Integrating Aboriginal Education into the Elementary School Classroom: How Settler Teachers Meaningfully Include Aboriginal Content, Perspectives, and Pedagogy in their Teaching Practice

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Abstract

Research has shown that incorporating Aboriginal education into the classroom can increase Aboriginal students’ engagement, interest, and academic success and thereby work towards closing the academic achievement gap that exists between Aboriginal and Settler students in Canada (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Kehoe & Echols 1994; Ledoux 2006; Wotherspoon & Schissel 1998). This qualitative research project uses a literature review and semi-structured interviews to investigate how Toronto elementary school teachers can incorporate Aboriginal education into the elementary school classroom in a way that is respectful of the Aboriginal community and does not replicate past injustices against Aboriginal communities. Interviews with two Settler teachers showed that these educators are actively attempting to incorporate Aboriginal content into their teaching practice in a way that goes beyond the Ontario curriculum requirements and is largely consistent with the best practices outlines by Aboriginal scholars. It is my hope that the findings from this study can aid in the process of decolonizing the Canadian classroom by informing policy and curriculum development, teacher education programs and teacher practice.

Key Words: Aboriginal education, Settler teachers, Settler students, Aboriginal students, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, academic achievement gap,
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

First identified in the Hawthorne report published in 1966 and 1967, the education achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students has continued as a problem in the Canadian education system (Kanu 2001, p.7; Ledoux, 2006). The 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey showed that 28% of First Nations, 58% of Inuit and 23% of Metis people living off reserve between the ages of 18 and 44 had not graduated from high school compared to 11% for the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2014). In the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) 80% of students who self-identify as Aboriginal did not meet the provincial standard on the grade six Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) reading, writing, or math tests compared to less than 40% of white students (Yau, O’Reilly, Rosolen, & Archer, 2011). Similarly, 50% of self-identified Aboriginal students did not pass the grade ten Ontario Secondary School Literacy test, compared to 29% of the white student population who failed the test (Yau et al., 2011). In addition, students who self-identify as Aboriginal have lower attendance and are less likely to graduate on time (Statistics Canada, 2014; Yau et al., 2011).

The consequences of this education achievement gap have widespread implications for Aboriginal Canadians. On average, Aboriginal Canadians have lower employment income as well as higher unemployment rates than the national average (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). Education success rates also correlate to poverty, injury and ill health, violence, alcohol and substance abuse problems, family difficulties and early childhood concerns, and criminal activity: with these factors resulting from a lack of, and acting as barriers to, academic success (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998).
However, numerous studies suggest that Aboriginal student success rates could be greatly improved if the school system was adapted to accommodate their worldview and learning styles (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Kehoe & Echols 1994; Ledoux 2006; Wotherspoon & Schissel 1998). Since the 1950’s Aboriginal students have been attending urban schools that do not reflect Aboriginal cultures and learning styles resulting in Aboriginal students feeling backwards and unwelcome and contributing to low academic performance rates amongst Aboriginal students (Kehoe & Echols, 1994). As such, scholars argue that it is time to “change the schools to fit the children rather than trying to change the children to fit the schools” (Kehoe & Echols, 1994, p.63). By changing the education system to reflect the lived realities of Aboriginal students, scholars suggest that Aboriginal students will see themselves reflected in the classroom, feel more engaged, and, as a result, demonstrate a higher degree of academic success (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Kehoe & Echols, 1994; Ledoux, 2006; Wotherspoon & Schissel 1998). These findings are supported by a survey conducted by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) which found that 49% of Aboriginal students believe that learning more about their own culture would help them perform better in school (Yau et al., 2011). Similarly, 76% of Aboriginal students stated that learning more about their own culture in school would make classes more interesting and 63% felt that the incorporation of their culture into the classroom would increase their enjoyment of school (Yau et al., 2011).

Despite indications that the incorporation of Aboriginal cultures and perspectives into the classroom can improve Aboriginal students’ engagement, inclusion, and academic success, the literature suggests that Settler teachers are still reluctant to incorporate this content into their teaching practice (Blood, 2010; Cherubini, 2011; Deer,
2013; Kanu 2011; Snowball, 2009; Zurzolo, 2006). Settler teachers have cited multiple barriers to the incorporation of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their classroom including concerns over offending the Aboriginal community, an inadequate knowledge base or understanding of the subject matter, limited access to resources, resistance from administration, insufficient funding, a lack of time, and feeling uncomfortable, ill-prepared, or guilty (Blood, 2010; Cherubini, 2011; Deer, 2013; Kanu 2011; Snowball, 2009; Zurzolo, 2006). Kanu (2011) states that overcoming these barriers will take a joint effort between teachers, administrations, Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal parents, pre-service education programs, and ministries of education.

**Relevant Terminology**

Throughout this paper I will use a variety of terms that have taken on multiple meanings in the literature. In order to clarify my usage I will include a brief description of each term here.

*Aboriginal* - I use the term Aboriginal peoples/student/community to refer to the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America (Government of Canada, 2012). This includes First Nations, Metis, and Inuit groups (Government of Canada, 2012).

*Aboriginal Education* – I use the term Aboriginal education to describe a teaching approach that reflects Aboriginal students’ cultural practices or lived experiences (Battiste & Henderson 2009). As such, I feel that content matter presented from Aboriginal perspectives and the use of Aboriginal pedagogy both constitute examples of Aboriginal education. I am, however, reluctant to consider the teaching of Aboriginal
topics from a Euro-Canadian perspective, such as a textbook, to be Aboriginal education because these types of lessons do not necessarily present Aboriginal perspectives and provide little opportunity for Aboriginal students to relate to the content in a meaningful way. This does not mean that a Settler teacher cannot teach using Aboriginal education but rather that Settler teachers must be aware of the materials they are using to present the information about Aboriginal peoples and ensure that these include Aboriginal voices.

*Settler* - I use the term Settler teacher/student to refer to non-Aboriginal people living in Canada. I use this term as a reminder of Canada’s colonial history (Maxwell 2011). In accordance with Maxwell (2011) I have also used the term Settler to include those who came to Canada as slaves, indentured labourers and refugees.

**Purpose of the Study**

This qualitative research study will focus on the ways that two Settler teachers are going beyond the curriculum expectations to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their Toronto elementary school classrooms. The purpose of this study is to illuminate how these two Settler teachers have overcome the challenges and barriers that act to prevent the majority of teachers from engaging with Aboriginal issues, and in doing so, provide a guideline for other teachers who wish to do the same. In addition, this research will help to identify which barriers and challenges these teachers continue to struggle with, providing insight into how stakeholders can further support Settler teachers and their attempts to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into the classroom. This study will also allow for a comparison between the methods teachers are using in the classroom and the best
practices outlined by Aboriginal peoples in order to assess if the practices which are currently being employed in the classroom by Settler teachers are meaningful and respectful of Aboriginal communities. I hope that this paper allows these teachers to share their stories so that their successes, motivations, and hopes for the future can act to inform, guide, and inspire other educators to incorporate Aboriginal topics into their teaching practice.

Demographic trends suggest that the Aboriginal population in Canada is becoming increasingly urban and is growing faster than that of the non-Aboriginal population as a result of higher birth rates amongst Aboriginal peoples (Aboriginal Education Office, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2014). This, combined with the fact that Settler people who identify with the dominant Euro-Canadian culture represent the vast majority of teachers in the Canadian public school system, suggests that Settler teachers will regularly, and increasingly, be called upon to educate Aboriginal students (Kanu, 2011). As a result of the academic achievement gap between Aboriginal and Settler students at both the provincial and municipal level there is a push by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the TDSB to include Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in public schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015; Toronto District School Board 2014). This suggests that this research project, which will provide insights into the ways that Settler teachers are integrating Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their classrooms, is timely and will be valuable in informing my own teaching practice.

**Research Questions**

The goal of my research is to inform both myself and other educators about the ways in which Settler teachers are successfully overcoming challenges to implement
Aboriginal content, perspective, and pedagogy into the elementary school classroom. As such, I will ask the following question: How are a small sample of Settler Toronto elementary school teachers going beyond the Ontario curriculum expectations to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into the classrooms in a way that they feel is respectful of the Aboriginal community?

This question leads to four subsidiary questions: (1) What specific strategies, lessons, and resources are these teachers using to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their classroom teaching? (2) What methods are these teachers using to try to ensure that they are incorporating Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their teaching practice in a way that is meaningful, appropriate, and respectful of Aboriginal peoples? (3) What barriers have these teachers encountered while incorporating Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their classrooms? (4) What do these teachers believe is the benefit of including Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in their teaching practice for both Aboriginal and Settler students? In examining these questions I hope to initiate a conversation that can be used to suggest guidelines on how Settler teachers can mindfully and respectfully incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their classrooms with the ultimate goal of increasing the academic achievement of Aboriginal students.

**Background of the Researcher**

As a Settler teacher with a background in anthropology I am aware that both of the disciplines that I relate to, and draw my education from, have a strong history of gathering and employing knowledge as a tool of colonization and assimilation. Despite
this, my educational experiences in both have increased my awareness of the systemic issues of discrimination as well as the value and learning that can be gained from cross-cultural negotiation and exchange. As such, I am committed to creating a classroom environment that is inclusive, teaches appreciation of different cultures and lifestyles, stresses that our actions have consequences for other peoples and the environment, and attends to issues related to social justice. I believe that much of this can be achieved through the use and incorporation of, and respect for Aboriginal teaching strategies, worldviews and practices.

However, I also understand that the use of these techniques by someone such as myself - a Settler person whose ancestors were complicit with the acts of oppression against Aboriginal peoples in Canada’s colonial history – can easily be viewed as an act of appropriation that replicates past injustices. As such, I have become concerned that my attempt to create an inclusive and decolonized classroom could be having the exact effect I am trying to negate. By designing a research project that specifically focuses on how Settler teachers are overcoming barriers to incorporating Aboriginal education into their classrooms in a way that they feel is appropriate and respectful of Aboriginal peoples, I am trying to begin to unravel some of the complex issues of power, authority, voice, value, and authenticity that are enmeshed in this topic. In doing so, I hope to begin to create a space where Settler teachers such as myself can grapple with, and question these issues while gaining insights from teachers who demonstrate commitment to incorporating Aboriginal cultures, perspectives, knowledges, and topics into the classroom in a way that goes beyond the Ontario curriculum expectations and overcomes some of the barriers cited in the literature.
Overview

Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the use of Aboriginal education by Settler teachers with the goal of decreasing the academic achievement gap that exists between Aboriginal and Settler students in the Canadian public school system. Chapter 1 also outlines the terminology used, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the background of the researcher. Chapter 2 contains a literature review in which I examine the multiple ways Aboriginal education is understood in the literature, the benefits of the use of Aboriginal education in Canadian classrooms on both Aboriginal and Settler students, and the challenges encountered by Settler teachers as they attempt to use Aboriginal education in their teaching practice. Chapter 3 will outline the qualitative methodology, procedures, and data collection tools used to gather information for this research project. Chapter 4 provides a brief overview of the participants in the study and describes the themes, which acts to address the subsidiary questions while organizing the data collected. Chapter 5 outlines the strengths and limitations of the study, the conclusions drawn, and recommendations for future practice and study. References and a list of appendixes follow.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This literature review is designed to contextualize my project within current research on the topic of Aboriginal education in the Canadian school system. In this literature review I will begin by addressing the multiple and diverse ways in which Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy are incorporated into the classroom. This will be followed by a discussion of the benefits that both Aboriginal and Settler students receive from the use of Aboriginal education in the classroom. After this, I will outline the challenges and barriers encountered by Settler teachers that prevent or hinder their attempts to incorporate Aboriginal education into their teaching practices.

What Does Incorporating Aboriginal Content, Perspectives, and Pedagogy Into the Canadian Classroom Look Like?

For the purpose of this discussion I will examine how Aboriginal education can be incorporated into the classroom on three different scales: topic, perspective, and practice. These scales are by no means discrete entities but are instead used to facilitate an understanding of the different techniques employed by educators attempting to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspective, and pedagogy into the classroom.

The first and most simplistic way of incorporating Aboriginal content into the classroom is to include Aboriginal topics in the curriculum. In Ontario this is accomplished with specific expectations that focus on Aboriginal content in history, geography, social studies, and Native study streams of the curriculum (Godlewska, Moore, & Bednasek, 2010; Snowball, 2009). Critics argue that an approach which simply focuses on the subject matter rarely moves beyond the textbook and therefore provides a
limited understanding of Aboriginal peoples, relegates them to the past, may continue to enforce stereotypical representations, does not adequately incorporate Aboriginal worldviews or epistemologies, and treats Aboriginal content as an add-on (Godlewska, et al., 2010; Kanu, 2011; Kempf 2006; Snowball, 2009). Similarly, this method often avoids discussion of, and subsequent genuine reflection on, content relating to the historical mistreatment and acts of cultural genocide that have been directed at Aboriginal peoples in Canada as well as their resistance to the colonial project (Godlewska, et al., 2010; Kempf 2006; Snowball, 2009). According to my definition, this method does not constitute the incorporation of Aboriginal education into the classroom because it tends to present Aboriginal topics from a Euro-Canadian perspective, which fails to include the Aboriginal voice that I feel is an integral part of Aboriginal education. By neglecting to include Aboriginal perspectives there is little opportunity for this method to reflect the lived experience of Aboriginal students.

Closely tied to the incorporation of Aboriginal topics into the curriculum is the inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in classroom discussions. While policy documents describe an Aboriginal perspective as a shared world-view of a universe that is made by the creator where humans need to live in harmony with nature, one another, and oneself, researchers have found teachers often construct their own working definitions (Blood; 2010; Zurzolo, 2006). Zurzolo found that when teachers constructed their own definition of the term “Aboriginal perspectives” Settler teachers explain Aboriginal perspectives as a “presentation of issues, cultures, and spirituality by Aboriginal peoples about Aboriginal peoples” with Aboriginal peoples having shared the experiences of marginalization, assimilation, racism, and oppression (2010, p. 65). Specifically, integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the classroom takes the form of including
Aboriginal content while ensuring that stories are told from the viewpoint of Aboriginal peoples - as opposed to the European or Western perspective - through the use of resources such as videos, print material and guest speakers (Blood, 2010; Zurzolo, 2006). Throughout the literature there are multiple examples of how Indigenous perspectives were used to supplement western science, which acts as the basis of school science curriculums, as a way of incorporating Indigenous environmental knowledge into the classroom and acknowledging the strengths of both approaches (Aikenhead, 2001; Pedretti, Bellomo, & Jagger, 2014; Snively & Corsiglia, 2001). However, despite the inclusion of Aboriginal voices, Settler teachers expressed that they felt that they were often including Aboriginal perspectives using an additive approach where the perspectives were supplementary and not necessarily engaged with in a meaningful way (Blood, 2010).

The third way that Aboriginal education can be used in the classroom is through integration into the educator’s teaching practice. At the broadest scale, Aboriginal education can be described as a teaching approach that exists in harmony with Aboriginal students’ cultural practices and lived experiences (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Toulouse, 2013). An Aboriginal education style is characterized by sacred, place-based, experiential, purposeful, and relational teaching and learning (Battiste & Henderson, 2009). The emphasis in this form of Aboriginal education lies in viewing each student holistically by taking into account their physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual well-being to create a student-centered environment (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Toulouse, 2013). Students are educated through observation, interactions, problem-solving, and decision-making with parents, relatives, Elders and social groups (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Toulouse, 2013).
Overall, researchers have found that Aboriginal students tend to be learners who are less able to separate various parts from the whole and who will do better when presented with a concept first and specific details second (Ledoux, 2006). Aboriginal learners also tend to be imaginative and concrete and therefore prefer to use images, diagrams, symbols, graphic organizers and concrete materials over words (Ledoux 2006; Toulouse, 2013). Aboriginal students also tend to value the group (and will hide individual competencies to avoid seeming superior), prefer spontaneous learning, and learning in real-life situations through observation and imitation (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Toulouse, 2013). Similarly, Kanu (2011) has found that the use of stories, the use of Aboriginal elders or guest speakers as learning resources, field-trips to Aboriginal communities, the use of learning scaffolding, and talking circles - all teaching methods developed with an understanding of Aboriginal cultural learning practice – to be especially effective in teaching Aboriginal students and improving their academic success. However, it is important to remember that Aboriginal peoples constitute a diverse group of nations with their own distinct cultures and perspectives and therefore cannot necessarily be reduced to a single entity (Ledoux, 2006; Snowball, 2009; Zurzolo, 2006).

**Best Practices in Settler Teacher Use of Aboriginal Knowledges and Perspectives**

In their summary of St. Denis’ (2010) discussion on being an ally to Aboriginal education, the Student Teachers Anti-Racism Society of the University of Saskatchewan (2011) posted the following on their blog:

Although there are many ways to be an ally, Dr. St. Denis stressed that being an ally is a life long learning process and that we should not expect
perfection. The study also tells us that to be an ally, teachers do not need to know everything about First Nations, Métis and Inuit knowledge, history, culture and perspectives. Nor can the right lesson plans or teaching strategies make one an ally. Rather, being an ally is more about seeing, treating and knowing Aboriginal peoples as human beings. This includes listening, being modest, staying positive, being a life long learner and taking a stand against racism. The teachers also stated that everyone can be an ally of Aboriginal education, including Aboriginal teachers and communities.

The sentiments in this quote are mirrored by other blog postings such as “10 Things Teachers Should Never Do When Teaching Native Kids” written by Christina Rose and uploaded onto Indian Country Today Media Network (2014).

These sources suggest that to respectfully engage with Aboriginal education, Settler teachers must be reflective and aware of their own biases, misconceptions, and stereotypical understandings towards Aboriginal peoples so that they do not continue to perpetuate them (St. Denis, 2010). Similarly, Settler teachers need to be aware of, and think carefully about, their body language, word choice, lesson plans, and resources as these can act as vehicles to further enforce deeply held disregard, stereotypical ideas, or misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples (Rose, 2014; St. Denis, 2015). Additionally, Aboriginal students should never be asked to speak for their race (Rose, 2014).

The writers also suggest that Settler teachers should not assume that they are experts on Aboriginal people but should be committed to learning about the uniqueness of this group (Rose, 2014; St. Denis, 2010). It is important that Settler teachers accurately present Aboriginal contributions to history while avoiding relegating Aboriginal peoples to the past (Rose, 2014). It is also important that Settler teachers show care and concern about Aboriginal issues while remembering that they are not in the role of a savior (St. Denis, 2010). Finally, Settler teachers should admit their mistakes and apologize when they have done something wrong (St. Denis, 2010).
The Effects of the Incorporation of Aboriginal Education on Aboriginal Students

Research has shown that school systems that are adapted to accommodate Aboriginal students’ worldviews, perspectives and learning styles actively augment students’ sense of identity and can greatly improve Aboriginal student success rates (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Kehoe & Echols 1994; Ledoux 2006; Wotherspoon & Schissel 1998). A study comparing Aboriginal students’ success rates in a standard grade 9 social studies class, which did not include Aboriginal content beyond that in the curriculum and textbook and an enriched grade 9 social studies class which integrated Aboriginal education in the form of content, perspective, and pedagogy, Kanu (2011) found that Aboriginal students in the enriched class were more successful than their peers in the area of academic achievement. Overall, Aboriginal students in the enriched class had significantly higher test/exam scores, demonstrated a better understanding of class concepts, showed higher-level thinking, and revealed improved self-confidence (Kanu, 2011). Aboriginal students in the enriched classes also cited aspects of Aboriginal education as the reason they attended class, felt more confident about their future, and felt more comfortable participating in class (Kanu, 2011). Researchers contributed these successes to better conceptual understanding of examples developed from Native culture, the inclusion of Aboriginal content and perspectives, the use of Aboriginal pedagogical practices, feelings of support and ownership derived from group work, one-on-one interactions with the teacher, clear use of language, extensive test preparation, and the teachers’ superior knowledge of Aboriginal topics of study (Kanu, 2011).

Although it was not stressed in Kanu’s (2011) study, other scholars have suggested that Aboriginal education can be used to overcome the unresponsive approaches to teaching, irrelevant curriculum, and boredom that are cited as many of the
reasons for Aboriginal students' poor attendance, discipline problems, as well as their academic underachievement (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011). In addition, education systems that find a balance between incorporating unique cultural resources and conventional standards have shown that Aboriginal students can experience remarkable educational success and begin to overcome many of the socioeconomic and health barriers they regularly encounter (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 1998). However, Kanu (2011) cautions against the idea that incorporating Aboriginal education will act as a panacea to the Aboriginal-Settler student academic achievement gap. While improved school practices, which allow for the integration of Aboriginal content, perspective, and pedagogy, can narrow the achievement gap there are multiple barriers on the macro-structural level that negatively impact Aboriginal students’ academic achievement (Kanu, 2011).

The Effects of the Incorporation of Aboriginal Education on Settler Students

Overall, my investigation of the literature shows that there has been little work done to measure the outcomes of Aboriginal education on Settler students. In fact, having to figure out how to make Aboriginal education work in a classroom of mixed Aboriginal and Settler student has been cited as a difficulty encountered by Settler teachers (Kanu, 2011). As such, I believe that research that demonstrates the effects of Aboriginal education on Settler students would be both timely and worthwhile for both Aboriginal and Settler teachers to use in justifying the inclusion of Aboriginal education in mixed classrooms settings.

In general the research that does touch upon Settler students and their experiences with Aboriginal education suggest that the addition of Aboriginal culture and
perspectives into the classroom broadens the education of non-Aboriginal students by allowing them to become more knowledgeable and gain an appreciation of Aboriginal cultures (Aboriginal Education Office, 2007; Snowball, 2009). While Kanu’s (2011) investigation showed that some Settler students object to the incorporation of Aboriginal content into the classroom, the 2000-2001 Student Awareness Survey conducted by the Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (CAAS) suggests that this is just the kind of information that is missing from Settler students’ educational experience. This survey measured awareness, attitudes, and knowledge of facts about Aboriginal histories, cultures, worldviews, and current concerns of 460 Canadians, 35 Aboriginal, and 24 Newcomer university students (CAAS, 2002). Overall, 80% of the students surveyed indicated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that their schooling had adequately prepared them to understanding the current issues between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians (CAAS, 2002). When the CAAS (2002) assessed the number of correct answers provided by respondents they found that those who relied on their “own reading” as their main source of Aboriginal knowledge had the most correct answers while those who had relied on school were the most poorly informed. I feel that this accurately reflects my own schooling experience.

This study suggests that there is a serious need to improve the delivery, content, and approach to teaching Aboriginal topics, perspectives and culture in schools (CAAS, 2002). As mentioned above, this sentiment is echoed by the Ontario Ministry of Education policies (2007), which not only seek to improve Aboriginal academic achievement and inclusion but also to educate non-Aboriginal students about current and historical Aboriginal cultures, traditions, and perspectives. Despite Aboriginal education regularly being discussed solely in relationship to Aboriginal learners, Aboriginal
education needs to be emphasized as a practice that is important to Settler students as well (Snowball, 2009).

**Challenges and Barriers Encountered by Settler Teachers**

Despite indications that the incorporation of Aboriginal cultures and perspectives into the classroom can improve Aboriginal students’ engagement, inclusion, and academic success, the literature suggests that Settler teachers are still reluctant to use Aboriginal culture and perspectives in their classrooms for multiple reasons (Blood, 2010; Cherubini, 2011; Deer, 2013; Kanu, 2011; Snowball, 2009; Zurzolo, 2006). Firstly, Settler educators have stated that they feel uncomfortable, ill-prepared, and apprehensive about teaching Aboriginal topics and perspectives largely as a result of having an inadequate knowledge base (Blood, 2010; Cherubini, 2011; Deer, 2013; Kanu, 2011; Snowball, 2009; Zurzolo, 2006). This lack of preparation and education about Aboriginal topics has led to a fear of failure where Settler teachers become concerned that they may not be teaching Aboriginal topics and perspectives accurately, appropriately, and respectfully or that they might teach these perspectives in a way that offends the Aboriginal community (Restoule, 2013; Zurzolo, 2006). These feelings of insecurity and inadequacy are often amplified when Aboriginal students are present in the classroom, further limiting these students’ chances of seeing their identities reflected in the classroom environment (Restoule, 2013; Zurzolo, 2006). This feeling of concern over the appropriate and respectful ways of teaching Aboriginal education as a Settler teacher mirrors my own anxiety.

Settler educators have also expressed that they do not engage with Aboriginal topics because they feel guilty, or believe they cannot do the Aboriginal perspective
SETTLER TEACHER USE OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION  

justice, because of their non-Aboriginal ethnic identity (Blood, 2010; Deer, 2013; Restoule, 2013; Zurzolo, 2006). Similarly, some researchers have found that personal religious or racist beliefs prevent Settler teachers from incorporating Aboriginal culture into their classrooms (Deer, 2013; Restoule, 2013). Other Settler teachers have expressed the opinion that Aboriginal peoples should speak for themselves or that these topics lie outside the scope of education and therefore it is not the job of the teacher to put forth this alternative perspective (Deer, 2013; Zurzolo, 2006).

Settler teachers have also expressed that they feel unsupported in their attempts to incorporate Aboriginal education into the classroom as a result of the lack of available resources, profession development opportunities, and backing from administration (Blood, 2013; Deer, 2013; Kanu, 2011; Zurzolo, 2006). This has also acted as a significant barrier in my attempts to incorporate Aboriginal education into my teaching practice. Settler teachers have experienced difficulty finding resources appropriate for their students’ reading levels, resources that contain Aboriginal perspectives, and resources that are specific to the group of Aboriginal students that they are teaching (Kanu, 2011). Teachers have also suggested that while appropriate resources might exist they do not have the time to visit libraries, Aboriginal education resource centers, and search the Internet to find them (Kanu, 2011). A lack of funding for professional development courses and guest speakers has also acted as a barrier to the incorporation of Aboriginal education into the public school classroom (Kanu, 2011).

Another challenge that confronts teachers who are trying to incorporate Aboriginal topics, perspectives, and especially teaching practices into their classroom is resistance from Aboriginal parents (I have been unable to find a discussion on the reactions of Settler parents) (Taylor, Crago & McAlpine, 2001). As a school system
genuinely adopts an Aboriginal style of education it becomes more distant from mainstream education (Taylor et al., 2001). This is problematic because this perceived disconnect between Aboriginal style schooling and mainstream educational systems can result in concerns by Aboriginal parents about their child being able to manage future studies in a mainstream school and function successfully in other aspects of mainstream society that may not emphasize Aboriginal perspectives (Taylor et al., 2001). Being able to function successfully in mainstream society is a trait that is highly valued by many parents (Taylor et al., 2001). In addition, Aboriginal parents have generally experienced mainstream schooling rather than an Aboriginal based education system and have been socialized to believe in its virtues as a result (Taylor et al., 2001).

Interestingly, the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project found that while a lack of awareness among teachers is cited as one of the main barriers to Aboriginal education in Ontario, most of the teachers who participated in the project became committed to ongoing learning about Aboriginal issues, incorporating Aboriginal subject matter and resources into their teaching and working to establish a respectful classroom environment, suggesting promise for the future (Dion, 2010). Similarly, Settler teachers who were committed to incorporating Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into their classroom felt that this act was absolutely critical (Kanu, 2011). The Settler teachers provided the following reasons for their strong beliefs: the need to learn from Aboriginal peoples’ rich body of cultural knowledge, values, and contributions; the need for learning to be culturally relevant to the students in the class; the improvement of self-image and identity seen in Aboriginal students; the economic implications of school dropout; the need for inclusion; and the need to inform Aboriginal and other students about their cultural heritage, history, and issues effecting their lives (Kanu, 2011). All of the Settler
teachers who had begun incorporating Aboriginal education into their classrooms indicated that it was the result of a transformational experience that changed how they perceived Aboriginal education and its place in their teaching practice (Kanu, 2011).

**Conclusion**

The above literature provides a context for the continued exploration of my research question: How are a small sample of Settler Toronto elementary school teachers going beyond the Ontario curriculum expectations to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into the classrooms in a way that they feel is respectful of the Aboriginal community? I will refer back to many of the ideas presented here in my final chapter.
Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

In order to address my central research questions I designed and conducted a qualitative research study. I chose to use a qualitative approach because this methodology allowed me to use techniques that are interactive and humanistic, as well as to focus on “participants’ meaning” and the “holistic account” (Creswell 2013). By doing so, I was able to center my research on the meaning that the participants bring to the topic of the use of Aboriginal education by Settler teachers while including multiple perspectives, situating myself in the research study, and outlining the bigger picture that emerged (Creswell 2013). As such, I was able to gradually make sense of the participants’ perceptions, experiences, and feelings about their use of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in the classroom, while acknowledging that I am viewing the situation with my own personal lens that inevitably adds my own idiosyncratic interpretations to the study (Creswell, 2013). In gathering and analyzing my data I tried to follow Creswell’s (2013) procedures as closely as possible.

I began the research process by compiling a literature review, which contextualized the research question: How are a small sample of Settler Toronto elementary school teachers going beyond the Ontario curriculum expectations to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into the classrooms in a way that they feel is respectful of the Aboriginal community? In preparation for writing the literature review I read numerous books, articles, theses, and blog postings to gain an understanding of the research surrounding the topics of Aboriginal student achievement in classrooms incorporating Aboriginal education and the inclusion of Aboriginal education in the classrooms of Settler teachers. From this exploration of the sources five
themes emerged which were outlined and discussed in the previous chapter. These themes included the ways that Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy are being included in Canadian school classrooms; the best practices for Settler teachers’ use of Aboriginal knowledge; the benefits of Aboriginal education in the classroom for both Aboriginal and Settler children; and the challenges and barriers encountered by Settler teachers as they attempt to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their teaching practice. Insights from this research were used to develop the interview questions used in the data collection.

I used five themes from the literature review to guide the development of my interview questions. These themes were (1) diverse and personalized understandings of the term Aboriginal education, (2) motivation for incorporating Aboriginal education into the classroom, (3) methods of incorporating Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into the classroom, (4) perceived effects of the use of Aboriginal education on students, and (5) concerns, challenges, and barriers encountered during the inclusion of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in the classroom. Using the questions developed around these themes, I conducted face-to-face interviews with two Settler Toronto elementary school teachers. The participants were chosen using convenience sampling, which saves time and effort at the expense of information and credibility (Creswell 2013). Convenience sampling was selected because both my supervisor and I knew individuals using Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in the classroom and without this connection we had no way of locating the participants needed within the timeframe. In both cases, the interviews were conducted at the Settler teachers’ school after classes had been dismissed.
Instruments of Data Collection

To gather the data for this research project I conducted two informal face-to-face interviews with two Settler Toronto elementary school teachers. In designing the research questions and undertaking the interviews I used the “standardized open-ended interview” format outlined by Turner (2010). This allowed me to have some flexibility in the way the questions were worded and the flow of the interview because I was not required to follow the same script every time (Turner, 2010). I found this to be beneficial because it allowed me to ask additional follow-up questions, or adapt the questions based on the answers provided by the participant (Turner, 2010).

Samples of my interview questions include: How would you define the term “Aboriginal education”? What motivated you to include Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in your teaching practice? What strategies do you use to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into your classroom? Did you face any challenges when trying to incorporate Aboriginal education into your classroom? If yes, can you describe them? What effects do you perceive Aboriginal education is having on the relationship between Aboriginal and Settler students in your classroom? The full list of interview questions is located in Appendix A.

Participants

I interviewed two teachers for this project. The teachers were selected based on three criteria. Firstly, the teachers needed to be elementary school teachers working in Toronto. Secondly, the teachers needed to identify as Settler. Thirdly, the teachers needed to be actively working to incorporate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their classroom in a way that goes beyond the curriculum expectations.
These criteria were put in place to ensure that teachers were teaching in an area in which the Aboriginal-Settler student achievement gap had been clearly documented (Yau et al., 2011). While I had initially intended to interview Aboriginal elementary school teachers about their use of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in the classroom, as well as how they felt about the use of Aboriginal education by Settler teachers, I was unable to locate Aboriginal teachers working in standard Toronto classrooms. As such, I adapted my project to investigate the use of these techniques by Settler teachers. Since I wanted to gather information about overcoming the challenges associated with incorporating Aboriginal education into the Toronto classroom, it was important that the teachers interviewed be committed to the use of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in their classrooms so that they could reflect on and discuss their experiences. Additionally, I chose to interview elementary school teachers because I felt that this would make the strategies and experiences discussed immediately applicable to my teaching practice as a primary/junior teacher.

Both of the teachers interviewed fulfilled all the criteria. The first teacher was female who taught multiple classes at the primary level in a private school in Toronto. She is in her first year of full-time teaching. I refer to this teacher throughout this project by the pseudonym Sophie. The second teacher was male and taught grade 6 in a public school in Toronto. He has been teaching in Toronto for 14 years. I refer to this teacher throughout this work by the pseudonym Andrew.

Data Collection and Analysis

Both of the interviews were voice-recorded and later transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed I coded using the methods outline by Saldana (2008).
process actually began during transcription because I made “preliminary jottings” to record my initial impressions (Saldana, 2008). Once I had completed the transcription process I completed two coding cycles (Saldana, 2008). In the first cycle I created preliminary codes for both of my interviews (Saldana, 2008). I then “lumped” the codes to make them more manageable before undertaking a second coding cycle (Saldana, 2008). After the second coding cycle I gathered my codes and organized them into the categories and finally the themes outlined in chapter 4 (Saldana, 2008). Rather than disassembling my quotes I chose to highlight them within the body of the interview so as to keep the context.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

The Masters of Teaching program at OISE required that the following ethical review procedures were followed. All of the teachers interviewed signed a letter of consent and were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Before conducting the interview the participants were also reminded that they were not required to answer any questions that they felt uncomfortable with and could stop the interview at any time, withdrawing their consent.

The teachers interviewed were assured that the full transcripts obtained from the study would only be seen by my supervisor and myself and that the voice recordings would be destroyed after five years. Participants were also informed that the data obtained from these interviews would be used to inform my Masters of Teaching Research Project and may subsequently be used in future publications and/or conference presentations. In writing this report, I informed all participants that they would be referred to by a pseudonym and no identifying characteristics would be described. Instead
generalized background information would be used to differentiate those individuals interviewed. Participants were assured that any quotations taken from the interview for use in this project, publication or presentation would remain anonymous and would be followed by a pseudonym.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. While there are no immediate benefits to the participants, the information they share during this study will be used to inform my own teaching practice and has the potential to inform the practice of other teachers and teaching students, as well as policy and curriculum development. Similarly, the information shared also has the potential to make Aboriginal education more accessible to non-Aboriginal teachers. Since participants were selected partially based on their commitment to using Aboriginal education in their teaching practice, it is likely that they will feel positively about these outcomes.

**Limitations**

There are three main limitations to this study. Firstly, this study was limited in both scope and data collection. Due to the difficulty with finding participants and arranging interviews I was only able to meet with two of the four people I contacted. Similarly, upon meeting with participants there was a limited time frame within which to conduct the interview and as such I had to be very selective about the topics and issues I chose to pursue. As such, this study provides a narrow understanding of how Settler teachers are incorporating Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into the classroom.

Secondly, the Masters of Teaching ethics approval did not allow us to conduct observations as part of our research projects. I feel that observing the participants as they
taught the lesson plans they discussed, employed the pedagogy, and engaged the students with issues pertaining to Aboriginal peoples would have greatly enhanced my understanding of the topic. This would have also allowed me to provide the reader with a more detailed description of the practices employed by the participants.

Thirdly, the Masters of Teaching ethics approval also did not allow me to talk to students. As mentioned previously in the literature review, there is a lack of information about the effects that Aboriginal education in the classroom has on Settler children. As such, I think that it would have been beneficial to include the perspectives that Settler children have about the incorporation of Aboriginal education into their learning experience.
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter will outline the findings from two interviews conducted with Toronto elementary school teachers on their understandings of, and experiences with Aboriginal education. While each of the teaching professionals interviewed had markedly different understandings of, approaches to, and experiences with Aboriginal education, they both displayed a sincere commitment to overcoming the barriers they encountered in order to include Aboriginal education in their classrooms and teaching practice. Perhaps not surprisingly, both teachers interviewed also acknowledged that they would considered themselves outliers in their commitment to extend their teaching of Aboriginal issues beyond the requirements of the Ontario curriculum. The personal stories, opinions, and experiences presented in these interviews are an essential component of this research project because they provide valuable insight into the different ways Aboriginal education is enacted in the Toronto elementary school classroom.

Throughout this chapter I strive to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Accordingly, I will assign each interview participant a pseudonym, which I will use for the remainder of this discussion. Similarly, I will not use the names of institutions, schools, or neighbourhoods but will instead discuss the ethnic compositions of the students in the class in order to provide the reader with an understanding of what type of student population each teacher is addressing. As such, I will begin by briefly discussing the background of each of the teachers interviewed by outlining their teaching experience, current job description, and classroom composition.
Background Information on Participants

Both of the teachers interviewed teach at the elementary level in Toronto. Similarly, both teachers acknowledged that the majority of students in their class were Caucasian and that there were no students who identified as Aboriginal. However, it is important to remember that there may be students in the class who are Aboriginal and have chosen not to identify as such (Restoule, 2011). In addition, both teachers acknowledged that the majority of the students in the class were of middle to high socioeconomic background. While one interviewee was unfamiliar with the term “Settler,” as individuals of non-Aboriginal descent, I feel comfortable identifying both teachers as Settler teachers for the purposes of this paper.

The first teacher interviewed was a female teacher who had recently graduated from teachers’ college and was in her first year teaching at a Toronto private school. She had been hired as a primary teacher and, as such, teaches a variety of subjects including English, math, science, health and physical education, and research to students in grades one, two, three, four, and six. While she does teach a few junior level classes, the majority of her time is spent with primary students. She does not teach any students who identify as Aboriginal in her class and while new to the school she understands that there has only ever been one student who identified as an Aboriginal person in attendance. I will refer to this interview participant as Sophie.

The second teacher interviewed was a male teacher who has been teaching in Toronto for fourteen years and had previously taught in another Ontario board and overseas for six years before that. At the time of the interview this teacher was teaching grade six at a Toronto public school, although he has also had experience teaching grades four and five. Likewise, this teacher does not teach any students who identify as
Aboriginal although there are Aboriginal students in the school. He identifies the majority of students in his class as being Caucasian with a minority of students of Asian descent. I will refer to this interview participant as Andrew.

Key Findings

After analysing my interview transcripts I felt that the information was best organized into four key themes that mirrored the subsidiary questions that guided my research and interview questions. Therefore, the themes that will guide this discussion are as follows: (1) teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal education; (2) barriers encountered to the implementation of Aboriginal education in the classroom; (3) strategies for incorporating Aboriginal education into the classroom in a meaningful way; and (4) desired outcomes. Interestingly, the two teachers interviewed have both convergent and divergent understandings of, experiences with, and beliefs around Aboriginal education that result from their own personal stories, concerns, and hopes.

Teachers’ Understanding of Aboriginal Education

Constructing a Working Definition

Initially, both of the teachers interviewed displayed very similar understandings of the term Aboriginal education as content based learning focused on the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. For example when asked to define Aboriginal education Sophie said:

I would just say learning about the First Peoples...like if I’m trying to educate my kids about Aboriginal stories or peoples I feel like it has to be something like experienced so I think education, when it comes to Aboriginal stuff, has to be something that is really meaningful for the kids, not just something they are told.

Similarly, Andrew stated that for him, Aboriginal education means:
Trying to bring awareness of Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal accomplishments but being more focused on the story from their point of view and being able to learn more about Aboriginal peoples in general…trying to have the kids more aware of some of the horrible things that have been done in the past and trying to learn from mistakes and correct things in the future.

However, while both teachers have similar understandings of Aboriginal education as content-based education that focuses on Aboriginal peoples they display different understanding on how this teaching should be approached. From the above quote as well as additional comments throughout the interview, it becomes apparent that Sophie strongly believes in Aboriginal teachings being delivered from Aboriginal peoples rather than herself, in order to make the educational experience truly meaningful for the students. Alternatively, while Andrew readily incorporates Aboriginal perspectives into his teaching he has a broader understanding of how this content can be delivered in the form of videos, readings, teachers and teaching students, and guest speakers. This is a topic that will be explored in more detail in the discussion surrounding theme three, strategies for incorporating Aboriginal education into the classroom in a meaningful way.

**Understandings of Aboriginal Pedagogy**

As noted in the literature review, Aboriginal education can be integrated into the classroom through the use of Aboriginal pedagogy, which is described by researchers as a teaching approach that exists in harmony with Aboriginal students cultural practices and lived experiences (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Ledoux, 2006; Toulouse, 2013). As this approach is considered to have beneficial effects for Aboriginal students’ achievement in the classroom I felt that it was important to assess if teachers understood and used Aboriginal pedagogy in their teaching practice.
During the interview I conducted with Sophie she mentioned that she had done previous research on what she called “Indigenous pedagogy” in the classroom and as a result provided a description of Aboriginal pedagogy that was quite consistent with the literature. She mentioned that the types of teachings that she considered to be Aboriginal were:

Holistic and community-based. For example, I think, if someone were to say that they were taking an Aboriginal approach to teaching, for me that would mean that they were going to be involving a lot of other community members. There is going to be a lot of experiential learning, there is going to be a lot of connecting to nature and outdoors.

Although she has only been teaching for a short time, the examples Sophie provided of her approach to Aboriginal education have demonstrated that she has worked to incorporate the community-based, experiential part of this definition into her teaching practice surrounding Aboriginal content.

Alternatively, Andrew recognized that there was a distinction to be made between how Aboriginal peoples view the world and the worldview of many Settler Canadians, and that the current Eurocentric education structure was not consistent with the Aboriginal perspective. As such he stated:

There is a difference in how [First Nations people] look at everything in the world. Like the education system, I think is a broken system for example. For First Nations people, like by and large, I feel anyway, that not a lot has been done to acknowledge First Nations’ traditions and the way things are done within their community…. the system of the European ways has been mostly, sort of, imposed and doesn’t seem to work and there are a lot of things that seem to be broken within the system.

So while Andrew does not readily describe different pedagogical approaches to teaching as Sophie does, he is aware that there is an inconsistency between how teaching and learning is undertaken in Aboriginal culture and the Eurocentric system imposed upon them in Toronto schools.
Despite both teachers having at least some awareness of the differences in teaching and learning that exist between an Aboriginal pedagogy and a Canadian pedagogy, only Sophie readily incorporates aspects of this approach into her teaching practice. It is important to note however, that Sophie does not incorporate all the aspects of Aboriginal pedagogy that she previously mentioned into her teaching practice. For example, while Sophie recognizes that an Aboriginal approach to teaching is holistic, meaning that it takes into account the physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual well-being of the student, Sophie has readily acknowledged that she is uncomfortable and will not incorporate any aspect of Aboriginal spirituality into her classroom. This is both because, as a Settler teacher, she feels that she does not have the authority to do so and also because she feels that parents of non-Aboriginal students would object to having Aboriginal spirituality as part of their child’s education. However, Kanu (2011) suggests that spirituality is an integral part of Aboriginal cultural practice and worldview and therefore if Aboriginal students are to feel valued and see themselves reflected in the classroom, spirituality cannot be separated out of a comprehensive meaningful approach to the use of Aboriginal education. This raises the question as to whether it is realistic, respectful, and appropriate for both Aboriginal and Settler communities if Settler teachers utilize all aspects of Aboriginal pedagogy.

**Understanding of Aboriginal Education in Opposition to Their Personal Education Story**

Interestingly, both the teachers interviewed used their own personal experiences with Aboriginal curriculum to contrast their teaching approach and highlight why they felt that incorporating Aboriginal content into the classroom was an important aspect of their teaching practice. Andrew uses the fact that his educational experience pertaining to
Aboriginal peoples was “very centered around traditional ways” with “very little awareness of what Aboriginal peoples have gone through” to emphasize why students today need to be made aware of the course of history to better understand the injustices Aboriginal peoples have faced with the objective of having students look towards bettering the future. Comparably, Sophie states that it was not until she was in teachers’ college that she realized that Aboriginal peoples had different ways of “knowing the world” that contrasted with Western scientific understandings. As such, she states “I thought that was wrong, that I could get through the education system and not even think of another way of approaching science or the world…and that kind of sparked my passion.” Both participants use what they believe to be their own inadequate education around Aboriginal topics to contrast and support what they understand Aboriginal education to include as well as why it is an important aspect of their teaching practice.

**Barriers Encountered to the Implementation of Aboriginal Education in the Classroom**

*Concerns about Positionality*

Unlike Andrew who stated “I don’t have any concerns about teaching [Aboriginal education],” Sophie expresses concerns over being the person to deliver the information on Aboriginal perspectives to the students in her class. She remarks that:

I’d be concerned that I’m like kind of tainting someone’s story or putting my perspective of it when it is not really what happened…so one concern is, I guess appropriating or feeling I have the right to tell something when it’s something I know others are supposed to be telling or things like that… I don’t want kids hearing the wrong thing …I don’t want to put ideas in people’s heads that weren’t accurate because I’m still learning a lot.
Despite the importance Sophie placed on having Aboriginal peoples’ perspectives included in her teaching she felt strongly that she was not in a position to provide this information to the class and instead investigated other ways of presenting this content to her students.

Institutional Concerns

In their interviews, both Sophie and Andrew recounted experiences where they have faced concerns voiced by the administration. In Sophie’s case, she approached her principal about starting a letter-writing project with a First Nations reserve. While Sophie states that her principal was open-minded about the project, the principal cautioned Sophie about negative experiences they had in the past when trying to engineer projects with First Nation partners. Alternatively, Andrew has had both the principal and vice principal observe his lessons and become concerned over the content being presented. In the first story Andrew tells how his principal observed a lesson on the systematic genocide faced by Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history and became very uncomfortable with the topic stating that not everyone was like that. Similarly, upon having his vice principal observe a lesson on current issues faced by First Nations peoples Andrew states that she also became very uncomfortable and interrupted to say that not everyone shares those experiences. While Andrew acknowledges that both the principal and vice principal were making valid points about not over-generalizing and focusing on positive accomplishments, he understands that “it’s a history that not everybody is comfortable with discussing” and the difficulty involved with admitting that “we are a part of something that was bad.” Despite the discomfort and potential for
miscommunication or bad experiences both teachers interviewed still felt that working to incorporate Aboriginal content into the classroom was important and necessary.

Lack of Resources

While Sophie’s primary concern was over her positionality, Andrew’s primary challenge was a lack of appropriate resources. In the interview Andrew stated:

There is not enough in the way of resources. It is still a struggle to try to find some creditable sources for the kids when they actually do things…Print material, like when we try to access something from the library, it is very hard because things are very outdated and the publications tend to be still very stereotypical and not getting into the more current issues. So it’s, we rely a lot on internet sources and it’s hard to find some really credible sources that are also kid friendly. So a lot of the language tends to be pretty adult…I think that more can be done to allow kids the opportunity to read things that are more at their reading level and are meaningful to them.

In addition, Andrew suggests that this lack of available resources that are up to date and student friendly might be one of the reasons so few teachers are able to incorporate Aboriginal education into their classrooms in a meaningful way.

Strategies for Incorporating Aboriginal Education into the Classroom in a Meaningful Way

Teaching Approaches - Sophie

Interestingly, while both teachers interviewed had similar understandings of Aboriginal education as a content-based approach to teaching Aboriginal issues, the strategies, techniques, and approaches they used were markedly different. As mentioned previously, one of the barriers Sophie experienced when attempting to incorporate Aboriginal education into her classroom was her reluctance to be the person who delivered the information. She believes that to make the learning meaningful it is
important to have a personal connection and realize that you are talking about real people. As such, she had invited a First Nation speaker to come in, speak to the students, and initiate a letter-writing project, which she planned on assessing as part of the students’ language expectations. Sophie was very pleased to see how excited and curious the students became after their first meeting with the guest speaker but she remained cautious about imposing her own perspective on his experiences. Sophie notes that:

Afterwards if [students] asked me a question I said, “Oh, you know what? He is going to come back again and that would be a really great question to ask him”. So I don’t, I just try not to answer anything I don’t know or I just be really honest and be like “You know what? That’s a great question and I’m going to have to look that up or ask somebody about that.”

Despite the emphasis she initially placed on having an Aboriginal person deliver the information, as the interview progressed, Sophie identified other areas in her teaching practice where she felt that the topic had “come up naturally” and she had used the teachable moment to introduce Aboriginal content. For example, Sophie discussed how her class had been reading *Charlotte’s Web* and she had taken the opportunity to introduce the dream catcher in her room. This prompted a conversation about the terminology surrounding Aboriginal peoples, as well as the history of contact that is responsible for the term “Indian,” which was used by many children in the class.

Similarly, Sophie also took the opportunity at the beginning of the year to acknowledge the origins and importance of the circle that they use in the classroom. She discusses how this initiated another conversation about First Nation people:

At the beginning of the year ‘cause we had our circles when we were first learning the routines of the class and I made sure to say like “Oh” – where it comes from. Right? Sitting in circle where we’re all facing each other and all of our voices can be heard...And I, I used that opportunity to talk about how a lot of the First Nations, when they meet together they are facing each other, everyone’s at the same level and myself and the other teacher make
sure we are sitting on the carpet with them too. So it was a neat way to bring that part in.

Sophie’s belief about Aboriginal education is that she only personally addresses it “when it comes up naturally because I feel like anything else is forced.” Despite this, it becomes apparent that Sophie takes advantages of many situations that others might not realize or use as teachable moments for Aboriginal content discussions.

*Teaching Approaches – Andrew*

Unlike Sophie, Andrew did not mention any reluctance to engage with Aboriginal education because of his position as a Settler teacher. Over the years, Andrew described how he has incorporated Aboriginal content into numerous subject areas including social studies, language, dance, visual art, drama, and science. He has not “tackled” how to incorporate Aboriginal content into math but does not see why “that couldn’t be done at some point” and provides some interesting suggestions about how Aboriginal content could be incorporated and featured in the Ministry’s STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) initiative. In the past, Andrew has invited a First Nations guest speaker to come and talk to the class. He feels the guest speaker can make the learning more meaningful to the students because they can ask questions and find out how various issues have affected “real people” as well as increasing their understanding of how to respect First Nation people. Andrew sees the guest speaker as a way to show the students that “we have many First Nations people within our own city” and that “we can’t think in stereotypes.” Andrew believes that First Nation guest speakers can show that “First Nations people should be a part of our community and be proud of who they are and proud of their accomplishments.”
This is in keeping with the philosophy of Aboriginal education that Andrew presented throughout his interview. In the interview he stated that “I think that the key is to get them, the kids, as much access to the information as possible” and this has been apparent in his descriptions of his teaching practice. When asked to provide an example of a lesson in which he has incorporated Aboriginal education Andrew outlines how he has his students doing media presentations every week on issues within the community, province, country, and world and Aboriginal content is one “really important” thing to tie into that. As a part of this Andrew explains that:

I set up learning about pre-contact like how, the things that I was saying earlier that we only had a focus on originally which was the traditional customs, learning about those kinds of things. But, from there I have them start to look at post-contact and how the changes that were made over time, the treaties, the broken treaties, learning about residential schooling, and learning about, basically, issues that the communities all face even now: health care issues, education issues, those kinds of things. So I try to tie that in as a more sort of a central focus.

Andrew feels that this method is effective in bringing awareness to issues that students “don’t seem to know anything about.”

Andrew also notes that he feels it is important to provide “content that [students] can relate to.” He provides one example of a lesson taught by a student teacher in his class that he felt to be especially effective because it provided students with a context and a “little nugget of being sort of put down.” In this lesson Andrew and the student teacher had the students bring in an item that was meaningful to them but had no financial value. The student teacher read the students information about the residential schools in a very instructional tone and had the students explain and share what they brought and why it was important to them. After that, the student teacher informed the students that they had to put the item in a bag and that she would be keeping the students’ treasures. As a result,
Andrew explains, “she had the kids, for a while, feeling like they weren’t going to get them back, that they were useless, that they meant nothing, that even though it was meaningful to them it wasn’t of any importance to anyone else.”

Andrew felt that this lesson was especially meaningful for the students because it gave them a chance to briefly experience “that whole sort of feeling of being devalued and not important.” While Andrew notes that this is not even close to the complex and devastating situation experienced by Aboriginal peoples in the residential school system it does provide some context for the discussion and makes it easier for the students to “connect” and “make it meaningful to them.”

In addition to these lessons that outline the current and historical issues faced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada, Andrew has also emphasized the need to highlight the accomplishments of Aboriginal peoples as well. Throughout his discussion he emphasized the importance of not generalizing and not only focusing on the negative. Like Sophie, Andrew tries to correct misconceptions and teach for an understanding of Aboriginal peoples as an important part of the community. However, Andrew does not have the same reservations about being the individual who delivers the information and has, therefore, been able to integrate aspects of Aboriginal education more widely in his teaching practice.

**Outcomes**

While neither teacher was able to comment on the potential for incorporating Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy to improve the academic achievement of Aboriginal students – due to a lack of identified Aboriginal students in their classes – both commented on the effects they observed, or hoped to observe, in the Settler students
in their class. For Sophie, the most important learning that she hoped the Settler students in her class would take away from their exposure to Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogies was the understanding that there is a “history of our land and the people” that must include the First People. Sophie hopes that the letter-writing project that she has initiated in her school will allow Settler students to connect to Aboriginal students and, as a result, the Settler students will gain a deeper understanding that Aboriginal peoples are real and not simply people of the past. If the letter writing project is successful, Sophie feels that the Settler students in her class will see “other ways of living” that they can have a “personal connection with” and as a result “will notice things in the literature that [they] are reading that aren’t right because [the students] have actually talked to someone who lives. It’s real.” According to Sophie, the incorporation of Aboriginal education will further provide the students with the opportunity to see that they are “connected to others and animals, and the world in every way.” This is an integral element of Sophie’s teaching philosophy and one that she has been able to achieve through the use of Aboriginal education.

Alternatively, Andrew sees the incorporation of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy as a way to “have the kids more aware of some of the horrible things that have been done in the past and trying to learn from mistakes and correct things in the future.” Andrew notes that Settler students often experience shock after a lesson, and that the incorporation of Aboriginal content and perspectives forces them to think about things that they have been protected from and to kind of examine our country. I think they tend, up until this point, to think that our country is just this wonderful, glorious place that does no wrong. So I think it sort of changes things a little bit for them. I think that they become very interested in it, like the more they learn about Aboriginal education the more, I think, they want to find out. Like they do seem to be really curious about it.
Like Sophie, Andrew feels that Aboriginal education plays an important role in connecting Settler students to the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in both the past and the present and, as such, has an ability to improve Settler student understanding of the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples and allow Settler students to become “more aware.”

**Conclusion**

Throughout this discussion it becomes apparent that both of the teachers interviewed feel that Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy play an important part in their teaching practices. I found it surprising that these teachers were using Aboriginal education as a way of educating Settler students about the historical and present realities of Aboriginal peoples because I had understood Aboriginal education to be a culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical practice that reflected the lived experiences of Aboriginal students. As such, these interviews broadened my understanding of where and when Aboriginal education should be used. Both teachers emphasized the need to correct misunderstandings and fill gaps in the knowledge that Settler students have about Aboriginal peoples and both teachers felt that the incorporation of Aboriginal content and perspectives into the classroom in a way that goes beyond the curriculum expectations was the proper way to do this.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

In exploring the incorporation of Aboriginal education into the mainstream classroom I found that both my literature review and interview findings suggest that there are numerous barriers that are encountered by Settler teachers who are attempting to integrate Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their teaching practice. However, my research also shows that Settler teachers who are committed to the incorporation of Aboriginal education into their classrooms find ways to overcome these challenges. In turn, this suggests that there are ways to support Settler teachers in their attempts to include Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in their teaching that need to be investigated further as a way to encourage more Settler teachers to undertake this necessary endeavor. However, both the literature (Kanu, 2011) and interviews indicate that Settler teachers who do incorporate Aboriginal education into their teaching practice have been inspired to do so by past experiences. This suggests that simply providing teachers with ways to overcome the barriers discussed may not be enough to prompt the inclusion of Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy into their teaching practice. Chapter 5 will address how my interview findings connect to the literature, the implications of these findings for professional practice, a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.

Connections between Interview Findings and the Literature

Teachers’ Understanding of Aboriginal Education

In her research study, which examines how Settler teachers understand the notion of the “integration of Aboriginal perspectives” into the Manitoba curriculum, Zarzolo (2006) found that Settler teachers construct an operational definition of this practice that
differs from the definition offered by the provincial Department of Education. Comparably, the interview findings suggest that both Sophie and Andrew have constructed different definitions of Aboriginal education, which translate into distinctive teaching practices, strategies used, and topics examined. In the most general terms both Settler teachers interviewed understand Aboriginal education to refer to a largely content-based teaching practice that brings topics that are central to Aboriginal peoples’ historical and current experiences into the classroom. Both teachers often use resources that provide insight into Aboriginal perspectives on the issues being examined. While this definition contains many important aspects of Aboriginal education outlined in the literature (Blood, 2010; Kanu, 2011; Zurzolo, 2006) it lacks the Aboriginal pedagogical approach, which Aboriginal scholars and teachers emphasize represents an integral aspect of the incorporation of Aboriginal education into the classroom (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Kanu, 2011; Ledoux, 2006; Toulouse, 2013).

While Andrew has simply indicated that he understands that there is a difference between Aboriginal and Settler worldviews, Sophie has displayed a clear understanding of Aboriginal pedagogy as a holistic, place-based, and experiential approach to learning. Sophie’s description of Aboriginal pedagogy emphasizes that everything is connected and reflects the learning and teaching practices apparent in Aboriginal communities in a way that contains many (but not all) of the aspects of Aboriginal pedagogy that are described by scholars in the literature (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Kanu, 2011; Ledoux, 2006; Toulouse, 2013). However, neither Andrew nor Sophie prioritized the use of Aboriginal pedagogies in their approach to Aboriginal education. This is problematic because the literature suggests that it is through teaching and learning strategies that are representative of Aboriginal cultural worldviews and practices that many Aboriginal
students feel connected and reflected in the classroom, which in turn leads to high levels of academic achievement (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Kanu, 2011; Kehoe & Echols 1994; Ledoux 2006; Wotherspoon & Schissel 1998).

More specifically, Kanu (2011, p.104) outlines the importance of spirituality as the “missing link” between traditional Aboriginal education and Western systems of education and an integral aspect in providing empowering education for Aboriginal students. Spirituality is about “meaning making, the belief in a higher power or purpose, a sense of wholeness, healing, the interconnected [sic] of all things, the ongoing development of one’s identity including cultural identity, and how people construct knowledge through cultural symbols, images, music, and so on” (Kanu, 2011 pp.103-104). As such, spirituality becomes an important source of meaning making for Aboriginal peoples and therefore is an essential component of Aboriginal students’ learning both inside and outside the classroom (Kanu, 2011).

While Andrew indicated that his students have engaged with Aboriginal spirituality through a ceremony performed by an Aboriginal guest speaker, Sophie was adamant about her discomfort with incorporating Aboriginal spirituality into her classroom. Contextualized within the literature, this lack of place for Aboriginal spirituality in Sophie’s teaching practice seems problematic, as the literature emphasizes the need for spirituality to be included in Aboriginal students’ schooling experiences (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Kanu, 2011; Ledoux, 2006). However, both Sophie and Andrew are teaching in contexts where there are no identified Aboriginal students present. This raises the question as to whether Aboriginal spirituality has the same importance in classes where the student population is composed entirely of Settler students. Pertinent to this discussion is the idea that an understanding of spiritual
interconnectedness is essential to the full understanding of Aboriginal social and cultural frames of reference (Kanu, 2011). This suggests that an underlying knowledge of Aboriginal spirituality is necessary for Settler students to gain a more complete understanding of the social and cultural issues effecting Aboriginal peoples and as such, that the inclusion of Aboriginal spirituality into the classroom of Settler students is an integral part of incorporating Aboriginal education into Toronto schools (Kanu, 2011). The reluctance expressed by Sophie to incorporate spirituality suggests that there is a misunderstanding about the important role that spirituality plays in meaning making and emphasizes the need for more teacher professional development and research. Similarly important to remember is that Aboriginal students are not always identifiable as Aboriginal peoples and therefore might be present in the classroom without the teacher being aware of their cultural identity (Restoule, 2011). This point further acts to enforce the need for all teachers to incorporate Aboriginal education into the classroom.

*Barriers Encountered to the Implementation of Aboriginal Education in the Classroom*

Sophie’s main barrier to incorporating Aboriginal education into her teaching practice was based on her Settler identity. She expressed concerns with “tainting someone’s story,” providing an inaccurate representation, sharing knowledge inappropriately without the correct customs or permissions or sharing knowledge that was not meant to be shared, and appropriating knowledge. This is consistent with the concerns expressed by Settler teachers in Manitoba (Zurzolo, 2006).

Alternatively, Andrew’s main barrier to incorporating Aboriginal content and perspectives into his classroom was a lack of available, credible, and grade appropriate resources. A similar difficulty with finding appropriate, grade level, place-based
resources that reflected the specific identities of the Aboriginal students in the class was expressed by Kanu (2011) as she attempted to supply grade 9 social studies teachers with teaching materials for their classrooms. Andrew also expressed a concern that many of the resources available were outdated and depicted Aboriginal peoples in a stereotypical manner. A comparable concern with resources and curricula enforcing a stereotypical representation of Aboriginal peoples was also reflected in the literature (Godlewska, et al., 2010; Kempf 2006).

Furthermore, both Andrew and Sophie discussed how their administration expressed reluctance, apprehension, and concern with various topics related to Aboriginal peoples (Andrew) or forming a learning partnership with Aboriginal communities (Sophie). Kanu (2011) and Zurzolo (2006) also mentioned a lack of support or “lukewarm” support from administration as a barrier that Settler teachers cited as an obstacle to the integration of Aboriginal education into their teaching practice. Interestingly, Settler teachers in Kanu’s (2011) study suggested that administrators were also unwilling to spend money on the integration of Aboriginal education. However, both Sophie and Andrew specified that there was no cost associated with their methods of incorporating Aboriginal education into the classroom.

Overall, the Settler teachers I interviewed in Toronto expressed very similar concerns to the Settler teachers interviewed in Manitoba as part of both Kanu (2011) and Zarzolo’s (2006) studies. This consistency suggests that the barriers to incorporating Aboriginal education into the Canadian classroom are more widespread than the isolated classroom situations being studied. Additionally, Sophie’s comments suggest that these barriers exist in a private school context as well.
Strategies for Incorporating Aboriginal Education into the Classroom in a Meaningful Way

As Sophie and Andrew described their teaching methods and beliefs about incorporating Aboriginal education into their classrooms in meaningful ways, many of their actions and strategies reflected the best practices in Settler teachers’ use of Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives that were outlined in the literature review. Both Andrew and Sophie explained in their interviews that they were reflective about their teaching practices and committed to continual learning about Aboriginal issues, perspectives, and cultures. As such, Sophie and Andrew demonstrated careful consideration of how they framed topics related to Aboriginal peoples by emphasizing the need to demonstrate that Aboriginal peoples are human beings with connections to the community, showing Aboriginal accomplishments in addition to the realities and injustices of their current and historical lived experiences, countering images of Aboriginal peoples as historical and traditional, and exposing and combating stereotypes about the Aboriginal community. All of these approaches to Aboriginal education are mirrored in the work of St. Denis (2015) and Rose (2014), which I have used as guides to the responsible use of Aboriginal education by Settler teachers. This congruency suggests that both Sophie and Andrew can be considered allies to Aboriginal education.

Outcomes

Throughout their interviews, Sophie and Andrew continually returned to the idea that it was important to include education about Aboriginal peoples, issues, and cultures in their classroom because it helped to combat the ignorance, stereotyping, and misunderstandings they both observed in their Setter students. In turn, by incorporating
Aboriginal content and perspectives into their teaching practice as a way to allow Settler students to connect to Aboriginal peoples and their experiences, both Sophie and Andrew hope that the Settler students in their class will gain a better understanding of the Aboriginal community, develop a realization of the existence of different worldviews, and be eager to learn more about Aboriginal issues, perspectives, and ways of knowing. These insights offer useful information about the effects of Aboriginal education on Settler students, which some feel have been missing from the literature (Kanu, 2011). For example, in Kanu’s study a Settler teacher stated “most of the documents focus on the benefits for Aboriginal students and how to get through to Aboriginal students, leaving teachers to figure out how to make this work for the other students in a mixed classroom” (2011, p.182). Similarly, this finding would support Snowball’s (2009) claim that Aboriginal education needs to be emphasized as a practice that is important to Settler students as well as Aboriginal students.

**Implications**

Initially when I imagined this project I had intended for this research to provide me with a step-by-step road map to the incorporation of Aboriginal education into the elementary school classroom, which would serve to guide both myself and other Settler teachers in providing more equitable education to Aboriginal students. However, listening to the stories of Settler teachers during interviews and reading literature by both Aboriginal and Settler scholars I find that I held an overly simplistic view of what the integration of Aboriginal education into my teaching practice would entail. I now understand that the process of incorporating Aboriginal education into my teaching practice will be a part of an ongoing journey, filled with complex situations of
negotiation, exchange, and improvisation, which will mirror the commitment to life-long learning described by Andrew, Sophie, and St. Denis (2010). I have also come to understand that the nature of mixed classrooms means that the wider effects of the inclusion of Aboriginal education in Settler teachers’ practice need to be understood and explained as a way to benefit both Aboriginal and Settler students.

Despite the fact that I was unable to find a step-by-step process for the incorporation of Aboriginal education into the classroom this research has demonstrated that there are important elements of practice that need to be included for Aboriginal education to be successful (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Kanu, 2011; Ledoux, 2006; Rose, 2014; St. Denis, 2015). As a result, I will actively modify my teaching practice to include both a pedagogical approach to Aboriginal education and best practices in Settler teacher use of Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives as outlined in the literature review (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Kanu, 2011; Ledoux, 2006; Rose, 2014; St. Denis, 2015).

Similarly, Sophie and Andrew have offered numerous examples of how they have been able to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives into their teaching that can help direct my own practice. Kanu (2011) explains that Settler teachers’ commitment to Aboriginal education often results from a transformational experience, and I feel as though this research project has been that for me.

**Recommendations**

There are three key recommendations that emerged from this research. They include the development of age-appropriate resources, building community connections, and integrating Aboriginal content and perspectives into the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) initiative.
Development of Age-Appropriate Resources

Throughout his interview, Andrew continually referenced a lack of resources as the main barrier to the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives into his classroom. Andrew found that many of the resources he has access to are outdated, contain stereotypical representations of Aboriginal peoples, or are inappropriate for students in terms of content, comprehension level, and reading level. Additionally, Andrew states that “it is really hard to access anything coming from the Ministry or TDSB” and that there are not a lot of resources made available by these stakeholders. However, Andrew feels that he has been able to overcome the challenge of a lack of resources by remaining in contact with individuals and institutions such as OISE (the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education) that supply valuable teaching tools, lesson plans, and resources related to Aboriginal education.

Importantly, Andrew feels this lack of resources acts as an insurmountable barrier to many Settler teachers and, as such, prevents the incorporation of Aboriginal content and perspectives into the classroom. Kanu (2011) has cited similar difficulties with access to age appropriate resources that accurately represent the perspectives of the Aboriginal groups with which students in the school associate. Therefore, I recommend that stakeholders in Aboriginal education such as school boards, ministries of education, and Aboriginal community groups strive to create age-appropriate resources that Settler teachers can trust to portray accurate and fair representations of Aboriginal perspectives. Importantly, members of the Aboriginal community should approve these resources so that Settler teachers can trust that they are providing meaningful and appropriate resources to their students. Additionally, these resources need to be made easily
accessible to teachers so that they know where to find them and can access them in a timely manner.

These resources may also help teachers, such as Sophie, who are reluctant to include Aboriginal education in their teaching practice because they worry that they will provide an inaccurate or misleading representation of Aboriginal perspectives. Having Aboriginal voices and perspectives easily accessible in the form of age-appropriate and vetted books, videos, or audio recordings would allow teachers such as Sophie to readily incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms without feeling like they have the responsibility to represent the views of the Aboriginal community.

Additional resources may also help Settler teachers incorporate Aboriginal spirituality into their teaching practice. As mentioned above, an underlying knowledge of Aboriginal spirituality is necessary for Settler students to gain a more complete understanding of the social and cultural issues effecting Aboriginal peoples (Kanu, 2011). In her interview, Sophie expressed a reluctance to incorporate Aboriginal spirituality into her classroom, which suggests that she does not understand the important role that spirituality plays in meaning making. This emphasizes the need for resources, professional development, and additional research that will help Settler teachers better understand and incorporate Aboriginal spirituality into their teaching practice.

**Building Community Connections**

During her time in teacher’s college Sophie connected with Aboriginal organizations and peoples and used these connections to form the basis of how she incorporated Aboriginal education into her classroom. Similarly, Andrew explained how an Aboriginal guest speaker had offered an amazing opportunity for Settler students to
connect with, respect, and understand Aboriginal peoples in a meaningful and non-stereotyping way. Andrew also elaborated on the idea that there should be opportunities for teachers to pair up with Aboriginal communities for the benefit of both Settler teachers and students. Firstly, this partnership would act as a way for Settler teachers to increase their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal peoples. Secondly, this connection would also offer Settler students access to interaction with Aboriginal peoples as a way to increase their understanding and make their learning meaningful. In the literature, Kanu (2011) similarly emphasizes the need for increased connections between teachers and the surrounding Aboriginal community. As such, I recommend that pre-service programs, boards of education, ministries of education, and individual schools provide opportunities for both students and teachers to connect with the Aboriginal community in order to support teachers as they integrate Aboriginal education into their classrooms, provide meaningful experiences for students, and allow Aboriginal students to interact with Aboriginal role models.

Incorporate Aboriginal Issues into the STEM Initiative

After completing his interview Andrew asked me to turn the voice recorder back on so that he could share a final thought. In doing so, he explained how he felt that the STEM initiative offered by the TDSB provided an opportunity to have students engage with Aboriginal education in a meaningful way, and in subjects such as math that he had been unable to incorporate Aboriginal topics into. Andrew thinks that by using issues that are faced by Aboriginal communities in Canada as the problems that students try to fix through their engagement with science, technology, math, and engineering that it would be really interesting and meaningful learning. In reflecting on these comments I
recommend that stakeholders need to think more broadly and creatively about the resources they design to enable teachers to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives into the classroom. I would like to suggest that the most needed resources are those that allow teachers to integrate Aboriginal education into subjects where it is rarely used, such as math. I feel that for Aboriginal education to provide the most benefit to both Settler and Aboriginal students it must be seamlessly integrated across the entire curriculum in a way that provides valuable and meaningful engagement rather than simply as an add-on. However, without resources that provide suggestions and support this integration is hard for most teachers to accomplish (Kanu, 2011).

**Limitations and Strengths of this Study**

The limitations of this study include the limited scope and data collection, a lack of opportunity to observe the teaching practices of the educators interviewed, and an absence of student responses. These limitations are outlined in detail at the end of chapter 3. The strengths of this research project lies in providing an opportunity for the participants to share their experiences of incorporating Aboriginal education into their classroom, the challenges and barriers they have encountered in this process, and the ways they have been able to overcome some of these challenges and barriers to meaningfully integrate Aboriginal content and perspectives into their teaching practice. The lessons offered by both the participants interviewed and literature reviewed have provided me with an invaluable learning experience and challenged me to conceptualize Aboriginal education in a more holistic and meaningful way. I hope that this project has the potential to inspire and support others to integrate Aboriginal education into their teaching practice and, as such, will benefit both Aboriginal and Settler students.
Suggestions for Further Research

This research project raised three questions, which suggest avenues for future research. One finding from this study was that each of the teachers interviewed had been inspired to incorporate Aboriginal content and perspectives into their teaching practice as a result of recognizing a deficit in their own school experience and not wanting their students to have the same experiences. This is similar to my own reasons for conducting this research and incorporating Aboriginal education into my own teaching practice. Kanu (2011) suggests that the teachers she observed integrating Aboriginal education into their classrooms had also been inspired by a transformational experience. However, Sophie and Andrew also explained that while they had been inspired to integrate Aboriginal education into their teaching practices they felt that they were outliers in the teaching community and that most teachers did not share this commitment. As such I wonder what can be done to increase teacher motivation to include Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy in their classrooms?

Secondly, this study has suggested that the incorporation of Aboriginal education into the classroom provides benefits to both Aboriginal and Settler students. While there is considerable research detailing the benefits to Aboriginal students, there is a lack of material referring to the benefits derived by Settler students (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Kanu, 2011; Kehoe & Echols 1994; Ledoux 2006; Wotherspoon & Schissel 1998). This raises the question: What are the effects of Aboriginal education on Settler students? And suggests that further study is needed to document this.

Thirdly, during the interviews I planned to ask the question “what effects do you perceive Aboriginal education is having on the relationship between Aboriginal and Settler students in your classroom?” However, neither Sophie nor Andrew could answer
this question because they did not have Aboriginal students in their classes. Interestingly, Sophie did suggest that one of the outcomes she hopes will result from the Aboriginal to Settler student letter-writing project she has initiated is that Settler students will be able to relate to, and have an more accurate understanding of Aboriginal peoples when they meet them in their daily lives. For me, this suggests that increasing positive relationships between Aboriginal and Settler students might be a potential outcome of Aboriginal education in classrooms of Settler students. As a result, I think that an area of future research could focus on the question: What are the effects that Aboriginal education has on the relationships between Aboriginal and Settler students? This is an important question to consider because discriminatory practices by peers are cited as a reason for Aboriginal students leaving mainstream schools (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011).

**Conclusion**

This research project has provided me with an opportunity to grow as both a teacher and researcher. I am grateful that Sophie and Andrew provided genuine and reflective comments that allowed me to better conceptualize Aboriginal education as an important teaching method that has the potential to broaden student understandings and disrupt stereotypical attitudes and misconceptions. I hope that this research inspires more teachers to bring this valuable teaching practice into their classrooms.
REFERENCES


Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying how Settler teachers incorporate Aboriginal education into their classrooms for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Mary Lynn Tessaro. My research supervisor is Nancy Steele. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be voice-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or 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 people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. 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 voice 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 the 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,

Emma Hunter
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that 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 Emma Hunter and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): ______________________________________

Date: ______________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. Can you please provide some background information about yourself as a teacher such as how long you have been teaching, what grades you teach, etc.?

2. What does “Aboriginal education” mean to you?
   a. Probe: How would you define the term “Aboriginal education”?

3. Why do you feel it is important to incorporate Aboriginal education into your teaching practice?

4. What concerns, if any, did you have about incorporating Aboriginal education into your classroom?
   a. How did you overcome these concerns if you feel you have overcome them?

5. What challenges, if any, do you face in trying to incorporate Aboriginal education into the classroom?
   a. How did you overcome these challenges if you feel you have overcome them?

6. How do you try to ensure that you are incorporating Aboriginal education into your classroom in a way that is meaningful, appropriate, and respectful of Aboriginal peoples?

7. How do you incorporate Aboriginal education into your classroom?
   a. What subject areas do you incorporate Aboriginal education into and how do your methods differ depending on the subject being addressed?
   b. Can you provide an example of specific lessons you have taught that includes Aboriginal topics, or pedagogy?
   c. What resources do you use to teach Aboriginal education?

8. Can you describe the ethnic composition of students in your classroom, mentioning specifically the number of Aboriginal students you teach?
   a. What effects do you perceive Aboriginal education is having on the Aboriginal students in your classroom?
   b. What effects do you perceive Aboriginal education is having on Settler students in your classroom?
   c. What effects do you perceive Aboriginal education is having on the relationships between Aboriginal and Settler students in your classroom?

9. Do you have anything you would like to add on the topic of Aboriginal education and its use by Settler teachers?