

Many educational reforms are implemented with the assumption that teachers will automatically be prepared to take on new roles, adapt to new curricular demands, or modify their orientations to teaching and learning. In practice, though, teachers require sufficient input, commitment from administrators and peers, background preparation, resource support, and confidence in the efforts of other teachers to reshape their jobs and work environments before they are likely to engage fully in education reform processes. (p. 118-119)

Each of these aspects of teaching practice help to shape the type of educator a teacher will become. A teacher’s sense of self-efficacy might depend on this complex myriad of relationships in the school. In the end, the teaching profession has been designed to suit the individual needs of teachers within a complex system. It is through the effectiveness of the teaching profession that teachers are able to better understand their senses of self-efficacy.

There are many reasons why Non-Aboriginal teachers have low self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students, including challenges augmented by the different experiences of students. Canadian racism and the current modes of colonialism have helped to construct a sense of “the stranger” between Aboriginal students and their Non-Aboriginal teachers. Dion (2007) argues
that teachers create this sense of “the stranger” by dominant discourses. More specifically, Dion (2007) argues that white teachers construct a perfect image of an “Indian” from their experiences in school, reading books, and through engaging in white-Canadian discourse. Many Non-Aboriginal teachers explain that they do not know anything about Aboriginal culture, or history; their mindset produces resistance to teaching Aboriginal students, and curriculum content. Dion (2007) argues that when teachers analyze their investment in dominant discourses, they become aware of how this engagement has allowed them to reproduce the dominant ways of knowing about Aboriginal people. This strategy is integral for teachers to think more critically about their practice, and the possibilities for teaching Aboriginal students with a higher degree of efficacy.

This review has shown that, while many teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching Aboriginal students, self-efficacy is something that can change over time. Considering the unique experience of teaching Aboriginal students, it is evident that teachers can develop their self-efficacy. One of these ways is to integrate Aboriginal content and worldviews into the curriculum.

Integration of Aboriginal Content and Worldviews into the Curriculum

A theme in the literature around Aboriginal education is the efficacy of integrating and infusing Aboriginal content and worldviews into the curriculum. There is a deep connection to the land and the spiritual world that needs to be taught to Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal students (Anderson, & Pohl, 2012, Battiste, 1998). Teachers, primarily, are responsible for helping students to understand this, by integrating Aboriginal worldviews and perspectives in their classrooms. The extent to which teachers integrate Aboriginal content relies on the self-efficacy of the teacher, and their feelings of effectiveness teaching about these topics.
When teachers incorporate Aboriginal content into the curriculum, the entire program becomes much more inclusive and participatory (Wang, 2012). While policy documents may help teachers to integrate certain content into the curriculum, the teacher has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that the content is taught in an inclusive, appropriate way. For example, students will not learn to value Aboriginal content if they are told to construct teepees in school. Instead, students learn about Aboriginal content when it is taught in a meaningful way, and when it becomes an integral part of the regular classroom (Wang, 2012). The goal of this paper is to show how teachers have developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal content (or in the case of this paper, teaching Aboriginal students), and to discern whether teachers with high self-efficacy teach Aboriginal content in a more meaningful way.

Curriculum that incorporates Aboriginal content should not just be a mix and jumble of Aboriginal content and knowledge (Wilson & Wilson, 2002). Rather, a curriculum that integrates Aboriginal content should emerge from traditional Aboriginal culture. In this way, Aboriginal languages and culture would feel less disjointed when learners begin to study and learn from the material. It is imperative, Battiste (1998) argues, to integrate the curricula with Aboriginal languages; without Aboriginal languages and knowledge in the curriculum, Aboriginal communities will find it too difficult to recover their senses of nationhood. However, this also necessitates a paradigmatic shift that embraces the rich diversity of Aboriginal culture. What is key in the process is for teachers to be able to identify with a pedagogy that borrows from Aboriginal perspectives. Some features of Aboriginal pedagogy include learning by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment (Battiste, 2013). The success in integrating Aboriginal culture, however, depends on non-Aboriginal teachers’ confidence to do so in an effective manner.
Specifically in the Toronto context, researchers believe that the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) should provide access to proper teacher training in regards to teaching Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) students about the history, and the legacies of colonialism (Dion, Johnston, & Rice, 2010). The authors argue that by incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms, teachers will be able to better work towards decolonizing these learning environments. This job, though, is that of the classroom teacher, and it is a daunting task. The difficulty in integrating Aboriginal perspectives, or teaching about Aboriginal people is that each and every Aboriginal person identifies with a specific history, culture and language. This can make integration difficult for teachers, affecting the way they think about the effectiveness of their teaching practice (Anderson, & Pohl, 2012). However, it is important for teachers to encourage their students to acknowledge this complexity as well. Soloman & Daniel (2009) explain that teachers admit that they do claim colour blindness when teaching racialized students. The overwhelming white presence in the teaching profession in Ontario highlights the need for teachers to interrogate their white privilege, and the structures therein throughout their practice; by interrogating this presence teachers can become much more effective at integrating Aboriginal content into their curriculum.

Infusing Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum will help all learners to be better prepared for the work of true reconciliation in society (Kanu, 2011). By integrating Aboriginal content, including history and perspectives into the curriculum, teachers will be better able to teach their students about the complex and tragic history of colonial injustices. This work remains burdensome for teachers, but, as Kanu (2011) argues, it is absolutely essential:

There are factual truths in Canadian history that we all need to know, not only to deepen our own intellectual understanding and awareness of ourselves as
people but also to be able to make appropriate, informed, political decisions for our nation and for our lives. For instance, because of our lack of understanding of the relationships between Canada’s Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian federal government, many of us stereotype Aboriginal peoples as receiving special privileges that other Canadians do not get. Because we may not know that Aboriginal peoples signed treaties with the federal government that granted Aboriginal peoples certain rights in exchange for the cession of millions of acres of Aboriginal land (for example, the constitutional and treaty right to formal education for successive generations of First Nations peoples), we look upon these so-called privileges not as treaty or constitutional obligations but as Aboriginal people getting something for free at the expense of other Canadians. In short, our ignorance leads us to look at policies divorced from historical context (pp 15-16).

The implications for infusing Aboriginal content and knowledge into the curriculum are far reaching. By doing so, teachers will be more effective at creating equitable learning environments for all of their students. Teaching Aboriginal students contributes to the matrix of a teacher’s feelings about their effectiveness in being able to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives into the curriculum.

Teacher self-efficacy is difficult to study, given the subjective nature of a person’s unique experiences. What has been developed in this section is an acknowledgement that integrating Aboriginal content and worldviews into the classroom is important, but relies very much on the comfort of the teacher in doing so in a meaningful way. Kanu (2011) explains that the theoretical groundwork for why Aboriginal perspectives should be integrated into classrooms has been laid.
The problem remains that teachers who lack high self-efficacy may not feel prepared for teaching Aboriginal content, and students effectively in their classrooms. One strategy-theory that has been helpful for teachers who teach diverse students is culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

**Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy**

Integrating Aboriginal content into the classroom may be one way of teaching in a culturally relevant and responsive way. However, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) is as much a pedagogical framework for understanding education, as it is a teaching strategy. Ladson-Billings’ (1995) article, “But that’s just good teaching!” outlines three tenets of CRRP: “a) Students must experience academic success; b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and, c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (p. 160). CRRP is committed to the collective, not necessarily the individual’s empowerment (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings (1995) explains that a teacher who uses CRRP uses a student’s culture “as a vehicle for learning” (p. 161). For Aboriginal students, CRRP has the potential to be very empowering because, as was discussed in the prior section, integrating Aboriginal content and knowledges is only worthwhile if it is done in a meaningful way. Integrating Aboriginal perspectives and

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3 Culturally relevant pedagogy, as defined by Ladson-Billings (1995) is a theory committed to collective empowerment of groups of students, and is focused on the three main tenants, as described in the chapter. Culturally responsive teaching, as defined by Gay (2002) is “defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively (p. 106).” Generally, culturally relevant pedagogy refers to the theory of teaching in a culturally relevant way, whereas cultural responsive teaching focuses more on the practice of teaching in a culturally relevant way. Unless an author is specifically mentioned, they term culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy (CRRP) will be used to describe the theory and practice of teaching culturally relevant.
content using the framework of CRRP would help to do this in a meaningful, and responsible way.

Knowing that particular pedagogies affect students more positively than others can help teachers to more purposefully choose particular frameworks for teaching. Milner (2011) elaborates that CRRP cannot be used to justify increases in students’ test scores; instead, Milner describes three slightly different outcomes of CRRP: student empowerment to succeed socially and academically, the ability for all students to see their culture reflected in the curriculum and instruction, and the ability for students to understand the complex sociopolitical nature of society. Like teacher self-efficacy, these outcomes of CRRP are difficult to measure, but knowing that they are desired outcomes may provide teachers with a more suitable framework to use when teaching Aboriginal students.

Likewise, culturally responsive pedagogy, as defined by Gay (2002) includes channeling cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of diverse students into a teacher’s teaching practice. CRRP, when infused into the practice of teaching diverse students, can actually help teachers to better understand their students, and make them feel more comfortable because they will know that the diverse cultural needs of their students are being acknowledged, and nurtured. Gay (2002) explains that this occurs through establishing five tenets in the classroom: “developing a knowledge base around cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction” (p. 106). Envisioned together, Ladson-Billings, Milner and Gay all provide a framework for developing teaching praxis that is entirely focused on the cultural affirmation of the students in the classroom. For Aboriginal students this is important, especially
considering the problematic history of the IRS system, which delegitimized Aboriginal culture and knowledges (Milloy, 1999).

Milner (2011) explains that the types of experiences that help teachers to build cultural competency is less clear; yet, cultural competency is key to becoming more culturally congruent with students (Milner, 2011). By situating CRRP within this body of literature, the aim is to integrate CRRP as a meaningful pedagogy for teachers to think about in constructing their own definitions of pedagogies that can be useful for teaching Aboriginal students. What is not known, however, is how teachers with high self-efficacy have used the tenants of CRRP in their teaching praxis, or whether or not this framework is used by them when integrating Aboriginal content and culture meaningfully in the classroom. What remains important to understand within this research, however, are the broader implications of colonialism in Canada.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Settler Colonialism

Canada has a history of colonialism. It is important to address, however, the different ways that colonialism has been understood, and is being reconceptualized by scholars and applied to different areas of study (such as education). Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that postcolonial studies have generally centered around two modes of colonialism, which overlap, reinforce, and contradict one another. External colonialism is one of these forms of colonialism, while internal colonialism is the other. The former concerns the exploitation, and the extraction of different parts of an Indigenous world (such as animals, plants, and human beings), and thus the Indigenous world becomes remade with systems and structures that are created by colonizers and based on Western epistemologies. The latter form of colonialism concerns the social institutions (such as schools, hospitals and others) as modes of control over Indigenous people. The purpose of internal colonialism was to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its colonial
ele. A third mode of colonialism exists, and that is settler colonialism (Tuck, & Yang, 2012; Calderon, 2014, Coulthard, 2014).

Neither external, nor internal colonialism properly describes the system where the colonizer chooses to stay (Veracini, 2007; 2010). Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that settler colonialism relies on the modes of internal and external colonialism, but also on the supplanting of Indigenous people from the land. This occurs for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that in the settler colonial context, land equals wealth and power in the remaking of a world system and the erasure of Indigenous laws and epistemologies. Colonialism has resulted in the racialization of Aboriginal people’s identity, and the marginalization and de-legitimation of their knowledges, languages, and epistemologies (Battiste, 2013). For teachers, it is imperative that they understand their practice by deconstructing how their work teaching Aboriginal students relies on the structure of settler colonialism, rather than the understanding that schools operate as a form of colonial power in Canadian society. Simply put, as Battiste (2013) made clear, teachers need to understand how colonialism (and as such, the state, and its institutions) has erased the legitimacy of Aboriginal knowledges in schools.

One of the limitations for using settler colonialism as one of the theoretical underpinnings of this research is that without centering the research on the articulations and voices of Aboriginal people, this paper runs the risk of perpetuating, and perhaps replicating, modes of domination, including settler colonialism (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014). The challenge in using settler colonialism as a way to understand this work is that this study places non-Aboriginal teachers at the centre of the research, which eschews the power and purpose of Aboriginal resurgence and self-determination in Canada. As Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel argue, this approach has the potential to present settler colonialism as “complete or
transhistorical, as inevitable, rather than conditioned and contingent” (2014, p. 26). By thinking and acting on the relational processes that exist through settler colonialism, this paper will help to move beyond analysis and move towards creating a dialogue teachers can use to better understand how their engagement and lived experiences on this land continue to shape the current mode of power. One avenue of departure for teachers is to talk about their positive experiences teaching Aboriginal students. By participating in the discourse of settler colonialism, teachers can learn more about the history of, and contemporary issues with, Aboriginal education. What is less clear is whether or not teachers think about their role within a colonial context, and whether or not this contributes to the development of high self-efficacy. In determining how teachers develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students, we can begin to connect how these feelings of comfort affect teaching practice and equity in classrooms with Aboriginal students.

Decolonization

Decolonization is a difficult term to define, because, as Tuck and Yang (2012) explain, many education scholars choose to use decolonization as a means towards social justice education, or equity education; as a result, decolonization has become somewhat of a buzzword amongst educators and scholars who study Aboriginal education. According to Tuck and Yang (2012), “decolonization is only accountable to Indigenous sovereignty” (p. 35). Yet, Battiste (2013) also explains that decolonization is an important framework for all educators and scholar who study education:

Decolonization … is a process of unpacking the keeper current in education: its powerful Eurocentric assumptions of education, its narratives of race and difference in curriculum and pedagogy, its establishing culturalism or cultural
racism as a justification for the status quo, and the advocacy for Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate education topic. It is the channel for generating a postcolonial education system in Canada and disrupting those normalized discourses and singularities and allowing diverse voices and perspectives and objectives into “mainstream” schooling. (p. 107)

The postcolonial framework of decolonization necessitates the renewal and reconstruction of the principles underlying the current epistemologies that allow educators to understand contemporary Canadian education. In her previous work, Battiste (1998) has argued that decolonization is a daunting task for teachers, and involves the sustainability of an Indigenous future. This presumption aligns with the definition provided by Tuck and Yang (2012), which also calls for decolonization as a means to ensure an Aboriginal future and Aboriginal sovereignty. Using land education as a model for teaching practice, Calderon (2014) explains that decolonization involves “uncovering how settler colonial projects are maintained and reproduced, with understandings of land being of the primary ways such identities are formed” (p. 28). This form of decolonization is particularly helpful as it helps scholars to reconceptualize land as a mode of Indigenous erasure through the system of colonialism.

Understanding decolonization is important for this study, as few scholars have used decolonization as a framework for understanding how teachers can develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. However, Tuck and Yang (2012) do explain that decolonization is too often used as a settler move to innocence in the scholarship of Aboriginal education. Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that settler moves to innocence “problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity” (p. 3). In fact, Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that scholars invested in educational advocacy too easily call on decolonization as the answer to the colonial injustices in
the education system. Decolonization in this case becomes an inappropriate metaphor for social justice education and equity education. The problem with this is that decolonization is accountable only to Indigenous sovereignty, and that decolonization as understood though a western epistemology works to perpetuate and (re)produce a settler, not Indigenous, future (Tuck and Yang, 2012). For this reason, many scholars lack the ability to understand what the decolonizing moment of settler colonialism might be; in other words, the language for this type of work does not yet exist (Veracini, 2007). With this in mind, it is important to consider the implications for decolonization if teachers are able to imagine this moment of decolonization.

For Minnis (2008), the rhetoric of decolonizing education has resulted in a culturally deterministic, politically motivated approach to education where culture trumps everything else. He argues that rhetoric around decolonization has not resulted in systemic-wide improvements in educational under-achievement amongst Aboriginal students. Kanu (2011) acknowledges this argument and explains that learning cannot only be measured through test scores. Yet, Kanu further acknowledges that good pedagogy alone cannot undo the multiple injustices faced by Aboriginal students in our classrooms. Minnis’ analysis confuses the purposes of decolonization in the context of Aboriginal education. Integrating Aboriginal culture into the classroom does not decolonize the learning environment for students, for example. Rather, when teachers rethink the pedagogical imperative of their teaching practice in making the learning more equitable for more students, and when they actively acknowledge the impact of integrating Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms, teachers can help to create a moment for decolonization in education.

In addressing the political nature of decolonization in the scholarship, I hope to demonstrate an appreciation for the Aboriginal scholars whom I rely greatly throughout this study (Frank Deer, Marie Battiste, Wilmer Nadjiwon, Glen Coulthard, as well as others). In
presupposing the literature themes, I suspected that teachers with high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students might envision their practice as decolonizing education. Certainly, decolonization has become an important area for study, and its implications in practice, while not yet known, could be powerful for making education more equitable for more students in our schools. What is not known is whether teachers talk about decolonizing their practice, or education, and whether the discourse of decolonization affects their senses of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students or not. This study endeavors to better understand how teachers develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students, and how these feelings of high self-efficacy affect how they think about equity in their classrooms.

**Implications for this study**

To conclude, it is important to note that the study of Aboriginal education is a very broad, cross-disciplinary field. The five themes chosen: teacher self-efficacy, integration and infusion of Aboriginal content and worldviews into the curriculum, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, settler colonialism, and decolonization merely scrape the scholarly surface, yet they help position the crux of this study. The gap in the research that this paper will attempt to reconcile, is in part defined by Kanu (2011), who explains that while it may be difficult to navigate the needs of all the learners in Aboriginal education – including teachers, students, families and others – whatever the factors are that promote the integration of Aboriginal perspectives are of particular interest. This literature review highlights the different ways that researchers have come to understand the different apprehensions that teachers have teaching Aboriginal students. It also broadened the scope to address the efficacy of integrating Aboriginal perspectives and culture into the classroom, and addressed the ideological frameworks of settler colonialism in contemporary Canadian society. This paper will help to augment the literature by
exploring the perspectives of teachers who have high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. These are the perspectives that will help us to understand how teachers’ practices in classrooms can make education more equitable in Canada.

In determining how these different scholarly perspectives intersect, we can learn more about how teachers have developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. In doing so, this research will highlight the experiences of teachers who teach Aboriginal students; the research will determine who primarily influences the self-efficacy of teachers of Aboriginal students, and the strategies that teachers use to improve their senses’ of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. The goal is to determine how teachers develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students, and how they are able to negotiate their senses of self-efficacy within a system of settler-colonialism.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Procedure

A multiple case study methodology was used to complete this research project. Multiple case studies enable the researcher to explore the differences and similarities between cases, but within the same study (Yin, 2003). Baxter & Jack (2008) acknowledge that case studies must rely on an issue, or a proposition for potential research. The proposition for this multiple case study is that teachers, especially new teachers just beginning their teaching careers, will normally feel ill prepared to teach Aboriginal students in their classrooms (Deer 2013, Kanu 2005). There exists little research that explains why teachers might have high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. With this proposition in mind, a framework for conducting the research was developed. This included carefully selecting cases that would suite the proposition, conducting interviews with three teachers, and creating cases for each of these teachers. The analyzing of the data included making a cross-case comparison, and relating the data to the literature that focuses on Aboriginal education, as well as the frameworks of teacher self-efficacy, settler colonialism and decolonization. The data is presented as findings, and the cross-case comparisons, and connections to the literature are presented as insights, in the final chapter.

After gaining ethics approval from the University of Toronto, educators were approached and asked to participate in the research. I used connections through different instructors in the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) program at OISE to locate interested teachers. I also used my own connections to recruit participants. The goal of conducting interviews with these teachers was to study how teachers have developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. The perspectives provided by the participants informed what the account of experiences of teachers who teach Aboriginal students are like. The perspectives also provided
insight into who primarily influences the self-efficacy of teachers of Aboriginal students, as well as the strategies that a teacher can use to improve their self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. The perspectives also highlight what the relationship is between high teacher self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students and their beliefs about equity in the classroom. Participants were teachers who teach Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and at the time of recruitment believed that they had high self-efficacy teaching the Aboriginal students in their class.

**Instruments of Data Collection**

The data for this project was collected through face-to-face interviews with teachers in their classrooms outside of class time. Turner’s (2010) article was helpful in structuring and completing the data collection for this project. Standardized open-ended interviews were completed with each of the participants. Each participant was asked the same set of questions, and the open-ended nature of the questions allowed for each interviewee to contribute as much information as they could by drawing on their own experiences and perspectives. The beginning questions sought to get a better understanding about the teacher’s experiences teaching Aboriginal students. Simple questions helped the teachers to feel at ease, and also provided important demographic information. The interview questions progressed into two subsets. The first allowed the teacher to elaborate on their beliefs as to why they have developed a high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. For example I asked teachers to describe a moment when they felt comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, and a time when they felt anxious teaching Aboriginal students. The second subset of questions asked the teachers to talk a little bit about how their colleagues have developed their senses of self-efficacy. For example, I asked participants to tell me if they knew about any strategies or resources that their colleagues might
have used to become more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students. The interview protocol is attached in Appendix A.

Participants

The collection of data relied on interviewing non-Aboriginal teachers who teach Aboriginal students in Ontario. There was no minimum requirement for number of years teaching. However, it was explained to the participants in the letter of consent that they had to feel very comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. For the purposes of clarity, I choose not to use the term self-efficacy in the recruitment of participants. An instructor in the ITE program at OISE, who has extensive experience working with elementary teachers and principals, helped by contacting principals throughout Ontario who she believed would be of assistance in the recruitment process. This is important because, as Yin (2003) explains, qualitative research that uses multiple case studies should rely on a replication logic, whereby each case is carefully chosen so that similar results can be expected from each case. Teachers also found out about my study through word of mouth; I asked participants to recommend teachers who they believed had high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. In one case, a teacher who I had asked to participate in the study referred me to a different teacher in the school who she felt would be a better fit for the research study. My three teacher-participants are: Gerald, a non-Aboriginal teacher who has been teaching for thirteen years and who says that he is comfortable teaching Aboriginal students all the time; Susan, who is a non-Aboriginal teacher, and has been an educator for twenty-two years, who says that she is comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in her classrooms; and Katrina, who is a relatively new teacher teaching special education, who also explains that she feels comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in
her classroom. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, and their schools, each of these teachers have received a pseudonym.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Each interview was digitally recorded, and after I had completed each of the three interviews, I listened to them multiple times and made anecdotal notes about things that surprised me, or that I found particularly interesting. I transcribed the interviews and conducted a broad analysis of the transcripts by reading them through twice and making notes in the margins before I began coding. This process, as described by Wolcott (1994), is referred to as sketching the ideas. Yin (2003) explains that during the analyzing phase of research it is important to return to the original proposition of the study. This was important for me, especially as I continued to re-focus and contextualize the themes within the literature. Coding is primarily an interpretive act, and key to analyzing qualitative data (Saldana, 2008). I manually coded each of the interview transcripts. Once the categories became apparent, I highlighted the different data for each category in the transcripts. The different codes from each case helped to produce the following five categories of data: community and quality relationships; safety of Aboriginal students; Aboriginal leadership; poverty of Aboriginal families; and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. The next phase of analyzing included making cross-case comparisons and contextualizing the data with the original framework, and literature which had been purposefully chosen to contextualize the proposition that teachers, generally, feel ill-prepared to teach Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

As is true for all qualitative studies that rely on personal experiences, great care was taken throughout this study to ensure that the ethical review procedures of the Ontario Institute
for Studies in Education (OISE) were upheld. Research ethics were considered at all times throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013). I contacted the participants and informed them of the purpose of the study prior to their recruitment. At this point the participants were told that the researcher was studying the topic of teachers’ sense of high self-efficacy and level of comfort teaching Aboriginal students and that the research would be presented at conferences, and would be uploaded online. The participants were reassured of their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in the research study. The participants were given a letter of consent (Appendix B) and asked to complete the attached portion of the letter, which acknowledged that they had agreed to be interviewed for the study (Appendix C). The participants were ensured that, even after signing the document, they had the right to withdraw from the study. The participants were left with hard copies of these documents.

As Skaalvik, and Skaalvik (2008) explain, a framework for measuring a teacher’s self-efficacy does not exist. Therefore, this investigator remained vigilant in ethically interviewing their participants in order to uncover accurate, genuine perspectives of the teachers’ senses of self-efficacy. One of the ways in which this became an ethical consideration was in the analyzing of the data. For example, if I were not being an ethical researcher, I would have only discussed the positive results from the research. Considering the state of education for Aboriginal students, this would have been inappropriate, and detrimental to the goal of the project, which is to help teachers to understand how high levels of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students can be developed.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The recorded sessions were deleted after they were transcribed and the transcriptions were kept protected on a password-protected computer. This raw data will be kept for up to five years by the researcher; at
this time, the data will no longer be needed and will be destroyed. Each participant received a copy of this research project in its final form.

**Limitations**

As is the case with all qualitative research, there are limitations to this project. There are two limitations in particular, which are significant. Firstly, a significant limitation is the fact that only three teachers were interviewed. Interviewing just three teachers limits this study because there is little research conducted on how teachers perceive their teaching practice as it relates to teaching Aboriginal students. There would have been more perspectives had more teachers be interviewed. However, it is important to acknowledge that the perspectives of the teachers who were interviewed in this research study have had a significant impact on the creation and development of the different themes related to the development of high self-efficacy. As Creswell (2013) explains, when the study involves multiple cases, it is important to not choose to interview too many participants. Interviewing more teachers certainly allows for more variables to be considered, however, and these variables are worth including in future studies. Yet, it is important to be clear about the intentions of the researcher when more, or fewer, cases are included.

Another significant limitation of this study was in the recruitment of participants. It may have been difficult for teachers to admit that they have high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. I believe it may have been difficult for teachers to admit this because of the current state of education in Canada. Due to the contemporary socio-cultural politics involved with the education of young Aboriginal students, it can be daunting for teachers to express that they feel confident in overcoming the macro-challenges in the education system. I attempted to overcome this limitation in the interview process by asking teachers questions related to their personal
teaching experiences and their perceptions related to the topic. Future researchers should consider this limitation in their recruitment of participants. By positively engaging in what teachers know best – their own experiences – I aimed to ascertain more authentic, genuine themes from rich discussions.
Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

The following findings are the result of three interviews with three separate teachers from across southern Ontario (Susan, Gerald, and Katrina). Each of the three participants is a full time teacher in Ontario, and they each teach Aboriginal students in off-reserve elementary schools. The experiences and voices that the teachers brought to the provocation of why teachers might have high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students, help to articulate a praxis for teaching Aboriginal students when, as has been discussed, that case tends to make teachers anxious, or apprehensive.

4.1: Case study one: Susan

Susan is also a non-Aboriginal teacher, and has been an educator for twenty-two years. She is currently the learning resource teacher in her school, and is in charge of helping to co-create IEPs for students in the school. Susan also works with students one-on-one and in small groups with students from kindergarten to grade eight in an off-reserve school. Before moving to her current community, Susan worked at multiple school boards as a supply teacher, and also worked as a teacher on two fly-in reserves in northern Ontario. She taught kindergarten to grade eight in these communities, and all of her students were Aboriginal. During her time as a supply teacher Susan also did a short teaching stint in a high school where she taught NSL. Susan explained to me that she is very comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in her classrooms.

4.1a: Community and quality relationships

Throughout her interview, Susan demonstrated an awareness of the importance of community, and the development of quality relationships with her Aboriginal students in
developing high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. Susan explains that it is important to develop quality relationships with students in order to feel more comfortable teaching, and she explains that these relationships usually begin with a conversation, which end up being deep and meaningful. Susan demonstrates the development of quality relationships by explaining that her Aboriginal students now feel comfortable talking to her about complex issues:

I’m really pleased when we’re working now that they feel comfortable to either talk to me about their fears … like, ‘…I don’t know if I can leave the reserve,’ or, ‘I really do want to do that, but I am afraid to leave the reserve. I don’t know what that’s like; I’ve always lived here, so what do I do if I want to leave here and go to school?’ So, that’s when I feel I’ve made this connection, because in the past we wouldn’t be able to have that conversation.

Susan acknowledges that it takes time to develop quality relationships. These relationships become deep and meaningful, and Susan feels as if the students really open up to her, because they are willing to share their fears and apprehensions about leaving their reserve one day. These relationships have helped Susan to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students and have helped her to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

Susan explains that feelings of comfort are related to the success she feels as a teacher. Much of this success, however, depends on the quality and extent of the relationships that she has created with students. She explains that, “I’ve always felt that I am the most successful as a teacher if I take the time to understand the kids that I’m teaching.” Susan explains that the process of really getting to know students takes time, but admitted that when she first taught in an Aboriginal community, she felt apprehensive teaching Aboriginal students. When Susan moved to northern Ontario to teach on a reserve, she felt:
Really shell shocked, sort of, wait, this is not what I signed up for, this is not the reserve I wanted, obviously I went to the wrong one. The experience taught me: you better take some time, and get to know what’s going on where you’re teaching.

Susan explains that before she had high self-efficacy, she had to learn about the community before she could start feeling comfortable teaching the students in the community.

In her current school, Susan explains that relationships are so important, and that developing meaningful relationships have helped her, and the other teachers in the school, to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students:

I’ve found in this school in particular, if you talk to any other teacher in this school, they’ll go over and over again about relationships. It is the relationships that we have with our students that have made our teaching better... because it’s changed the way we teach, and I’m not talking about the relationship where you hang out, and we do have that with some of these kids, but it’s where the kids know when I’m upset with you, [they] know it’s coming from a place of caring.

Susan recognizes that it is because of the meaningful relationships that she has with her students, that she has been able to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom.

Besides developing meaningful relationships with her students, Susan explained why communities are important for Aboriginal students. In her particular community, Susan explains that the best way to get to know her students is to actually visit them in their own community on
the reserve. Susan clarifies that learning about the community helps to create trust between the Aboriginal community and the school:

One of the best things I’ve ever done is I make sure I know where the kids are coming from, … I’m surprised [at] the number of people who have never been out to the reserve, especially those who teach kids from the reserve, because I think to myself, that’s why some parents – they don’t see you out there – [and] there’s no trust. You know, we invite you, and you never come, and we don’t see you. But you want me to go here and do this and do that? Well, you don’t come to our celebrations. It’s like any community; they expect respect.

Susan explains that by taking the time to get to know the people in the community, she has been able to develop a sense of trust amongst the community members. By making these connections with the local Aboriginal community, Susan has been able to develop a high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in her classrooms.

**4.1b: Safety of Aboriginal students**

Part of Susan’s reflection during the interview discusses how she is sensitive to the fact that schools may not be safe places for Aboriginal students. Related to the issues of trust and the development of community that were discussed in the previous theme, Susan also acknowledges that schools may not be safe places for Aboriginal students because the Aboriginal community has a lack of trust in the teachers at the school. She explains that, “[when] they don’t see you there [on the reserve] … there’s no trust.” In unpacking these ideas around community, Susan clarifies that part of becoming comfortable teaching Aboriginal students necessitates an understanding that some community members in Aboriginal communities are not trusting of schools. Susan demonstrates that she understands why parents might not trust teachers, and she
actively gets to know the families on the reserve, and visits with them. Susan explains that many families need a lot of assurance from the teachers that the school is a safe place for their kids. She explains that, “if you want to get buy in, you have to get the parents engaged.” Interestingly, it is through developing meaningful relationships with the community that Susan has attempted to address the issue of students not feeling safe, or that Aboriginal students might not feel as if they belong, in school.

Susan addressed one thing that she felt was an issue for Aboriginal students, and their families in our interview. She believes that schools may not be safe places for young Aboriginal students because there is a fear that some Aboriginal people believe they might become less-Aboriginal in the process of leaving the reserve to attend elementary school. Susan told me that she has explained to people, including Aboriginal parents, that, “their Native never goes away. You don’t have to be around Native people 24/7 to still be Aboriginal. This school is proof of that… that’s your culture.” Because there are non-Aboriginal students in the school as well, Susan believes many Aboriginal families worry that their children will not be accepted in the school, but worse, that they might loose part of their identity by attending the school. Susan demonstrates a commitment to understanding the issues that contemporary Aboriginal students face in schools today. In doing so, Susan has been able to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

According to Susan, the school itself has a very bad reputation in the local community. She explains that she does not know why, because she never sees fistfights, or anything that might signal that the school might be bad, or have trouble. However, Susan explains that the reputation is based on the perceptions that the non-Aboriginal families in the community have of the school. Susan has been asked before from community members: “You teach at the Indian
According to Susan, the local community – generally – is very closed-minded. She acknowledges that the Aboriginal students have to come into this town to attend school, and that this experience may be negative for them. Susan demonstrates a commitment to developing high self-efficacy and comfort teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom through acknowledging that students may feel unsafe attending school.

4.1c: Aboriginal leadership

In her school, Susan works alongside a number of Aboriginal Education Assistants (hereafter referred to as paraprofessionals) who are hired by the reserve band office to work with the Aboriginal students in the school. Susan relies on these paraprofessionals in the classroom because:

They can give both perspectives… I’ve found them to be a very good sounding board. You can go to them to talk about a particular student and ask if there is something I need to know? They’ll give me a little more history. Like, they’ll say, ‘I don’t know if he’s doing that personally to you, I think that’s his way of telling you, I don’t get what’s going on; then you’ll kick me out, then we’ll be done.’ So, they have been extremely helpful because one: they work in education, so they know that we have things that we have to do; secondly: they can also give you that other perspective. So they have probably been the most helpful for me.

Susan’s reflection provides a better context for the relationship that she has with her Aboriginal colleagues. Their reassurance, insights and knowledge help to make Susan feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students.
Besides the Aboriginal paraprofessionals in the school, Susan also works with an Aboriginal teacher who teaches NSL. Susan explains that:

We rely heavily on our Native language teacher. In grade six when you teach Aboriginal culture, you can go to her. Because one, she has the knowledge, and two, she knows what not to do. One year, I wanted to do smudging. I was fine with doing it. I asked her and she told me that it would have more impact if you had an elder doing it… and that’s what I did because I didn’t want to over step. So, for those strategies a lot of us go, I’d better just go double-check that. We always find a source, and it’s usually her.

Susan finds reassurance in the Aboriginal leadership in her school, but she also has developed a professional relationship with these people as well, which has affected her teaching practice and contributed to her having high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

4.1d: Poverty of Aboriginal families

In our interview, Susan spoke at great length about the unique issues around poverty in the Aboriginal community, and the impact poverty has on equity in the classroom for Aboriginal students. Susan told me about the moment when she reevaluated the way she thinks about, or talks to, her Aboriginal students. Susan explained that she was driving an Aboriginal student home (he lived on the reserve) after an after-school extra-curricular program, and when she got to his house, she decided that she would to speak to his mother about a late assignment. She explains:

He was not happy … but I thought … you’re not happy because you’re not caught up on your work, and then when I got to his house [and] I had that light bulb go on … Where is this kid sitting down to do an assignment? There’s not a
table to work at, there are eight kids in the house, and I’m like, ‘You need to do this, …’ and it made me when I came back to school say, ‘okay, what am I asking these kids to do?’ And then it made me start to feel uncomfortable because [I thought], I know school is school, but I do have to take into account, where are you coming from? And that’s definitely a First Nations thing; it is for other kids, too, but also for a lot of the First Nations kids we teach. And it made me really stop and think [that] I have to stop saying some stupid stuff. You know, like, ‘where are your running shoes? Where is your second pair of running shoes?’ Now you’re [thinking], okay, they don’t have a second pair of running shoes. So, why am I making them say everyday, ‘well, I don’t have a second pair, my mother didn’t buy them for me…’ That was a big moment for me.

During this reflective process Susan highlights when she first felt uncomfortable about her relationship, including the language she uses, with Aboriginal students. She explains that through this experience, she was able to acknowledge that poverty uniquely affects her Aboriginal students. Knowing this has made Susan, in her opinion, a much more effective teacher, and more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom.

Susan explains that moving through these moments of discomfort has allowed her to grow and develop into a much better teacher for her students. Through these experiences, she has become a much more reflective, comfortable teacher. For example, she explained that, “I’m not going to give you a pass because I understand how your life is, but I’m going to have another talk of, so how can we make this work for you?” Susan keeps working to make the experience of Aboriginal students more equitable: in this excerpt, she explains how she came to realize that her
Aboriginal students might need more from her than her other students who might also experience poverty on a daily basis:

I want you to put the poverty lens on because many of our Aboriginal students are below the poverty line. … Poverty has a huge impact, the fact that their parents didn’t go to school, and that their parents didn’t … people will say, we got this whole Residential School thing, and yeah, definitely we do. There is a component to that, but the bigger picture is that we have children who have children, who came from parents who didn’t really know how to parent, and now they’re having children and they don’t know how to parent because of poverty … on the reserve, there are no resource out there.

Interestingly, Susan told me that with her Aboriginal students, she finds it most useful to consider that, yes, her students are Aboriginal, but there are always going to be other issues at play:

I am dealing with First Nation kids, but where are they coming from? Just like my other kids. Okay, I’m going to look at that, first, and then the Aboriginal component is going to come, too, but it’s not the first thing that I think about. Oh, they’re Native – oh I know what to do! No, I need to see the other part of their life.

Susan explains that one of the challenges that she has had to understand is that as a teacher there is more to teaching Aboriginal students than just the fact that they are Aboriginal. In her reflection, she admits that this learning has helped her to become more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students.
Susan explains that other teachers sometimes do not recognize the issue with poverty in the school when they first come to the school to teach. For example, Susan told me that the school got a new teacher recently, and:

He would tell you that when he came here he had that whole … idea of, well this is going to be great, because these kids are going to be spiritual and these kids are going to be cultural, and you know, as he said, these kids have a lot of issues that the kids in other communities have – they are from broken homes with no money and on welfare and you know, that kid is very much like so-and-so form that other school. Poverty is a huge issue.

From her vantage, Susan has been able to see how other teachers have developed their own understanding of how poverty affects Aboriginal people, but also an understanding of how these issues of poverty compound the issues of being an Aboriginal student in the contemporary school system. Understanding these compounding issues has made Susan a much more comfortable teacher with high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

**4.1e: Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy**

During the formative years of her teaching career, Susan thought that it would be great to teach Aboriginal students, because she believed that they would be “filled with their culture.” During her interview, she explained how the issues of poverty in the Aboriginal communities in which she taught disillusioned her. A dominant theme throughout her interview was acknowledging aspects of being Aboriginal on this land that have less to do with culture – such as poverty and low socioeconomic status. Yet, Susan did explain that, “if the staff can change the climate of the school, then they can change the results of the kids in the classroom.” In describing her pedagogy, Susan explains, “I know I’m a union member, but I’m not making a
car. We’re teaching kids. Billy needs me right now, and so that’s what I’m doing.” While she
does not say so explicitly, Susan explains that it is important to be responsive to students. This
includes being culturally cognizant of students’ individual needs, which Susan explained has
helped her to become more confident teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom.

4.2: Case study two: Gerald

Gerald is a non-Aboriginal teacher and has been a teacher for thirteen years. Before
moving to his current school, Gerald taught grade three to eight as a Teaching Assistant in a non-
Aboriginal, homogeneous community. As a Teaching Assistant, Gerald worked with “seriously
troubled children” on a one-on-one basis. Prior to becoming a teacher in his current off-reserve
community, he had never taught an Aboriginal student, and had no experience with the
(Aboriginal) culture.

Gerald currently teaches a homeroom elementary school class and the majority of the
students in his class are Aboriginal. Gerald explains that he is comfortable teaching Aboriginal
students all the time, and that, if anything, he’d probably feel uncomfortable teaching anywhere
else at this point in his career.

4.2a: Community and quality relationships

Gerald explains that the community has helped him to feel more comfortable teaching
Aboriginal students. He attributes part of this comfort to the Aboriginal community, which, he
says, is “a very welcoming community.” Gerald told me about how he was made to feel part of
the community through participating in community celebrations, one of which in particular
welcomed formally into the community:

I’ve been here about a month when, somebody turned up to my door one day
and said, “you’re coming to ceremony tonight.” They took me to ceremony,
and I got my name, and I got my clan. I keep the drums now. I carry a pipe. I speak the language … I’m all in. And you have to be – otherwise it doesn’t work.

Community has been an important aspect as to why Gerald feels so comfortable teaching Aboriginal students. His high self-efficacy in the classroom, he partly attributes to his personality, but he also attributes to the Aboriginal community itself, which he has found very welcoming. Gerald elucidates this feeling of comfort by explaining that he is “so comfortable with the way that [he is] perceived by the community … not just by the kids, but by the adults and by the incredibly dedicated Native teachers that [the school has].” Gerald shows an understanding that he plays a role in the community, and that the community itself has helped him to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students.

Gerald also acknowledges that in his classroom, there exists a “culture of one” in his classroom. He explains that he has developed this sense of community by just getting to know his students. Gerald elaborates by saying that, “you can talk about Bloom’s taxonomy all you want. … but when you get here with the kids, it’s you and the kids. You have to engage them.” In developing quality relationships with his students, Gerald has created a positive and engaged community in his classroom. He explains, “the efficacy of any teacher teaching Native kids is based entirely on whether they show the respect to the kids … and that they can’t come in with a rescue complex.” In developing quality relationships with his students, Gerald explains that he has had to show respect, and understand that his role is not to save anybody in his classroom. He explains that he’s a teacher, and that the relationships he has with his students is based on a mutual respect. This community and the relationships that he has with his students has allowed
Gerald to develop his self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. He credits the relationships that he has with his students, and the community for that.

4.2b: Safety of Aboriginal students

Gerald explained to me that his school used to have a very bad reputation in the local community. Gerald remembered that when he started at the school, there were a lot of incidents of violence in the school, and suspensions were not uncommon, either. Gerald explains that it has gotten a lot better at the school, but he also acknowledges that a lot of this relies on the language that the teacher uses, and the environment that they help to create in the school. Specifically, Gerald explains that teachers have to be cognizant about their choice of words in schools. He explains that:

It’s not that if you say the wrong thing that people will come and yell at you, but in the sense that everything you say as a teacher, regardless of how off the cuff it is, you have no idea how heavy it’s falling on a kid in here. So if you’ve got a kid with a bit of context, or his family has been to Residential School, which the last one was shut in 1996 – so the parents have been to Residential School. We’ve got parents and grandparents and aunts and uncles who went to Residential School – you’ve got to be careful what you say.

Gerald feels comfortable teaching Aboriginal students now, and his reflection on the language that teachers use in the classroom has helped him to articulate how he understands that schools might not be safe places for students. He acknowledges that schools are unsafe places for Aboriginal students because, as he told me, the last Indian Residential School closed in 1996, and so his students still feel the trauma of these institutions.
Of course, Gerald also acknowledges that while it has been important for him to really think carefully about his choice of words, he also explains that it is important for him not to over-sensitize difficult issues. Yet, it is also important for him, as a non-Aboriginal teacher, to be comfortable in addressing these issues as well. White guilt, in Gerald’s opinion, can ruin the relationship between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal teachers. He explains to future teachers of Aboriginal students:

If you’re going to teach Native kids, get over [white guilt]. Don’t come here and teach out of guilt. It’s not going to work. … People don’t know how to have a conversation about what happened to the Native people without being spectacularly sensitive … white teachers coming into a Native community … come in with a huge amount of sensitivity. [They] aren’t saving them, [they’re] teaching them … You can’t come in here with a savior notion … you need to examine your motivations all the time.

Gerald explains that part of his role as a teacher is to teach the students. He explains that it is not important to come into an Aboriginal community with a hidden agenda – he acknowledges that this only hurts the students. Gerald points to this inner pedagogy as a cornerstone of the development of high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in his classrooms.

4.2c: Aboriginal leadership

Gerald explains that one of the reasons why he is so comfortable teaching Aboriginal students is because he knows that the teachings that he has learned come from a good place. He respects, and looks to the Aboriginal leadership in his community for advice and leadership. He says that:
I am so comfortable with the way that I am perceived in the community … It’s very reassuring to know that the teachings that I have came from people who are well respected in the community and I know that the teachings that I carry around with me and that … I’m modeling in front of the kids are coming from a good place. They’re coming from an established respected line of elders who gave those teachings to the community. So I am always comfortable in here.

The Aboriginal teachers, and Aboriginal community members in the school have provided Gerald with a lot of support, and he credits them with helping him to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

A pivotal moment in Gerald’s teaching career, where he felt truly comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, occurred when he was offered to keep the school’s drums in his class from one of the school’s elders. Gerald recounts the experience of being asked to keep the drums, and the impact that has had on his self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students:

When you get asked that by someone like [that], that puts an awful lot of pep in your step, because you’re getting acknowledgement and recognition from the only place you can really genuinely take it from. It’s great when the administrators say, you’re doing a great job, or when your EQAO scores are great, but when somebody from the community comes to you and says, can you please take over a community responsibility, for me that was the moment when I was like, you can bring anything now … the confidence I have from just being entrusted … really helps … For a non-Native person it’s so important that you do receive some support from the Native people in the community because otherwise I think it can be very isolating … They know
that I understand what it’s about, and that I’m not just paying lip-service to it… That gives me a huge amount of confidence.

In Gerald’s school, the Aboriginal elders are highly regarded. This passage identifies how validation and reassurance from these leaders have been important for Gerald as he develops self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in his classroom.

4.2d: Poverty of Aboriginal families

During his interview, Gerald spoke very little specifically about poverty. He did mention that one of the issues that many Aboriginal people face is poverty, and that it has resulted in a number of stereotypes that teachers need to acknowledge before teaching Aboriginal students. Gerald did, however, address the issues around equity in the school board regarding Aboriginal education. Gerald admitted that discussing equity makes him feel uncomfortable, because, as Gerald explained in his interview, he believes that “the notion of equity is problematic.” Gerald showed me the interactive whiteboards, which he and the school librarian were able to bring into the school with private funding. Gerald explains that it is because of the hard work that he and his colleagues put in that has resulted in the students being successful academically. Gerald explained to me that knowing this about his practice gives him confidence in knowing that his students are able to succeed in his classroom.

4.2e: Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy

Before moving to his current community, Gerald admits that he did not have any pre-set judgments about Aboriginal students, or Aboriginal culture, because he had never taught an Aboriginal student before. He explains that he “didn’t have any cultural context or baggage,” which might have enabled him to develop high self-efficacy quicker than had he had more interaction with Aboriginal people growing up. It was evident throughout the interview that
Gerald practices CRRP, and there were many instances where Gerald showed a deep understanding of the importance for being culturally relative and responsive in an Aboriginal setting. For example, Gerald acknowledges that being culturally responsive is not always about designing lessons that have an Aboriginal focus. Instead, Gerald explains that the reason why cultural responsiveness is necessary is because in his school he has to be very careful of language:

It’s really important that as a teacher, you are constantly aware of who you are, and what you’re saying … The most lightweight comment that you would make in a white, middle class high school, like, “Oh would you just sit down and act civilized?” You say that in here? … You have to think about everything you’re doing in here. And it’s become second nature so it’s not a grinding, wearing away of your spirit because you need to keep an eye on everything you say, but you have to make sure that when you say stuff that they understand the context (use of italics to show added emphasis).

Being self-aware, and culturally competent in the school has made Gerald a much more comfortable teacher of Aboriginal students. Becoming more reflective and culturally responsive has helped Gerald to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

Gerald explains that learning the culture of his Aboriginal students has been integral to his comfort level teaching Aboriginal students. He explains that:

It’s fantastically important that however you’re teaching they need to see you respecting the culture. Its fantastic that they have ‘language and tradition and culture,’ … But I think it is also important for them to see people who are non-Native respecting their culture; they are all highly aware that I am not Native
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... So I’m not trying to convince them that I’m Native … what I’m doing is picking up the teachings. … I’m not trying to be a Native person, I’m trying to pick up the Native teachings and pass them on.

Gerald explains that an important component of teaching Aboriginal students is to respect the culture, but to acknowledge that the culture wasn’t his in the first place, and that he is learning it along with the students. In acknowledging this, Gerald states that he has become more comfortable teaching the Aboriginal students in his class, and in learning more about his students’ culture, he has developed high self-efficacy teaching his Aboriginal students.

4.3: Case study three: Katrina

Katrina is a relatively new teacher, and works as a special education teacher in an off-reserve school. Katrina teaches the home school program (HSP) students (in grades five to eight) and is the resource teacher for other students with exceptionalities in her school. Prior to coming to her current school, Katrina had never taught Aboriginal students, and had taught grade eight for two years, and taught English as a second language (ESL) for all grades. She has experience teaching students with high needs, including students from families with low socioeconomic status (SES). Katrina explains that she feels pretty comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom.

4.3a: Community and quality relationships

Katrina reflected at length about the importance of community in helping her to feel comfortable teaching Aboriginal students. For example, Katrina describes an inviting atmosphere in the school, which helps teachers to feel connected to the students and the other teachers: “the atmosphere in the school and the way things are run and the way things are managed, helps you
to take on the atmosphere that the school has.” The inviting nature of the school, and the community has helped Katrina to become more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom.

One of the recurring themes throughout Katrina’s interview was on an implicit, unwritten protocol that exists in the school. For example, when a new teacher comes into the school, Katrina explains that she helps to “show them the protocol.” This so-called unwritten protocol is an important component of the community at her school. By learning this protocol, Katrina was able to feel more comfortable because she was able to understand her role in the school and it’s community. An important reason as to why Katrina feels comfortable teaching Aboriginal students is because of the feeling of community that she gets in and around the school. For example, she explains that:

The school is very much a community. It’s a community that I’m a part of but also not a part of. So, you know, [the students] have different ties to people outside, and they have relationships within the school and you know there are some things that, you know, as a female I can’t do you know? … There is no handbook for the protocol. For example, when you come into the school, you’re female and they don’t tell you, you can’t touch the drum. It’s the kind of thing you have to go along with and observe and see and … find your place. As I started teaching here it’s been learning that protocol that’s been the most apprehensive thing.

To Katrina, it was important to learn the unwritten protocol in her school. By doing so, she has learned to feel comfortable teaching her Aboriginal students and develop a high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.
Building relationships is part and parcel of building communities, and Katrina brought a lot of insight into how she builds relationships with her students to our interview. She also demonstrates the importance for having strong, quality relationships with her students, and others in the school. For example, Katrina defines the relationships that she has with her students as such:

I like to do activities where we’re all together, working together, challenging each other, that kind of thing. So we build relationships, and I find that the relationships I have with students here are different from other schools where, for example, they refer to me as [Katrina]. It’s very much, not like a peer relationship, but more friendly than most teaching relationships I’ve had.

Katrina explains that she has “the students work together on certain tasks, which really … creates a sense of unity in the classroom and builds a strong relationship between the kids and me.”

Katrina identifies that she has a role in the development of these relationships. For example, she explains that, “everything is teaching the kids, but also teaching us, too.” In other words, in developing strong relationships with her students, she has also been able to grow and develop as a teacher.

Katrina works hard to develop a sense of community in her classrooms, and good relationships with her students. She explains that she builds her relationships with students through extracurricular activities, and “going out and really bonding with them.” Katrina explains that:

At the end of the day … just learning about the school population like you would do if you went to any other school; you would get to know the community and their traditions, their culture … It’s mostly just how you would
get comfortable with any other group of kids; you do icebreakers, you play games. You get to know them, and one thing that a lot of people do is that we all smudge together. In the homerooms in the morning with the kids we will all smudge and it’s a good way to start the day off right and that’s one thing that everyone does.

Katrina admits that in her particular school many of the students may have been together since pre-school and up, so there is already a sense of community in the school. She explains “I didn’t have to build a community, … I just had to kind of embrace this community and have them embrace me as well.” An important aspect of community that Katrina reflects on is the fact that, as a non-Aboriginal teacher, she is “an outsider coming in, and [she is] aware that through the media, and through growing up here [she has] certain biases about First Nations people.” Katrina explains that she may have internalized some of these biases, and that the community is very aware of the school, so she has to be constantly reflective about stepping on toes, or being looked at in a certain way by members of the community. As Katrina said in her interview, “the walls of this school do not stop, this school goes out into the community.” Katrina explains that it is important for teachers to acknowledge that things that happen inside of the school could have further repercussions outside of the community.

Lastly, Katrina explains that an important component of developing community and good relationships include keeping an open dialogue with parents. Katrina explains that she texts parents about homework (sometimes every night). By maintaining communication with the parents, Katrina shows a commitment to developing quality relationships within the community. She explains that, “as a teacher I think the most important thing is developing relationships with
4.3b: Safety of Aboriginal students

Being thoughtful of place has helped Katrina to become a more comfortable teacher in her school. She acknowledges that schools may not be safe places for Aboriginal students, because it is difficult for teachers to get rid of their preconceived beliefs about Aboriginal students that might be racist, or stereotypical. For example many teachers, Katrina explains, may have certain expectations about what schools should look and feel like. Katrina explains that “I still held these pre-conceived beliefs about what teaching environments [were] like” when she first came to the school. Katrina had to acknowledge that the learning environment for her Aboriginal students might not be what she had expected. Katrina had to understand that, teaching in her school meant acknowledging and pushing against the common stereotypes that people might have made about the Aboriginal students in the school. She explains, “the school doesn’t have the best reputation.” Katrina admits that she has a tough job of pushing against these stereotypes when she knows that people think about the students and the school. Katrina acknowledges that when she is teaching her students, she has to constantly remind herself that her students are always being negatively stereotyped, and part of that is due to the reputation that the school has. She explains that this process of re-thinking the learning environment has helped her to become much more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students.

Katrina also explains how many Aboriginal students have a lot of anxiety about coming to school. She explains that, “we have a lot of students who have a lot of anxiety around school… as well as at home because it can be unstable.” Katrina acknowledges the different reasons why students might feel uncomfortable or anxious being in the school. She explains that
poverty is a big reason why students might feel anxious being in school, which is one of the reasons why students might feel uncomfortable being at school. Knowing this has helped her to become more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students and has helped her to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

Katrina also states that “I found that these kids were needy, but in different ways, and they are behavioral, but in different ways than I’ve seen in other schools. ... [other] kids will cuss you out, or say really rude things to you. Here it is more work avoidance, where the kids will refuse to do work.” Besides feeling anxious being in schools, Katrina notices that in her school, there is a lot of work avoidance amongst the students. To Katrina, attendance issues are “one of the toughest things for us right now,” and she acknowledges that work avoidance and attendance issues are unique to her Aboriginal students.

Katrina acknowledges that it is easy for teachers to be seen as racists, because there are certain racist mindsets that teachers might easily adopt before teaching Aboriginal students. Katrina explains how racist mindsets would affect your teaching practice by providing the example of not wanting to bring up issues such as FASD with her colleagues, because it may seem like stereotyping Aboriginal people. She explains that:

In terms of being comfortable, just educate yourself about the stereotypes and the biases that you pick up subconsciously just by living in this society… You don’t want to say anything racist. You know how you can say comments off hand? You want to be sensitive to those students. You don’t want to discourage them, or put down their people. Especially when you’re teaching the curriculum.
Katrina acknowledges that she has become more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students because she has been able to think critically about deconstructing any racist misconceptions, or stereotypes that she might have had about her Aboriginal students.

Katrina acknowledges “it’s tough because one thing that I think is the biggest issue is that there is such a knowledge gap in our society when it comes to First Nations people. It’s insane how big that knowledge gap is, that people just don’t know [about] this big population in Ontario. It’s an invisible minority and this population is growing and people don’t know the history, or the cultural practices.” Katrina’s experiences highlight the importance of being aware of misconceptions that people have of Aboriginal students, and the harm that these misconceptions can have on their learning.

Lastly, Katrina explains that teachers should not “always refer to First Nations people as people in the past, in the past tense, as something that happened in history. Because a lot of stuff is going on right now that our kids should know about. … Every kid should know about Residential Schools, for example.” Katrina focuses on how the curriculum actually perpetuates misconceptions and beliefs about Aboriginal students. This makes the learning environment unsafe for students, and she believes it is the teacher’s job to help make schools safer places for Aboriginal students. Acknowledging this has helped Katrina to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in her classrooms.

4.3c: Aboriginal leadership

Katrina acknowledges that the Aboriginal teachers in her school help her to feel more comfortable, especially as a special education teacher. Katrina acknowledges that it can be daunting to bring up issues, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) because she does not want to acknowledge that this is a problem associated with the Aboriginal community.
specifically, because it might be perceived as stereotyping the Aboriginal community. Katrina explains that if she brings up topics such as FASD, then “it might be … seen as maybe racist.” Aboriginal teachers, however, who bring up these topics help to ameliorate feelings of apprehensiveness that is felt by teachers like Katrina. For example, as Katrina talked about FASD being an important issue in the Aboriginal community, she explained that she felt relieved that during a staff meeting dealing with anxiety amongst the students, an Aboriginal teacher explained that FASD could be the reason why students could be anxious at school. Katrina admitted that, as a non-Aboriginal teacher, she did not feel comfortable bringing up this issue. Katrina believed she would be perpetuating stereotypes about Aboriginal people if she had been the one to bring up this topic.

As a result of the leadership of Aboriginal teachers in the school community, who also help to teach the non-Aboriginal teachers about Aboriginal culture, Katrina has learned to be much more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in her classrooms. Katrina explains that it is nice that the Aboriginal teachers want to pass on their knowledge to the non-Aboriginal teachers, and that this has helped Katrina’s practice.

When talking about taking additional courses, or additional qualification courses, Katrina stressed that the real learning she experiences is from her students, and the Aboriginal elders who come into the school. For example, Katrina explains that during staff meetings, what will happen is often the Aboriginal teachers will talk about topics and certain teachings so that the entire staff can continue learning Aboriginal education. This leadership helps Katrina to feel more comfortable teaching her Aboriginal students.

The Aboriginal people in her school provide Katrina with a lot of support, which makes her more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students. For example, she explains, “… the First
Nations people in the school acknowledge that [I’m] doing a great job, that [I] do belong here.” Katrina feels a sense of validation from the Aboriginal leadership in the school, which helps her to feel more comfortable. As she says:

Validation has a tremendous impact, because everybody wants to feel validated at their job, but also this isn’t just a job, it’s a community, so that validation makes you feel more part of the community and makes you feel more open to being a part of the community, even though you technically aren’t. Feeling welcome from the staff makes you feel like you can take part in the different ceremonies.

From Katrina’s perspective, teachers need validation from the Aboriginal leadership in order to feel comfortable in their role as a teacher of Aboriginal students.

**4.3d: Poverty of Aboriginal families**

Katrina explains that one of the realities with teaching Aboriginal students is that teachers must acknowledge the poverty that many of Aboriginal families deal with. Katrina explains that this can be difficult, but it is important to acknowledge that “they come from a slightly different place, but I think it’s important to just see them as kids. … They don’t want to be seen as, oh we’re just First Nations kids, so I try not to see them like that.” Yet, Katrina explains that an important component of poverty is that there are many issues that come out of that. For example, as a special education teacher, Katrina feels as if she has more of a role in learning about the specific needs about Aboriginal students. FASD, for example, is something that Katrina feels she needs to be more aware of, because it is more prevalent in Aboriginal communities.

In Katrina’s point of view, poverty amongst Aboriginal families has had a big impact on equity in her classrooms. In terms of equity, Katrina explains that her students need a lot to help
them succeed. She explains that, “the biggest factor is poverty. The majority of the kids come from ridiculous amounts of poverty.” Many of her students come from families with multiple siblings, as she explains, “you have some kids who are the fourth of like, six children, you know?” One of the implications of poverty is that her school has attendance issues, which Katrina explains is one of the toughest issues the school has to deal with. She explains, it “has to do with poverty; some kids stay home, they help out their parents, they go grocery shopping, do laundry with their parents. … I’ll work a lot harder for that kid, in filling in those gaps than I will with a student from a middle class background.” Katrina feels that, as a teacher who is comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, she is often putting in more effort to make her student’s education more equitable. She refers to this process as filling in the gaps: “But you’re filling in the gaps that need to be filled all the time.” Katrina describes in this passage how she has had to become more committed to equity in her classroom as a teacher of Aboriginal students. Katrina feels that, as a teacher who is comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, she is often putting in more effort to make her student’s education more equitable. She refers to this process as filling in the gaps: “But you’re filling in the gaps that need to be filled all the time.”

Katrina explains that there is a clear issue with poverty and Aboriginal families the school’s community: “in terms of equity, it’s like with the community, I don’t know if it’s really a problem that has to do with the First Nation’s community, but it does have to do with poverty. And if we can relieve some of that poverty, then the kids would be doing a lot better.”

Katrina explains that the job of teaching Aboriginal students is difficult because of the issues related to poverty. “In terms of me, teaching and equity, it’s about trying to fill that gap in, because, for example, … if our kids are running a 100 mile race … our kids are starting at minus 50… it’s about filling those gaps so that they have a chance. It’s really tough.” However, Katrina
feels as if she is comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, and through her reflection explains how she has developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

**4.3e: Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy**

What makes Katrina apprehensive teaching Aboriginal students is when she lacks knowledge of the culture. In order to combat these feelings of apprehension, Katrina has developed a sense of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP). For example, many teachers in the school, according to Katrina, “do things through an Aboriginal lens.” Teaching using this Aboriginal lens has been very beneficial to Katrina as she develops her pedagogy. For example, Katrina says, “you take anything, a novel that doesn’t have an Aboriginal focus, and you can tweak it, either through the different teachings or relate it to certain stories that they have in their culture, to make it more relatable.” Katrina takes the resources she has and tweaks them so that they are relatable to the students, which has helped her to feel more comfortable in the classroom.

She explains that pencil and paper assignments do not work for the vast majority of her students, so Katrina explains that she has to always find different ways to teach them. At the core of these teaching strategies is an imperative that the content is being taught through an Aboriginal perspective. Experiential, hands on learning, for example, is one of the strategies used by Katrina to help motivate her students. Small groups were also helpful in teaching her Aboriginal students. Luckily for Katrina, she uses her school’s library regularly, which has an Aboriginal focus. Another framework that Katrina uses in her teaching is the use of the Grandfather Teachings, which help to frame the student’s learning through an Aboriginal perspective. Katrina explains that when inquiries are taught through a First Nation’s lens, such as
through Grandfather Teaching’s perspective, she is able to make the learning more relevant to her students.

Katrina’s advice for teachers teaching Aboriginal students is to incorporate Aboriginal culture into the classroom, but also to not always refer to Aboriginal people in the past tense, as something that happened in history. She explains that doing so will make the students feel like their culture is not being represented appropriately in the classroom. Acknowledging this, and incorporating CRRP has been helpful for Katrina as she learns to be comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, and this has helped her to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom.
Chapter Five: Insights

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of teachers who feel comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, and to explain how these teachers have developed high self-efficacy teaching these particular students in their classrooms. The main research question posed by this project was: how have elementary school teachers in Ontario developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms? This project also sought to discover what the experiences of teachers with Aboriginal students are; who and what influences the self-efficacy of teachers of Aboriginal students; what strategies these teachers use to improve their self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students; and whether there is a relationship between teachers with high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students and their beliefs about equity in classrooms. After analyzing the data, five themes became emergent: community and quality relationships; safety of Aboriginal students; Aboriginal leadership; poverty of Aboriginal families; and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

This chapter provides insights into the findings, a reflection of the research process, as well as a connection to the teaching profession in general. The first section is a cross-case analysis, where the three cases of the study are connected by similarities and marked differences within the context of the literature. The professional implications for my practice, and that of other educators who teach Aboriginal students, is outlined and discussed, as well as a look into the limitations of the study. Finally, I provide recommendations for further study, and a final word on my experiences as a teacher-researcher interested in Aboriginal education, generally, but more specifically on developing my own sense of self-efficacy teaching all students, including the Aboriginal learners in my future classrooms.
Cross case analysis and relation to the literature

The previous findings in chapter four reveal fascinating similarities, and interesting points of departure between the three different teachers. Each of my teacher-participants’ unique experiences, compounded here in a cross-case analysis, provides an opportunity to address the five emergent themes from the data. Throughout this cross-case analysis, connections to the literature have been made, in an attempt to contextualize the teachers’ experiences from within the already established frameworks of self-efficacy, settler colonialism, and where applicable, decolonization.

5.1a Community and quality relationships

Each of the teachers in this study identified that the community helped them to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. An interesting point of departure between the three participants was in Katrina’s use of the term “protocol” to describe the implicit rules of engagement in her school when it comes to Aboriginal issues and teaching Aboriginal students. Gay (2002) explains that being culturally responsive is about knowing a lot about the ethnic community that you are teaching in. For example, Gay suggests that teachers develop an awareness of the different groups’ protocols for appropriate ways for children to interact with adults, and to exhibit these protocols in instructional settings. In Katrina’s case, she identified different community protocols that she had to learn, such as protocols dealing with participating in community events. Learning these protocols helped Katrina to feel more comfortable being a teacher in her school, and this process took time.

Katrina may have been more explicit about her acknowledgement of her school’s unwritten protocol for teaching Aboriginal students, but each of the teachers drew on the cultural capital of their students and communities in different ways, but for similar reasons. Kanu (2011)
explains that in developing a theory of teaching that is culturally responsive, the culture of the community is the capital that needs to be harnessed. Susan visited her students in their communities, and developed strong relationships with her students, and really got to know their different cultural traditions and celebrations. Gerald uses the cultural artifacts from his students’ community to help decipher good teaching strategies, and Katrina explains how she has learned to understand the culture of the community through different practices and traditions, such as smudging ceremonies, to help her to develop good relationships with her students.

Each of the teachers describes feelings of respect, integrity and care of, and with, the local Aboriginal community, and their students. As Gay (2002) explains:

Culturally responsive caring also places teachers in an ethical, emotional, and academic partnership with ethnically diverse students, a partnership that is anchored in respect, honor, integrity, resource sharing, and a deep belief in the possibility of transcendence … caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity … and requires that teachers use knowledge and strategic thinking to decide how to act in the best interests of others… and blinds individuals to their society, to their communities, and to each other. (p. 107)

What is significant about this quote, besides the fact that Gay studies CRRP more generally, is the focus on communities, and the moral imperative of developing a cultural awareness that transcends acceptance, but rather is caring and respectful. Each of my participants describes a deep care and respect for the Aboriginal communities that they teach. Katrina explains that she feels comfortable teaching her Aboriginal students because she knows that they know that she cares for them. Gerald fervently describes a great respect for the Aboriginal community, which,
in his words, has welcomed him with open arms. Susan explains that by developing trust with the Aboriginal community has helped her to become more comfortable teaching her Aboriginal students; she explained to me that her students know she cares about them (even when she is disappointed in them).

Kanu (2011) argues that teachers with high self-efficacy will often take measures that may be time-consuming or difficult – such as attending seminars, reading lots of educational materials, and getting to know Aboriginal people. Each of the participants showed a long-term commitment in developing their senses of self-efficacy, and comfort teaching Aboriginal students. For example, Susan explained in her interview that it takes time to get to know her students, and that includes taking extra time to go to the Aboriginal community, to get to know the families and to see the students in their own communities. Gerald, too, spent an inordinate amount of time getting to know the local community, and learning about the community’s unique cultural traditions. Wilson and Wilson (2002) explain that incorporating Aboriginal culture should be meaningful, and students exposed to Aboriginal culture in the classroom should learn Aboriginal teachings as they emerge from the infusion of Aboriginal traditions and culture in the curriculum. This process takes time, and each of the three participants in the study showed a commitment to learn from the Aboriginal community. The result, according to Wilson and Wilson (2002) is that due to the investment made by the teachers to really understand the communities and their unique cultures, the teachers will incorporate the culture more meaningfully in the classroom. This commitment from all three teachers shows a commitment by them all in getting to know the Aboriginal community on a long-term basis, which has helped them all to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms. The result is that their students will better understand the Aboriginal teachings that they receive in the
classroom, because their teachers have meaningfully integrated that knowledge into the curriculum.

5.1b Safety of Aboriginal students

Schools are culturally, socially and politically located. In Canada, for example, schools used to be places that forced Aboriginal students to assimilate into the dominant culture (such as with the Indian Residential School system). In 2007, the Urban Aboriginal Task Force (UATF) reported that despite anti-racism initiatives targeting at Aboriginal populations and related to education and employment, blatant racism still persists in Ontario cities, which leaves Aboriginal communities in a perpetual state of disadvantage. Schools are one of these places where Aboriginal people remain disadvantaged. This was reflected in my data: each of my three participants told me that their school has a “bad reputation” in the community. Interestingly, each of the participants shared that many people in each of their non-Aboriginal communities believe that the schools with higher numbers of Aboriginal students are more violent. Each of my participants also shared that violence is not an issue in their schools. In fact, Susan explained that she never sees any violence on the playground. Katrina shared that she has worked in schools where students would “cuss out” teachers, but that is not the case in her school. Gerald admitted that when he first came to the school the school might have had some issues with out of school suspensions, but those have for the most part subsided and that it is certainly unfair to refer to his school as violent now.

What is evident from each of the three interviews is that each of the schools are referred to as having a “bad reputation” mostly due to the fact that there are Aboriginal students in each of the schools. This insight aligns with the findings of the UATF that Aboriginal students attend schools that perpetuate their disadvantage. Aboriginal students, just by attending a school where
there are a high number of Aboriginal students, suffer being branded with derogatory labels, such as violent, and bad reputation just because of the school that they attend. Each of the teachers shared that these labels are harsh, and unfair for the students.

Katrina has to continually remind herself that her students are being judged every day just because they go to a school that is geared towards Aboriginal learners. Susan tells me that she has to deal with much more explicit racism in her non-Aboriginal community. People have asked her, and her partner: “You teach at the Indian school?” Comments such as these are telling of the kind of environment that Aboriginal students are expected to study in. All three teachers acknowledge that their students deal with these issues on a regular basis. To their students, the reality is that schools are still vehicles for cultural assimilation and many students, and their families feel unsafe being in these schools.

Each of the teacher-participants, however, showed a great deal of, what Ladson-Billings (1995) describes as, cultural competency, where spaces in schools are created for students to be themselves. The teachers got to know their communities, and they actively developed relationships with the parents, and students in their schools. Each of the teachers acknowledges the systemic and structural issues of racism in education. Milloy (1999) explains that in the wake of the Residential School catastrophe we must:

- Strive to ensure that the terrible facts of the Residential School system, along with its companion policies – community removal, the Indian Act, systemic discrimination in the justice system – become part of a new sense of what Canada has been and will continue to be if our historical record is not recognized for what is has meant to Aboriginal people and repudiated generation by generation. (p. 305)
It is important for teachers to be a part of this process of renewal, but it takes a big commitment to take on these issues – something these teachers have done in their schools.

5.1c Aboriginal leadership

One of the focuses of Kanu’s (2011) study, as has been discussed, is that developing high self-efficacy is time-consuming and often very difficult. However, Kanu also explains that one of the aspects of developing high self-efficacy is taking the time to get to know the people you are working with. In the case of my three teacher-participants, they each worked very hard to get to know the Aboriginal leadership in and around the school. In doing so, each of the teachers was able to better develop a sense of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

Getting to know the Aboriginal community, and learning from the leadership in and around his school is a huge component of Gerald’s development of high self-efficacy. He shows that what matters most, to him, is knowing that the information he has is from the most reputable sources: the elders, and the leadership in the Aboriginal community. Gerald explains that, you can look at his EQAO scores to see how well he’s doing as a teacher; for him, though, he explains how important it is to feel validated by the Aboriginal leadership, and the impact that validation has had on his confidence teaching Aboriginal students. Katrina states explicitly that the validation she gets from the Aboriginal leadership in her school has helped her “tremendously” in feeling more confident teaching Aboriginal students. Susan is less explicit in her feelings of being validated by the Aboriginal leadership, but she does explain how the Aboriginal teachers in her school help to reassure her that she is doing a good job if she is feeling apprehensive. According to Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003), self-assurance is extremely important in developing high self-efficacy, but teachers also require “sufficient input and commitment from administrators and peers” (p. 118). It is difficult to develop high self-efficacy
without the commitment of leadership from within the school. In the case of the teachers in this study, each of them relied, not only on their administration for reassurance, but they also relied on the Aboriginal community to help them to feel validated and reassured that they are doing a good job teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

To Susan, Gerald, and Katrina, the Aboriginal teachers and leaders in schools help in different ways to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students, but the most important aspect of their relationship is that it is one that is professional, and geared towards the teaching and learning of Aboriginal students. Gay (2002) explains “a requirement for developing a knowledge base for culturally responsive teaching is acquiring detailed factual information about the cultural particularities of specific ethnic groups” (p. 107). Yet, Aboriginal teachers and leaders in schools do much more than just provide a information about their Aboriginal communities to the non-Aboriginal teachers in their schools; they are also sounding boards, voices of assurance, a wealth of information, and professional allies for each of the participants in this study, and helped them each to develop their senses of self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

5.1d Poverty of Aboriginal families

Each of the participants discussed at length the enormous impact poverty has had on their Aboriginal students. To provide some context for this theme, I look to Kanu (2011), who explains that:

The common belief is that if schools and teachers do their jobs well, family economic circumstances and race should not influence how well a child learns … [yet] in a stratified society like Canada, factors such as social class … race and income – influence school learning. (p. 133)
The macro-structural barriers to Aboriginal academic achievement inevitably influence school success, which makes it difficult for people to understand how the different aspects of Aboriginal identity (race, SES, gender, as well as others) are compounded in schools. Gerald speaks very little about poverty, compared to the two other participants, but he did acknowledge in his interview that his Aboriginal students do not receive a truly equitable education due to the levels of poverty that his students’ families experience, but also because, Gerald feels as if the school board that he works in could do more to make the educational experience of his Aboriginal students more equitable. Gerald explains that, in his opinion, if it was not for the amazing teachers and the extra work that they do in the school, Gerald admits that his students would not be as successful as they are now.

During her interview, Susan provided more context into her understanding that poverty uniquely affects Aboriginal families. She explains that learning about the different SES of her students was an emotional and reflective experience for her professionally. She explained that when she first became a teacher with Aboriginal students, she had to reevaluate how she thought about Aboriginal education. Likewise, in describing the experience of her new colleague in her current school, he too had to come to the realization that Aboriginal students have their own unique culture, sure, but they – generally – experience an extraordinary amount of poverty. Susan explains how her Aboriginal students face not only the racism inherent in Canadian structures and systems, but that they must often usually deal with the realities of poverty. Susan explained that she had to think critically about her background as being a middle-class non-Aboriginal person, and how her past experiences might inform the way that she talks to her Aboriginal students. Soloman and Daniel (2009) explain that one of the most important components of teaching Aboriginal students is that teachers must be willing to interrogate their
privileged status in society. Susan explains that thinking carefully about her life, and
deconstructing her status as a middle-class non-Aboriginal teacher has helped her to feel more
comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in her classroom.

Katrina explains that she sees one of the biggest impacts of poverty is on the school’s
absenteeism rate. Her insights provide context into the findings of Silver et al. (2002) which
explain that some home conditions cause families to pull students from class to look after
younger siblings and to help out around the house. Silver et al (2002) also explain that within
some cultures of poverty, many adults may turn to alcohol and drugs for comfort, which leaves
older children with many of the household responsibilities, such as caring for younger children.
Katrina explains that some of her children often have to stay home to help out around the house,
including doing laundry and going grocery shopping with their parents. Katrina’s interview does
not suggest that her students’ parents misuse drugs and alcohol, but what it does do is align with
the literature, which suggests that many Aboriginal students, for reasons relating either directly
or indirectly to poverty, experience higher absenteeism rates compared to non-Aboriginal
students.

5.1e Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy

One of the interesting aspects of this theme in the findings is that not one teacher
explicitly stated using CRRP as part of their pedagogical praxis for teaching. However, as has
been demonstrated throughout these insights in this chapter, the primary *modus operandi* of the
teacher-participants who teach Aboriginal students is CRRP.

In her practice, Susan tries to understand her students before she starts teaching them. Her
focus is always on the individual needs of the students, and their success is important to her.
While her focus as a learning resource teacher is on the academic achievement of her students,
she also acknowledges that she just wants her students to succeed and to be happy. This point clarifies what Milner (2011) has argued, which is that academic achievement is not important if the students are not socially achieving in the classroom as well.

Cultural competency is an important component of CRRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995). While it is important for students to develop this cultural competency, it is important to note that teachers too must develop the tools necessary for cultural competent teaching (Milner, 2011). Gerald demonstrates a high degree of cultural competency in that he grasps the need to understand the unique cultural position of his students within the greater system of education, but he also explains fervently that it is not the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher to pass as being Aboriginal: that is not how to teach Aboriginal students, he insists. Instead, Gerald elaborates by saying that teachers should understand and respect the culture and use that knowledge in meaningful ways in the classroom.

Gay explains that teachers can use CRRP for every aspect of the curriculum, even though “too many teachers believe that their subject matter and cultural diversity are incompatible” (2002, p. 107). Katrina demonstrates that in her practice, she is able to use an Aboriginal perspective, and learn about her students’ culture in all of the classes that she teaches. For example, Katrina taught a lesson from an Aboriginal perspective using the Grandfather teachings. Similarly, she explains that if she is reading a book with the students, and there is not a direct connection to Aboriginal culture to make, she will make one up.

While each of my teacher-participants did not explicitly state that they use CRRP as a pedagogical praxis in their classrooms, it is evident that they use the core tenants of this philosophy in helping them to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms.
Implications for teaching practice

The purpose of this research project was to learn about the teaching experiences of teachers who have high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms, and to evaluate how these teachers developed their sense of high self-efficacy and comfort in the classroom. Based on the findings of this research study, and the insights and connections made between each of the participants, the following recommendations have been developed to help all educators to develop their own sense of high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

The first recommendation I have for teachers is for them to acknowledge that developing high self-efficacy requires a long-term commitment, which involves actively deconstructing past experiences and beliefs related to Aboriginal students and culture. For example, each of the participants discussed how at first they felt apprehensive teaching Aboriginal students; they each had to take the time to learn about their students, get to know the Aboriginal communities, and deconstruct the perceptions of Aboriginal culture that they had prior to becoming comfortable teaching their Aboriginal students. Secondly, teachers must remain humble while they learn about their Aboriginal students; it is important for teachers to take the appropriate amount of time to really get to know their students. They must also be humble enough to admit that teaching Aboriginal students may require a dramatic paradigmatic shift in the way that the teacher understands their teaching praxis. The third recommendation I have is for teachers to expect discomfort when teaching Aboriginal students. I borrow this recommendation from Singleton and Hays (2008) who explain that one of the components necessary for having real discussions around race in schools is to expect to have feelings of discomfort. The teachers in this study demonstrated that they were able to deconstruct their feelings of apprehensiveness and
discomfort that they have had while teaching Aboriginal students. This process must be
reflective, and, according to Dion (2007) is completely necessary in developing high self-
efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. The final recommendation for teachers teaching
Aboriginal students is to develop a relationship with an Aboriginal person in the school, or in the
community. Each of the participants in this study explained how important these mentors have
been for them as they develop their teaching praxis teaching Aboriginal students. Even teachers
who have high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students will feel apprehensive some of the
time, so it is important to develop these quality relationships early. These recommendations are
based on the unique findings of this study, and are built on the extensive literature that focuses
on Aboriginal education. The experiences of the teacher-participants in this study have allowed
me to share the different ways that all teachers can develop their self-efficacy teaching
Aboriginal students in their classrooms.

Limitations of the study

I believe that the two main limitations of this study, which were outlined in chapter three,
remain relevant. It may have been prudent to interview more teachers in this study; however, I
am confident that the perspectives and insights of the three participants have provided me with
complex, overlapping and unique stories of success – and failure – relating to their different
experiences of developing high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students. A caveat here would
be to suggest that by limiting my study to three teachers resulted in a less diverse selection of
teacher experiences. For example, while my teachers were recruited from across Ontario, all
three of my teachers teach at off-reserve schools. The perspectives of teachers who teach on
reserve schools may compliment this research by providing a unique experience that the three
participants do not currently have. Secondly, I argued previously that due to the sensitive nature
of the study, I explained that it may have been difficult for teachers to express that they feel confident teaching Aboriginal students, which may have made it difficult to recruit teachers to be participants in the study. I pressed on, and focused my interviews on the individual experiences of the teacher-participants, which helped to garner more authentic, genuine themes about how teachers can develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students.

Throughout my study, a third limitation presented itself during one of my interviews. One of my participants told me that, “self-efficacy is subjective” and that “people’s individual comfort levels are based on personality … someone with a strong personality is going to do better and feel more comfortable.” During the research process, I paused to reflect on these statements. The participant is correct, in my opinion. Self-efficacy is subjective, and a teacher’s beliefs about their efficacy teaching Aboriginal students will depend on many variables, including personality, which are difficult to compare across cases. However, I believe that qualitative studies, such as this one, have the power to discover the more nuanced descriptions of self-efficacy, and provide a unique way to learn more about a phenomenon, rather than relying on a Likert scale or a questionnaire, for example, to determine how teachers have developed a certain phenomenon (such as self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students).

**Recommendations for further studies**

The next step for this research study would be to observe teachers in their classrooms and to analyse the detailed lesson plans that the teachers prepare for their lessons. In doing so, I would want to know how teachers prepare for teaching their Aboriginal students specifically. What resources do they use? How do they plan lessons that are culturally relevant to the student’s unique needs? To what extent (and how often) do the teachers rely on the Aboriginal
leadership in their schools during the school year? These questions, and others, could help in better determining how teachers develop high self-efficacy teaching their Aboriginal learners.

I would also want to know more about the teachers’ teaching philosophies. I would have participants take the time to write out their teaching philosophies. I believe that these statements would help the teachers to focus their responses and our discussion of self-efficacy around the teachers’ beliefs about teaching. This is important because it can be quite difficult to discuss teaching philosophies, as some teachers may think more abstractly than others. An example of this phenomenon from this study is the different ideas of equity that emerged from the three participants. Having these statements written out ahead of time may help to make the interview process run smoother by allowing the teachers to address their specific beliefs with ease, no matter how abstract. Ultimately, the goal for future studies is to create a more structured understanding into what it means to have self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students, and how other teachers can develop their own high levels of self-efficacy.

Lastly, it is important for researchers in the future to acknowledge that teachers need to be humble as they develop their comfort level teaching Aboriginal students. Humbleness and humility might make it difficult for future scholars to recruit participants who teach Aboriginal students, because the participants may feel that to admit to being confident might not be humble of them. To make the process of recruitment easier for future scholars, I suggest they ask teachers if they or anyone they know feels comfortable teaching Aboriginal students to contact them directly. During the recruitment phase of this research, a teacher whom I tried to recruit actually suggested a different teacher in their school be interviewed instead. By making this an option from the beginning of the recruitment process, I might have had an easier time in recruiting a variety of exceptional teachers who teach Aboriginal students in their classrooms.
Conclusion

Yatta Kanu (2011), in *Integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the school curriculum* (2011), explains that the theoretical work for the importance of integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum is done. What remains, is a sense of unwillingness amongst teachers to put these principles into practice. Much of this unwillingness is due to a lack of confidence that teachers have in their abilities as educators. As a soon-to-be graduate of a teacher-education program in Ontario, I can attest to the feelings of uncertainty that I, and many of my colleagues, have about our futures as educators. Becoming a teacher-researcher, however, has made me confident knowing that my care, and love of education has provided me with the grounding I need to become a teacher poised at developing high self-efficacy teaching all of my future learners. To quote Marie Battiste (2013):

> To understand education, one must love it or care deeply about learning, and accept it as a legitimate process for growth and change. To accept education as it is, however, is to betray it … You have to have enough love of learning to have the courage to remake it, imagine it, and teach it. (p.190)

The three participants in this study have helped me to understand the imperative of their work, and mine, in ensuring that all people get to experience a positive educational experience. The most important take-away I have of this research project is that asking questions is just the first step in creating a dialogue, which will hopefully make the experience of students better in our schools.

Throughout the analysis of the findings, it became clear that the teachers in this study undeniably understand their role in helping to rethink the colonial attitudes held by many people about Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal education. For this reason, I describe the teacher-
participants in my study as anti-racist, anti-colonial social justice educators, because they demonstrate a competence for using culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies to better understand the unique position of their students in schools, and for becoming better teachers for the young Aboriginal students in their classrooms. In problematizing the assumptions of western-settler education systems, the teacher-participants in this study demonstrate a willingness to find a moment for creating what Battiste (2013) refers to as “an ethical space for decolonization” (p. 104). Such an ethical moment can re-create a foundational, first moment for sharing in a dialogue in addressing how different boundaries can and do infringe on “another’s space or standards, codes of conduct, or the community ethos” (Battiste, 2013, p. 105). A moment of decolonization may not have presented itself for the three teacher-participants in their careers yet, but as Regan (2011) explains, the first step in understanding decolonization is for non-Aboriginal teachers to unsettle their pedagogies, and to engage in deconstructing the Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relationships that manifest in our beliefs about schools and teaching Aboriginal students. The stories of success, of disillusionment, of love and of caring that the three teachers shared in this research project, will help all teachers to develop high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their own classrooms in the future.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol: “Teacher Self-Efficacy, Pedagogy and Decolonization”

Time: _________________

Date: _________________

Place: _________________

Interviewer: ___________________________

Interviewee: ___________________________

Questions:

Main Research Question

How have teachers developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms?

Introductory Questions

a) How long have you been teaching?

b) What grades have you taught? What grade are you currently teaching?

c) Have you taught Aboriginal students before? How many students?

d) Can you tell me about your experiences teaching Aboriginal students?

Subset Questions: Group One

What are the teacher’s experiences, feelings, and personal accounts of teaching Aboriginal students?

a) Can you please describe a moment when you felt comfortable teaching Aboriginal students in your class?

b) Can you please describe a moment when you felt anxious or apprehensive teaching Aboriginal students in your class?
c) In what ways do your teaching practices and beliefs affect the relationships that you have with your Aboriginal students?

d) Overall, how would you describe your comfort level teaching Aboriginal students?

e) Have you received any professional development focused on Aboriginal education over your career? If so, what was it? What did it entail?

f) What strategies or resources have helped you to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students?

g) Has anyone helped you to feel more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students?

Subset Questions: Group Two

What the teacher perceives, or speculates about other teachers’ practice.

a) What have you heard from colleagues about their comfort level with teaching Aboriginal students?

b) Are there any strategies or resources that your colleagues have used to become more comfortable teaching Aboriginal students?

c) From your perspective, is there a relationship between teaching Aboriginal students and equity in classrooms? If so, what is the nature of that relationship?

Thank the individual for participating in the interview.
Appendix B: Consent Letter

Date:

Dear:

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department. I am studying teacher self-efficacy, pedagogy and decolonization for the purposes of a graduate research paper. Specifically, my main research question is: How have teachers developed high self-efficacy teaching Aboriginal students in their classrooms? I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this topic as a requirement for the Master of Teaching program. My research supervisor, who is providing support for this qualitative research project, is Dr. Hilary Inwood. My data collection consists of a 30-45 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, outside of school time.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates, a research conference and possibly a publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only person who will have access to my work will be my research supervisor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/ or published, which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in this project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Graham Shular,
Master of Teaching student
OISE | University of Toronto
Junior Fellow, Massey College
graham.shular@mail.utoronto.ca
Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Mr. Graham Shular, and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Name (printed): ________________________________________________

Signature: _____________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________________