Oral Storytelling as a Pedagogical and Learning Tool for Cultural and Cross-cultural Understanding

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Abstract

This research study delves into the use of oral storytelling as a pedagogical and learning tool to help students acquire cultural and cross-cultural understandings. The study was conducted using qualitative research methods and data was collected from semi-structured interviews with two Ontario educators who incorporate oral storytelling into their teaching practice. A review of the existing literature on oral storytelling for cultural and cross-cultural understanding is also featured in this research study.

The research findings indicate that oral storytelling has many benefits that can facilitate the acquisition of cultural and cross-cultural understanding among intermediate/senior level students. The findings signal that oral storytelling actively engages students. Student engagement lays the foundation for students to develop an understanding of the knowledge they gain during the storytelling process. Oral storytelling also helps foster student agency, aids in the creation of inclusive and equitable classrooms, and provides an opportunity for community building within the classroom. The findings strongly suggest that educators who seek to use oral storytelling in their classrooms should receive oral storytelling training to learn how to purposefully incorporate it into their pedagogy.

Key Words: oral storytelling, cultural and cross-cultural understandings, cultural inclusivity
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context (background of the study)

Storytelling has typically functioned as a vehicle to disseminate knowledge. It is important to note that “since its earliest formalized uses, story has been a preferred method of transferring society’s beliefs and values from one generation to the next” (Hoogland 1998, p. 81). Although there are educators who contend that storytelling is an “enjoyable, yet unimportant activity” that is “peripheral to learning”, Davis notes that oral storytelling is currently experiencing a “resurgence in modern pedagogy” (2014, p. 84). While educators can engage in storytelling as part of their pedagogical repertoire, students can also use storytelling as a learning tool. According to Hoogland, when students use their imagination to tell stories, they are able to “negotiate the new and strange and integrate them with the known and familiar” (1999, p. 80). By doing so, students can gain a greater understanding of “emotional, cognitive, and social concepts” (Hoogland, 1998, p.80). After conducting preliminary research and discovering the various ways that storytelling is used in education, my interest was most piqued by the use of oral storytelling to help students acquire a deeper understanding of their own culture and to acquire cross-cultural understanding.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my qualitative research study is to elucidate how oral storytelling is used to teach students about their own culture as well as various other cultures. Within the realm of my research study, I do not refer to oral storytelling as the simple act of reading a story out loud. Rather, I refer to oral storytelling as the verbal telling of a story involving a “face-to-face encounter” whereby “both teller and hearer can see each other’s expressions as emotions and
body language change” (Davis, 2014, p. 87-88). Ultimately, I am in agreement with Davis that storytelling should be a shared experience that enables individuals to understand each other in a manner so significant and “deep that they can never view each other as objects again” (2014, p.88).

My research not only allows me to gain invaluable insight into the role that oral storytelling plays in classrooms for the sake of my own professional development as an educator, but equally serves to provide the educational community at large with a more thorough understanding of the types of stories that are told and exchanged in classrooms to possibly inform their teaching practice as well. My research primarily endeavours to comprehend if storytelling is an effective pedagogical and learning tool that can be used to expose students to cultural diversity.

1.2 Research Problem

In Canadian schools, the myriad of students with different cultural backgrounds is reflective of Canada’s heterogeneous population. As of 2008, statistics reveal that Canada’s population is increasingly diverse as 34% of the population are non-European (Banks, 2011, p. 10). It is no surprise, then, that in 2009 the Government of Ontario released Realizing Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy which provides guidelines and a four-year plan to implement practices that support the inclusion of cultural diversity in education (Government of Ontario, 2009, p. 11 & 19-23). The Government of Ontario states:

Our schools should be places where students not only learn about diversity but experience it. We know that when students see themselves reflected in their studies, they are more likely to stay engaged and find school relevant. Revised curriculum documents
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now contain a section on antidiscrimination education and examples that help teachers better connect with the reality of students’ lives. (Government of Ontario, 2009, p. 15)

The Government of Ontario’s commitment to ensuring that cultural diversity is directly reflected in students’ school work signifies that there should be no reason why teachers would not consider using oral storytelling to help their students achieve cross-cultural understandings. The need for students to gain an understanding of different cultures is underscored by the Government of Ontario when they cite information provided by the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops elucidate that “racism, religious intolerance, homophobia, and gender-based violence are still evident in our communities and – unfortunately – in our schools” (as cited in Government of Ontario, 2009, p.7).

Beyond gaining an understanding of different cultures, students must “see themselves reflected in their learning environment” (2009, p. 5). This is particularly necessary for Ontario students that have been deemed “at risk of lower [academic] achievement” such as recent immigrants and Aboriginal students, among others (Government of Ontario, 2009, p. 5). Thus, oral storytelling provides the ideal opportunity for educators to carry out the Government of Ontario’s mandate that “all partners …must actively seek to create the conditions needed for student success” (2009, p. 5).

1.3 Research Questions

Overarching, central question: In what ways do two Ontario teachers use oral storytelling to teach students about various cultures?
Sub-questions:

1. What are some best practices/methodologies that teachers employ to ensure that oral storytelling is an efficacious teaching and learning tool?

2. What are some of the features of oral storytelling that make it a useful method to help students learn about their own culture as well as different cultures?

3. What are some clear indicators that oral storytelling has contributed to students’ acquisition of cross-cultural understanding?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

As an elementary, secondary, and even undergraduate student, I was most engaged by educators who shared personal anecdotes related to the topics we were discussing in a lesson. In these instances my teachers or professors appeared more relatable and approachable. My most vivid recollection of a teacher using a story for didactic purposes involves one of my favourite elementary school teachers who taught my class about the concept of prejudice. My teacher did so by recounting a personal anecdote in which she revealed that she had once been the target of prejudice and elaborated on how she had felt. The immediacy with which I understood that negative prejudices can seriously harm a person’s self-worth demonstrates that storytelling has the power to evoke emotions which enables one to have a fuller and deeper understanding of what is being conveyed in the story. Indeed, Jo-Ann Archibald elucidates the effect that storytelling can have: “The strength of stories challenge me to think, to examine my emotional reactions in relation to plot and characters, to question and reflect on my behaviours and future actions, and to appreciate a story’s connection to my spiritual nature” (2008, p. 85).

Furthermore, Davis contends that oral storytelling allows students to “experience firsthand the
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connected reality of their own lives and those of all other life forms” (2014, p. 90). She believes this is vital in ensuring that students “internalize a caring attitude by developing empathy and understanding” (Davis, 2014, p. 90). This is precisely the effect that my elementary school teacher’s story had on me.

The power of storytelling became apparent to me once more when I volunteered in a grade seven classroom. The teacher of that classroom allowed me to teach a lesson on the topic of personalities and suggested that I begin my lesson by using a personal anecdote about my own personality as a sort of “hook” to engage the students from the outset of the lesson. I readily accepted his advice and proceeded to recount a story of how I came to the realization that it is problematic to categorize personalities by using the binary of introvert and extrovert. Sure enough, the students listened attentively as I underscored that I can be introverted in certain contexts and among certain people, but extroverted in other contexts.

As a first generation Canadian of Ecuadorian and Spanish descent, I treasured the moments in my schooling where my culture was valued through song or dance. Upon reflection, I realize that my culture was superficially represented and was peripheral to classroom learning because it was rarely, if ever, explicitly taught in any of the subjects I took. When I discovered that many researchers had conducted qualitative studies on the use of storytelling to teach students about their cultures as well as different cultures, I was intrigued to learn about how I could incorporate oral storytelling in my teaching practice. Thus, my research question bridges my love of stories and storytelling with my desire for students to be exposed to cultural diversity so that they do not feel that their culture is underrepresented in their education.
As it will be demonstrated in my literature review, my conceptual framework is influenced and informed by Aboriginal conceptions of oral storytelling. My affinity to studying and learning about Aboriginal ways of seeing can be traced back to the research that I conducted in one of my undergraduate history courses called “Topics in Western Canadian History”. For my final research paper, I provided an in-depth analysis of how an Aboriginal noblewoman named Agnes Alfred played a vital role in her community and retained agency despite the damaging effects of colonization. The primary source I examined was Agnes’ oral life story which had been translated and recorded into a memoir. As such, I researched and learned about Aboriginal oral traditions. Although I learned that academic based scholarship remains the dominant method of historical analysis, First Nations people have been “increasingly” vocal about their desire for “their oral traditions [to] be taken seriously as legitimate perspectives on history” (Cruikshank, 1994, p. 403). This prompted me to realize the necessity of infusing aboriginal perspectives into academic scholarly research. While I do not represent the voice of Aboriginal peoples, approaching oral storytelling through Aboriginal ideological conceptions of storytelling will hopefully demonstrate that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars alike can step outside of Western thought to guide their scholarly research.

1.5 Overview

The first chapter of my Master of Teaching Research project consists of the introduction to my research study and the purpose of my study. Chapter one also provides my research question as well as my set of sub-questions. The second chapter is devoted to my literature review, while chapter three outlines the methodology I used to guide and organize my research. In chapter four, I present my research findings and provide a data analysis of those findings.
Lastly, I discuss the implications of my research findings on both my teaching practice and the educational community at large. Additionally, I provide recommendations for educators seeking to use oral storytelling in their classrooms and highlight areas for further research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I seek to comprehend how teachers use oral storytelling to teach students about various cultures. Consequently, the central question that I pose in my qualitative study is: “In what ways do two Ontario teachers use oral storytelling to teach students about various cultures”? Although my qualitative study is specific to the use of storytelling in Ontario classrooms, the literature I will review provides insight into how storytelling is used in educational settings across North America to expose students to cultural and cross-cultural learning. Although there is a limited amount of literature that pertains to the use of oral storytelling for cultural understanding in Ontario classrooms, this will soon change because there is a “growing body of research from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars” underscoring the importance of incorporating oral storytelling into classrooms (Davis, 2014, p. 84). It is important to note that the literature under examination features storytelling being used among different age groups, spanning from kindergarten children to university students. This literature review reveals that oral storytelling is an invaluable pedagogical and learning tool to educate students about their own culture and/or different cultures.

2.01 Establishing Oral Storytelling as a Conceptual Framework

In “Theories of Story and Storytelling”, Eric Miller provides a predominantly Western view of storytelling. Miller claims that a story should have causality and trace a “series of events” (2011, p. 1). Moreover, with the exception of the Indian theory of Rasas, Miller solely identifies theories of story that were put forth by Western thinkers (2011, p. 4). These theories include: Vladimir Propp’s theory of Fragmentation and Wholeness, Joseph Campbell’s theory
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of Heroic Journey and Community Revitalisation, Carl Jung’s theory of Psychological Integration, Aristotle’s theory of Catharsis, the theory of “The Well-Made Play”, and Bob McGee’s theory of Characters Wanting Things (Miller, 2011, p. 4). Because these theories of story are not concerned with approaching stories for the sake of acquiring cultural and cross-cultural understandings, they do not suffice to be theories that I could use to examine oral storytelling as a teaching and learning tool. I have come to understand that Aboriginal conceptions of oral storytelling are far more conducive for helping students arrive at cultural and cross-cultural understanding.

I employ certain elements of Jo-Ann Archibald’s concept of storywork to serve as the basis for my conceptual framework. Archibald is an Aboriginal educator, storyteller, and researcher of the Stól:ō nation who was raised on the Soowahlie Reserve (2008, p. 4). In her book entitled Indigenous Storywork: Educating the heart, mind, body, and spirit, it is evident that Archibald’s personal journey to become a storyteller is interconnected with her academic and professional journey to create a storytelling framework that may be applied in the educational realm (2008, p. 82, 85). Archibald conducted her “story-research” by meeting regularly with Stól:ō Elders to learn about the beliefs surrounding storytelling as well as the components and intricacies of this practice (2008, p. 81). Because Archibald discovered that indigenous stories “conflicted with academic literate traditions”, she aspired to “find a way to respectfully place First Nations stories within the academic and educational milieu” (2008, p. 7). Archibald’s objective is pivotal considering that Aboriginal oral traditions have been eclipsed by Western literate traditions, “especially in educational contexts” (2008, p. 12).
What is *Storywork* and how can it be used to inform my conceptual framework?

Yearning for Aboriginal notions of storytelling to be “taken seriously”, Archibald coined the term *storywork* to consolidate Aboriginal conceptions of oral storytelling and highlight its applicability to education (2008, p. 3). Aboriginal oral storytelling is ultimately about creating meaning (Archibald, 2008, p. 83). As it will become apparent throughout my literature review, herein lies the opportunity to apply storytelling to an educational context. Archibald is certainly not alone in this vision as other scholars have had this realization.

Although Archibald identifies “respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy” as the “storywork principles” that form her “Stól:ō and Coast Salish theoretical framework”, I will primarily employ the concept of storytelling as a holistic process that is conducive to the creation of meaning because it privileges collaboration, or synergy, as a means of creating said meaning (Archibald, 2008, p. ix, 33).

Archibald elucidates that Aboriginal ways of thinking are founded on the “philosophical concept” of holism (2008, p.11). Holism is the belief that an “interrelatedness” exists “between the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical realms to form a whole healthy person” (Archibald, p. 11, 2008). For Aboriginal peoples, holism is cultivated by the collective influence of the family, community, band, and nation (Archibald, p. 11, 2008). A common aim amongst different Aboriginal groups has been to achieve a “mutual balance and harmony among animals, people, elements of nature, and the Spirit World” (Archibald, 2008, p. 11). In order to fulfill this goal, storytelling is one of the cultural practices that can be used to teach knowledge and codes of behaviour (Archibald, 2008, p. 11). While non-Aboriginals cannot approach holism through the cultural lens that Aboriginal people do, the basic ideological premise of holism—the idea
that all the elements of the universe are interconnected—can be used by students to make sense of their experiences during storytelling. Embracing the concept of holism will help students understand that the collaborative nature of storytelling allows individuals to experience a moment of interconnectedness.

**Why is oral storytelling conducive to the creation of meaning?**

In *Indigenous Storywork*, Archibald contends that both the storyteller and the listener play an active role in the storytelling process. The storyteller and story listener work in unison to create meaning. Archibald describes this interaction as “synergistic” and argues that this is a vital “storywork principle” (2008, p. 33). Archibald was taught by First Nation elders that “listening requires the concomitant involvement of the auditory and visual senses, the emotions, the mind, and patience” (2008, p. 76). While the listener must ensure that they are actively listening during storytelling, the storyteller has the responsibility of “selecting the appropriate story to tell” and may arrive at such a decision by using their intuition (Archibald, 2008, p. 76-77). The storyteller’s decision to reveal story meaning is relative to the ability of the listeners to arrive at the story’s meaning (Archibald, 2008, p. 77). Some listeners may be more adept at identifying meanings than others. Essentially, the oral storyteller is responsible for using their own discretion to determine whether or not they should explicitly state the “moral” or meaning of the story (Archibald, 2008, p. 77).

**2.02 The Intersectionality between Oral Storytelling and Socio-cultural Learning Theory**

In order to establish Socio-cultural theory as a theoretical framework, I will employ Gordon Wells’ approach to sociocultural theory in which he advances his own model. Wells acknowledges that he was “strongly influenced” by psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s social
constructivist “theory of learning and development” that can be found in Vygotsky’s work, *Thinking and Speech* (Wells, 1999, xii, xv-xvi). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is founded on the premise that knowledge should be constructed by a “collaborative community” with the teacher acting as a guide allowing “all participants to learn with and from each other as they engage together in dialogic inquiry” (as cited in Wells, 1999, p. xii). This theoretical framework stipulates that a shift must occur in which the teacher is no longer the unilateral constructor of knowledge in the classroom (Wells, 1999, p. xii). For Wells, this theory strikes the ideal balance between student-centred approaches to education and teacher-centred approaches to education (Wells, 1999, p. xii).

In order to comprehend Wells’ theory of knowing and the model he proposes, it is imperative to explain the terminology he uses. Wells defines *knowing* “as the intentional activity of individuals who, as members of a community, make use of and produce representations in the collaborative attempt to better understand and transform their shared world” (1999, p. 76). The nuance here is the emphasis that Wells places on collaborative learning for the sake of understanding *and* transforming a “shared world”. Well’s model for creating knowledge emphasizes the importance of interaction and collaboration as a means of students feeling empowered in their own learning. Wells (1999) contends:

For it is when they have begun to formulate their own theories, to test them in various ways, and to submit them to critical evaluation by their peers, that they can most fully appreciate the contributions to the problems with which they are engaged that have been made by more experienced workers in the field. In other words, until they have a personal stake in the knowledge under construction, they are likely to treat the published writings
of others as not only authoritative but also as precluding the need for any constructive effort on their own part. (p. 91)

In order for students to construct knowledge and gain an understanding of the knowledge they have created, Wells outlines the process that must take place. Wells’ model consists of four interconnected components: “Experience, information, knowledge building, and understanding” (1999, p. 84). By experience, Wells is referring to the “meanings that individuals construct” from their lived experiences (1999, p. 84). The meaning that individuals arrive at is informed by their existing understanding of the world (Wells, 1999, p. 84). In Wells’ model, information refers to all “meaning and interpretations” constructed by others, while knowledge building bridges experience with information because it entails an individual being “engaged in meaning making with others in an attempt to extend and transform their collective understanding with respect to jointly undertaken activity” (Wells, 1999, p. 84). Knowledge building leads to the “culminating point” in the process which is understanding (Wells, 1999, p.85).

Although knowledge building is a collaborative process, the understanding that emerges may be unique to each individual (Wells, 1999, p. 85). Elaborating on this notion, Wells explains that knowledge building is an exercise in “negotiation” (1999, p. 110). While participants should ideally arrive at some shared consensus or understanding, realistically this may not always occur (Wells, 1999, p. 111). Once understanding arises, it provides students with a new framework to “interpret” any new lived experiences (Wells, 1999, pg. 85). Wells agrees with Halliday that language or “modes of conversation” enable “teachers and students [to] dialogically make sense of topics” (as cited in Wells, 1999, p. 51, 98).
Consequently, storytelling provides the opportunity for Wells’ socio-cultural theoretical framework—with its emphasis on the co-creation of knowledge to lead to understanding—to be applied in an educational setting. As it has been highlighted by Archibald, Aboriginal conceptions of storytelling involve the construction of meaning through the teller and listener’s synergistic interaction (2008, p. 33). Because Wells’ model invites and encourages dialogism, storytelling provides the ideal platform for knowledge building through language to take place. Canadian students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, can benefit from approaching oral storytelling through the ideological lens of Aboriginal peoples. Students can be taught to value the creation of meaning through a collaborative effort, and to understand that storytelling is a holistic process that allows them to experience a sense of interconnectedness with others. Oral storytelling is conducive to Wells’ concept of understanding because a community of learners can co-create knowledge to arrive at their own unique understanding of cultural topics. In order for students to gain an understanding of their own culture and learn about the intricacies of various cultures, oral storytelling is an ideal approach to achieve this goal.

2.03 Overview of the Literature

Herein I will examine the existing literature that provides insight into how oral storytelling has been used in North American classrooms in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Piquemal (2003) furthers our understanding of the barriers that have prevented oral storytelling from being widely used in North American schools, while McCabe (1997) underscores that North American educators have a duty to accept the diversity of story forms in order for schools to truly value the cultural diversity of its students. Baldasaro et al. (2014) contribute to my understanding that oral storytelling can allow students to feel
empowered in their learning, while Sarris (1990) signals that oral storytelling should promote critical discourse if students are to gain a meaningful understanding of various cultures. Similarly, Al-Jafar and Buzzelli (2004) champion oral storytelling as a medium to create dialogic discourse between students about different cultural values and understandings. Lastly, Groce’s (2004) study points to the necessity of investigating the impacts that storytelling training can have on teachers who seek to infuse oral storytelling into their teaching practice.

2.1 Understanding the barriers that have prevented oral storytelling from being widely used in North American classrooms

Natalie Piquemal’s article, “From Native North American oral traditions to western literacy”, provides a contextual basis to understand the discrepancy that exists between Western approaches to storytelling and Indigenous conceptions of storytelling. Piquemal problematizes the dichotomy that exists between Native American oral tradition and Western literacy. She argues that it is problematic to describe Aboriginal cultures as non-literate societies and instead advocates that is “critical [for] teachers to work in the oral language tradition with which children share their understanding of the world” (Piquemal, 2003, p. 113, 119). For Piquemal, oral storytelling is an “ideal teaching strategy” to support students in this type of learning (2003, p. 119).

Piquemal explains that the origins of oral traditions and literacy stem from two distinct world views, “each with its own specific epistemology and mode of discourse” (Piquemal, 2003, p. 114). She signals that the divergence between oral tradition and literacy affects the different ways in which “narratives are read, heard, and understood” (2003, p. 115). Piquemal draws upon Gunn Allen’s book, Voice of the Turtle: American Indian Literature 1900-1970 (1994), to
explore principal differences between oral tradition and Western narratives (Piquemal, 2003, p. 115). According to Allen, unlike Western narratives which are primarily structured according to the “conflict-crisis-resolution” model, Native American narratives are holistic (as cited in Piquemal, 2003, p. 115). Furthermore, Allen underscores that “Western literary consciousness usually requires an analysis and deconstruction of texts, whereas orality consciousness implies that meanings arise from the story as a whole holistic context” (as cited in Piquemal, 2003, p. 115). This understanding of storytelling places an emphasis on deriving meaning and not conducting an analysis to arrive at definitive conclusions.

Native oral traditions are usually not concerned with establishing a moral or lesson that is to be understood by audiences. As Archibald and Piquemal also indicate, meaning is not only co-constructed by the storyteller and audience/listener, but stories are regarded as ever-changing because storytellers have the liberty to change certain aspects of the story to incorporate new elements (Piquemal, 2003, p. 116-117).

Piquemal voices her dissatisfaction with the fact that Western schools tend to “ignore” Aboriginal approaches to storytelling and also challenges Kieran Egan’s Eurocentric view of storytelling which privileges the conflict-crisis-resolution model (2003, p. 119, 120). Piquemal effectively challenges the predominance of Eurocentric storytelling forms by calling for change: “To be truly effective and respectful of Native culture and traditions, curricula would have to be elaborated keeping in mind Native orality consciousness” (2003, p. 121). Evidently, Piquemal further informs and enriches my research study because she signals that oral storytelling should become a formal component of education by being incorporated in actual curricula. Piquemal specifically sheds light on the importance of ensuring that teachers incorporate a diversity of
oral storytelling forms. As McCabe will elucidate, this is a vital task for teachers to undertake in order to ensure that their classrooms are equitable.

In “Cultural background and storytelling: a review and implications for schooling” (1997), Allyssa McCabe similarly problematizes European dominance of storytelling forms. McCabe contextualizes this problem by revealing that the possibility of incorporating non-Western, multicultural literature into the curriculum is often met with “resistance” because educators tend to view Western literature as noteworthy while discounting non-Western literature as lacking in merit and quality (1997, p. 453).

Although McCabe’s main argument is threefold, I will highlight the two that are most relevant to my research question. McCabe argues that “the transition of linguistically different children from oral language use to the acquisition of reading and writing [in primary school] may be enhanced if educators and researchers expand the definition of what constitutes good stories” (1997, p. 454). Secondly, she argues that teachers may facilitate a child’s understanding of literature from different cultures by ensuring that they are taught to understand “the oral discourse style that participants in that culture value” (McCabe, 1997, p. 454).

McCabe is also conscious of the role that oral storytelling plays in the creation of meaning. McCabe’s argument parallels Aboriginal conceptions of storytelling because she contends that “narratives from all children tend to involve sense-making and self-presentation around events that happened to them in the past” (McCabe, 1997, p. 454). McCabe’s argument also aligns with Wells’ model of knowledge construction in which he believes that the first step to arrive at cognition involves students’ personal experience (1999, p. 85).
McCabe uses both qualitative and quantitative research to inform her research article. She highlights that students vary in their approach to storytelling because it is informed by their cultural background. In her quantitative findings, McCabe discovered that by age 6, European North American children tell stories that meet almost all European North American conventional expectations of what a good story is: they begin by telling their listener who and what was involved and when things took place. They build a series of events up to a high point, often the solution of some problem they or others have confronted. (1997, p. 456)

This is consistent with the Western approach to oral storytelling that I highlighted earlier in my literature review, particularly “The Well Made Play Theory” which purports that conflict should be central to all stories (Miller, 2011, p. 5). McCabe also discovered that in a sample of 1400 Canadian students who told narratives, Canadian students adhered to this same story form (1997, p. 456).

Whereas North American children tend to tell lengthy stories, McCabe reveals that Japanese-American students usually tell succinct stories that are “cohesive collections of several experiences they have had” (1997, p. 457). McCabe correlates these storytelling practices directly to the students’ culture, as this narrative form “resembles haiku (Japanese stories)” (1997, p. 457). Furthermore, “the children’s relative restraint reflects the Japanese cultural value of avoiding verbosity that would insult listeners and embarrass narrators, a value their parents remind them of frequently, both explicitly and in more subtle ways” (McCabe, 1997, p. 457).

Stories told by African American children may in some cases conform to Western storytelling forms while in other cases depart from this style (McCabe, 1997, p. 459). In a study
conducted by Hyon and Sulzby (1992), when 48 African-American kindergartners were invited to tell a story about a topic of their choice, these students generally told episodic stories (as cited in McCabe, 1997, p. 459).

Differing storytelling forms can also be found among stories told by Latin American students. In lieu of focusing on the events of a story or on story chronology, stories told by Latin American children are family oriented (McCabe, 1997, p. 461). McCabe provides a story from the qualitative data that she collected to support this notion. In a five minute monologue, a seven year old student from El Salvador repeatedly made reference to her family. Once more, McCabe underscores that this storytelling form “reflects broad cultural values” (1997, p. 461).

After presenting these findings, McCabe signals that it is problematic when teachers do not validate and acknowledge different storytelling forms. Indeed, to deny these storytelling forms is to essentially deny the cultures that students belong to. It is evident that McCabe is displeased with individuals who tend to dismiss certain cultural stories as nonsensical simply because they are unfamiliar with the storytelling style of those cultures (1997, p. 462). McCabe argues that the stakes are high when these misinterpretations occur within a school context due to the power imbalance of the teacher-student relationship (1997, p. 462). She provides an example of clinical psychologists who misunderstood Latino children to underscore the ramifications that misinterpretation can lead to. Upon rating Latino children’s narratives “as significantly more ‘illogical’ and ‘incomprehensible’ than European North American narratives”, clinical psychologists “were inclined to make a diagnosis of developmental delay on the basis of such narratives” (McCabe, 1991, p. 462). To prevent students from being
misdiagnosed with developmental delays, adults who work with children have the responsibility to “recognize, appreciate, [and] value cultural differences in storytelling style” (1997, p. 462).

McCabe proposes a practical solution to ensure that educators do not misunderstand diverse storytelling forms or misinterpret them as incoherent and illogical. McCabe recommends that educators employ “stanza analysis” when making sense of the stories told by culturally diverse students. According to McCabe, this method is useful because “stanza analysis presumes no ideal or standard form to which all stories are compared” (1997, p. 458). This method requires that educators make sense of stories by analyzing it in sections as opposed to making sense of the story as a unified whole. McCabe draws on her own research study to assert that this method of story analysis is effective because it “illuminated most of the narratives” that she and her colleague “collected from Japanese, South African, and African-American children…” (1997, p. 458).

For curriculum to be culturally responsive and truly present students of culturally diverse backgrounds with the opportunity to succeed, McCabe argues that it would need to require teachers to routinely expose their students to numerous stories written by different cultural groups (1997, p. 463-464). In her article, “Oral Storytelling: A Cultural Art that Promotes School Readiness”, Curenton offers an ingenious idea to increase students’ exposure to stories from diverse cultures. Recognizing that “the majority of the commercial audio recording options expose children only to the classic European storytelling tradition”, she recommends that “teachers can incorporate cultural diversity by asking parents to record their oral stories” and request the permission of parents to share the recordings with students (2006, p. 84). While McCabe concedes that inclusion of multicultural literature into a language arts curriculum does
not suffice to end “the racism, poverty, and asymmetrical power relations in many U.S. classrooms”, she cites a research study conducted by Katz and Zalk (1978) which provides evidence that children who read stories about a culture that is not their own helped shift their perspective of other races and reduced their prejudices (1997, p. 468). Evidently, McCabe is adamant in her belief that storytelling is an integral tool to help students gain greater awareness of other cultures.

McCabe makes a substantial contribution to my research question because her critique of the Western predominance of storytelling form reveals that it has prevented legitimate storytelling forms from being deemed worthy. McCabe also makes a practical contribution to the literature by providing teachers with some sensible guidelines to follow. She advises:

1) Assume that children’s narrative productions have narrative form instead of assuming it lacks one [and] 2) Use writing instruction as a means of getting a child’s story on paper so that the educator can reflect on it and see form and sense-making that were not apparent in the fast pace oral conversation. (McCabe, 1997, p. 465-466).

These suggestions essentially call for teachers to become more culturally sensitive, responsive, and aware. They also require that teachers accept and validate the meanings that students create on their own. This notion aligns with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that I have chosen for my research because it privileges student-driven creation of cultural understanding with the teacher acting as a collaborator who facilitates, mediates, and guides this construction.
2.2 Moving Beyond Theory and Looking at Best Practices: The Success of Storytelling in Real Educational Contexts

Baldasaro, Baltes, and Maldonado assert that oral storytelling is an interactive process whereby students attain language skills and improve their ability to retain content (2014, p. 219, 223). This in turn facilitates their ability to gain cultural understanding and awareness (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 219). “Storytelling to teach cultural awareness: the right story at the right time” is a qualitative study that was conducted by Mary McCullum Baldasaro, Beate Baltes, and Nancy Maldonado in 2014. The research problem that Baldasaro et al. address in their study is that non-Aboriginal people are not being exposed to stories about marginalized groups in Canada, specifically Aboriginal peoples, as much as they should be (2014, p. 229). These “suppressed” stories need to be disseminated widely in order for healing to occur “between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures in Canada” (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 229).

The lead researcher and a trained team of Ontario students led the Blanket Exercise, while students ranging from grades four to eight took part in storytelling sessions (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 221). The Blanket Exercise tells the story of Canada’s Indigenous peoples losing their land to European colonizers and settlers (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 221). The oral storytelling that took place taught the students about “the loss of First Nations lands through a series of historical events and treaties” (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 222).

The majority of the student participants assumed the role of the “original inhabitants” while a few of the student participants helped tell the story alongside the narrator by assuming the role of the Europeans (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 222). Throughout the oral storytelling, “descriptive statements and proclamations outlining historical events and decisions that resulted
in the loss of land [were] read by the Europeans” (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 222). To represent the Aboriginal point of view throughout the storytelling, a few of the student participants were provided with statements to read out loud which were meant to convey the perspectives of Indigenous peoples (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 222). The progressive loss of land meant that the student participants who had assumed the role of the Indigenous peoples were “relocated” to other lands which was symbolically depicted by the “Europeans removing or folding blankets” that had been laid on the floor to represent Turtle Island/North America (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 222). By the conclusion of the storytelling experience, the population of Indigenous peoples was greatly diminished and the few towels that remained intact or were partially folded were meant to represent the reserves (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 223).

The evidence that Baldasaro et al. use to support their claims is primarily derived from the participant interviews and focus groups that they conducted after the oral storytelling exercise took place (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 219). The researchers discovered that the majority of students “were shocked at the loss of land and to learn that many Aboriginals died of disease” (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 223). While the students were not conscious they were co-creating meaning and knowledge, they were still able to articulate that they felt empowered by this collaborative learning process. One student exclaimed: “I would describe the Blanket Exercise to someone who missed it and say it was a great and empowering (sic) touching experience and we should be grateful. They sent the kids to school [residential] and they could not speak their family’s language and they took it away” (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 223). Under Wells’ model, this would be an example of the students having reached the type of “understanding” which provides students with a new framework to “interpret” and make sense of any new experiences (1999, p. 85).
The other written responses that the researchers include in their study all reveal that the students were deeply moved by the Blanket Exercise and that it caused them to experience a moment of introspection and enlightenment. As Wells points out in his socio-cultural model, experiences are the first step in knowledge construction (1999, p. 85). The Blanket storytelling exercise also fulfilled the second step in Wells’ model because the students’ personal experience participating in the storytelling process provided them with information from both the European and Aboriginal perspective. Once their experience was informed by knowledge, the students arrived at a sense of understanding through their own ability to construct meaning.

Furthermore, Baldasaro et al. emphasize that the experience was also beneficial for the team of student leaders who helped the lead researcher facilitate the story. Baldasaro et al. reveal: “As a result of their work with the narrative, they have developed a deeper understanding of the content and its implications and some of the students have demonstrated a keen interest in continuing to learn about Aboriginal history” (2014, p. 224). It is apparent that the students learned to think analytically about important issues in Canadian history because they recognized the need to pursue further learning. By demonstrating initiative and taking ownership of their learning, it is evident that oral storytelling has the “transformative” power that results from collaborative knowledge building (Wells, 1999, p. 76).

Additionally, the researchers also emphasize that oral storytelling is a beneficial learning tool because it helps students improve their ability to retain content/knowledge. Baldasaro et al. contend that the emotions that storytelling can evoke in an individual allow one to remember the experience (2014, p.224-225, 220). The researchers assert: “We remember better when the story is an oral story, a story told by heart, because our brains have to work hard to make sense of the
words and create the images. We remember best if the story touches our emotions, because emotional memory runs deep” (Baldasaro et al. 2014, p. 220). Evidently, the researchers are quite confident in their belief that storytelling leaves a lasting impression and imprint on an individual’s mind.

Although the story told in the Blanket Exercise speaks of Aboriginal people enduring and surviving the tragic loss of their land, Baldasaro et al. underscore that storytelling provides an opportunity for “restorying” to take place (Baldasaro et al., 2014, p. 227). I interpret this to signify that both the teller and the listeners can arrive at new meaning or knowledge. While the past cannot be changed, ways of thinking and approaching the study of Aboriginal history and culture certainly can.

The research findings that Baldasaro, Baltes, and Maldonado have presented in this article contribute to the body of research on oral storytelling because they highlight that storytelling for cultural understanding can be implemented effectively in an educational setting. Furthermore, Baldasaro et al. aspire for the Blanket Exercise to be used “as an introduction to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit content for the new (2013) Ontario Social Studies/History and Geography curriculum” (Baldasaro et al., 2014, pg. 221). Piquemal would likely applaud this aspiration since she stresses the importance of incorporating Aboriginal approaches to oral storytelling into school curricula (2003, p. 121).

Just as Baldasaro et al. put forth the claim that oral storytelling fosters the development of certain learning skills which in turn allows students to create their own meanings and understanding of culture, Sarris makes a similar assertion in his article, “Storytelling in the class: Crossing vexed chasms” (1990). Sarris primarily argues that storytelling has the ability to
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“empower and engage culturally diverse students while providing, in turn, a context for strong sense critical thinking for all of us, students and teachers alike” (1990, p. 184). By virtue of creating a space for critical thinking, Sarris argues that students will come to understand “the nature of our shared reality” (1990, p. 184). Sarris’ argument can be interpreted using the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that I have employed in my research study. The holistic nature of storytelling essentially allows teachers to co-create knowledge with their students. Oral storytelling provides the platform whereby both the teacher and student acknowledge that they coexist in a shared world.

Although the research that Sarris conducted was with post-secondary students, his research findings are still pivotal in understanding how storytelling can be used in the classroom because elementary and secondary students (especially at the senior level) are also capable of engaging in critical thinking (Sarris, 1990, p. 169)

Sarris approaches his qualitative study through the use of narrative research. He contends that his stories are “models of, not necessarily models for, using storytelling to foster critical discourse” (Sarris, 1990, p. 184). Sarris’ research problem is concerned with the challenge that “culturally diverse students” must face when they encounter a discord between the learning that occurs in the classroom and their lived experiences (1990, p. 173). Sarris uses the term “chasm” to refer to the dichotomy between home life and the classroom which “the culturally diverse student is forced to negotiate” if they are to succeed in school (1990, p. 173). According to Sarris, “too often students become disaffected, unable to deal with the conflicts; or they successfully learn to operate from one side of the chasm, repressing their life experiences as it may interfere with what is happening in the classroom” (1990, p. 173). For Sarris, the latter
situation is problematic because these “students accept the words and ideas of texts and professors as authoritative and tend to see their lives in terms of the texts, never considering the possibilities of seeing the texts in terms of their lives” (1990, p. 173).

Sarris primarily argues that storytelling provides the vehicle to draw upon lived experiences to engage in “critical discourse” (1990, p. 171). He contends that storytelling has the power of bridging the chasm because “stories become an important device individuals use to interpret” each other’s lived experiences (Sarris, 1990, p. 174). Sarris proposes a critical thinking model that can be used when using storytelling to achieve the aforementioned result. According to Sarris, critical thinking must: 1) engage the students by allowing them to draw upon personal experiences and 2) The model must allow students to critique their assumptions and misconceptions (1990, p.174) . Furthermore, he argues that teachers must challenge their students to go beyond making “subjective responses” and be able to “hold their response up for scrutiny” (Sarris, 1990, p. 174). Sarris contends that students should not shy away from being informed by cultural perspectives and diverse ways of thinking because “cultural variance is a means here and not an end. An experience is not expressed so that it might simply be validated, but so that it might inform, and be informed by, other experiences” (Sarris, 1990, p. 174).

Evidently, Sarris contribution to this research area is noteworthy because he establishes that certain criteria must exist in order for storytelling to create rich discussions and dialogue that lead to the creation of knowledge and meaning.

I will examine two narrative stories that Sarris uses as models in his research article. In these narratives, Sarris elucidates how oral storytelling was used to co-create knowledge and meaning with his students. The first anecdote is about his experience teaching a group of Cree
students from Saddle Lake Reserve in Alberta (Sarris, 1990, p. 176). The anecdote traces the students’ gradual development of critical thinking skills and the ability to understand how colonization and Western culture has affected their lives. Sarris created opportunities for his students to use storytelling as a medium to channel their critical thinking about issues that pertained to them such as alienation and discrimination. In one example that Sarris recounts, Sarris encouraged the students to draw upon personal experiences to collectively create a story that was inspired by one of the students who, as a teaching assistant, witnessed a teacher exclude a Native girl from the regular classroom activities by sending her to sit in a corner and colour pictures. Sarris’ students wove together a story that highlighted the ramifications of being discriminated by non-Indigenous people. The discourse that emerged after this storytelling experience highlights the chasm that Sarris speaks of. One student alluded to the chasm when he exclaimed: “When we hear our elders talk of tradition as the only thing we have left, take a look around and it’s true. And then the schools want us to forget that—that and the whole ugly history of what’s been done and is still being done right in the classroom” (as cited in Sarris, 1990, p. 179).

The progression of these students’ creation of knowledge follows the same steps that Wells’ outlines in his model. Sarris is conscious of the fact that the students were fundamentally transformed by this storytelling experience. He recounts that the students came to the realization that they unjustly faced inequality and racial discrimination from institutions such as schools and the government (Sarris, 1990, pg. 182) The Cree students also understood that these Euro-centric institutions had damaged their self-perceptions (Sarris, 1990, p. 182). Instead of becoming embittered by the realization that they were oppressed peoples, the knowledge they derived from storytelling allowed them to boldly articulate their opinions and arguments “from a
position of self-determined strength” (Sarris, 1990, p. 178). Moreover, Sarris’ students “found that texts—oral stories, fiction, government documents, movies, and advertisements” were “alive, filled with interpretations based on certain assumptions, and that they could actively engage with” [them] (1990, p. 180). If one interprets Sarris’ successful use of storytelling in the classroom using the conceptual and theoretical frameworks I have employed, his success can be attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, Sarris assumed his role as a storyteller in a manner that is parallel to the way that Aboriginal storytellers embody their role. As Archibald discovered through her research, the aim of the educator should be to “bring back storytelling in ways that respectfully and responsibly resonate with the cultural community of students” (2008, p. 131). This is precisely what Sarris strove to do with his Cree students. Secondly, Sarris’ success resulted from the fact that he insisted on encouraging his students to go beyond the mere presentation of their opinions. According to Wells and Bereiter, for discourse to be meaningful and “progressive”, students must “share, question, and revise” their opinions in order to build knowledge that results in a “‘new understanding that everyone agrees is superior to their own previous understanding’ ” (as cited in Wells, 1999, p. 112).

Sarris also applied oral storytelling as an approach to garner fruitful discussions in a culturally diverse classroom that he taught. However, he divulges that collaborative storytelling was fraught with difficulty because the students could not create a story about a culture that was not their own (Sarris, 1990, p. 181). This reveals the very problem that I would argue teachers have the responsibility of remedying. McCabe’s solution to this problem is that students must be made to feel comfortable in their knowledge of different cultures by constantly exposing them to cultural stories (1997, p. 464).
Although Sarris discovered that collaborative storytelling among culturally diverse students was challenging, storytelling still led his students to create new knowledge and gain cross-cultural awareness (Sarris, 1990, p. 180-182). When the students told their stories individually, Sarris notes that the students found common ground in that they all experienced the “chasm” between school and home life due to their need to navigate between both worlds (1990, p. 181). The stories told by these students revealed that they had a tendency of trying to disassociate themselves from their culture while at school. Sarris underscores the sense of solidarity and commonality that can be fostered among students when storytelling is used as a learning tool: “By bridging the chasm between life experiences and classroom activity and between personal anecdote and critical thinking, storytelling opened the way for both classes to explore critically the intercultural dynamic that constitutes our shared reality” (1990, p. 182). Koenig and Zorn (2002) advance this premise further by asserting that storytelling facilitates the creation of “caring communities” (p. 394).

Koenig and Zorn contend that storytelling “develops relationships and provides a connectedness with one’s inner self and others, empowering and strengthening one’s beliefs and knowledge” (p. 394). For Koenig and Zorn, storytelling is vital because they believe that “culturally and ethnically diverse students must be empowered to share their upbringing, and adapt to the educational system in ways that will facilitate their success”. Koenig and Zorn’s understanding that storytelling can provide culturally diverse students with an outlet to express themselves parallels Sarris’ belief that storytelling bridges the “chasm” between the cultural discourses they learn at home and the dominant discourses they may encounter in school. This is particularly evident when Koenig and Zorn contend that culturally diverse students “must be
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able to obtain the necessary knowledge to succeed in an ever-changing environment, while retaining a sense of cultural identity” (p. 379).

As Sarris has effectively established, storytelling lends itself to the cultivation of critical thinking skills. The meaning that his students created helped them come to an understanding of their culture and facilitated their understanding of other cultures by recognizing that many cultures, especially those that have been marginalized in North America, share the common experience of belonging to a culture that is unfortunately not celebrated or valued on the same level that Western culture is (Sarris, 1990, p. 181-182). Al-Jafar and Buzzelli also explore how storytelling can help establish common ground amongst students of different cultures.

2.3 Storytelling as an Interactive Experience that Promotes a Dialogical Discourse

In their qualitative research study, Al-Jafar and Buzzelli presented children with a Western version of Cinderella and a Kuwaiti version of the same fairy-tale to demonstrate both the similarities and differences between cultures (2004, p. 40-41). Al-Jafar conducted the study with student participants in grades one and two who attended a rural elementary school located in America’s Mid-West. (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004, p. 40).

The researchers primarily advance the argument that “fairy tales from several cultures can be used to engage children in a dialogic narrative in early childhood classrooms” (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004, p. 43). Evidently, Al-Jafar and Buzzelli’s research study aligns with the two frameworks that I am using in my research because they acknowledge the dialogic relationship that is inherently part of oral storytelling. The researchers devote an extensive portion of their
research article to discussing the nature of storytelling and how it is conducive to creative thinking, critical thinking, and collaborative discussions.

Al-Jafar and Buzzelli argue that fairy tales in particular “promote cultural understanding because they address universal themes encountered by many cultures” (2004, p. 37). The researchers reason that the act of listening to fairy tales allows students to “become a source for generating new meanings from the narratives they hear and in doing so develop new ways of understanding cultures” (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004, p. 37). Indeed, as Archibald has made quite clear, according to Aboriginal conceptions of storytelling, storytelling is never intended to recreate a static, universal, or singular meaning (2008, p. 77). Rather, oral storytelling is about acknowledging that multiple meanings can arise as a result of this process.

Influenced by Bahktin, Al-Jafar and Buzzelli contend that students are able to “enter into the dialogical narrative as author and audience” when the “teller shares the source with the child” and the child proceeds to create new meaning depending upon their interpretation of the story (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004, p.39). Furthermore, the researchers contend that storytelling invites the free flow of discussion and inquiries (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004, p. 38).

Additionally, the researchers highlight the importance of the role that imagery and metaphor play in storytelling. According to Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, “when the narrator tells a story in the language of imagery, children pursue the events in the story that are connected with their everyday lives. This allows children to convey experiences of the past that the storyteller has just handed to them into a possible future” (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004, p. 39). As I examined earlier in my literature review, part of Wells’ interpretation of socio-cultural learning theory is founded on the premise that students must feel that they have a personal stake in their
learning (1999, pg. 91). This signals the need for teachers to ensure they provide students with opportunities to draw connections between their lived experiences and the stories being told within the classroom. By doing so, students will value the learning process and attribute meaning to the knowledge they gain about different cultures in the classroom.

Although Al-Jafar and Buzzelli effectively contextualize the significance of storytelling and draw upon a rich amount of secondary sources (2004, p. 43-44), the researchers’ discussion of their qualitative findings is limited because they hurriedly discuss the students’ versions of Cinderella that Al-Jafar had asked them to create in groups (Al-Jafar and Buzzelli, 2004, p. 41-42). Nevertheless, Al-Jafar and Buzzelli provide the compelling argument that oral storytelling is a “dialectal narrative” which enables students to fruitfully learn about cultural diversity (2004, p. 42). As far as Al-Jafar and Buzzelli are concerned, “fairy tales enable children to explore other cultures through direct engagement with some of the underlying values, images, and stories of the cultures” (2004, p. 42).

Ultimately, Al-Jafar and Buzzelli view storytelling as an efficacious pedagogical approach because it provides students with freedom to “use their own oral traditions to interpret and understand the oral traditions of another country” (2004, p. 42). Oral storytelling provides new opportunities to expand North American thought. As a pedagogical tool, oral storytelling is a departure from the traditional classroom in which the teacher dictates the way students must interpret a text or story and invites students to co-create knowledge. Nonetheless, for teachers to adopt oral storytelling as a pedagogical approach, the literature suggests they must be mindful of using certain techniques and strategies.
2.4 Storytelling Training

Robin D. Groce also provides qualitative research findings which illustrate that storytelling can be purposefully applied in actual classrooms. In her article, “An experiential study of elementary teachers with the storytelling process: Interdisciplinary benefits associated with teacher training and classroom integration”, Groce advances the argument that storytelling is a fluid teaching tool than can be incorporated easily into any subject area or discipline (2004, p. 122). As such, her main concern throughout the article was to highlight the interdisciplinary benefits of storytelling that she observed when she conducted her research observations in elementary school classrooms. While two of Groce’s research participants mention using storytelling to help students gain cultural and cross-cultural understandings (2004, p. 125, 126), Groce does not assess the significance of using storytelling for this purpose.

Summarizing her findings, Groce contends that “storytelling was found to be a valuable tool for motivating students to listen and engage in content areas lessons, improve reading skills in the content area, and as a springboard for beginning units and skills development” (2004, p. 122). As such, it is evident that Groce’s research is not directly relevant to my central research question. Nevertheless, Groce’s study still enriches my understanding of my research question because it signals a need for teachers to develop a certain methodology if they are to implement storytelling as a pedagogical approach in their classrooms. When Groce claims that the main purpose of her research was to “learn more about how teachers implement storytelling in their practice” and “how a storytelling in-service might influence their current teaching practices” (Groce, 2004, p. 122-123), she is alluding to the fact that oral storytelling cannot be casually or superficially incorporated in classrooms. Rather, Groce signals that teachers can greatly benefit
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from oral storytelling training because purposeful storytelling is not an ability that it innate to all individuals. However, it can be learned or perfected. Indeed, Baldasaro et al. contend that storytellers must have a certain level of proficiency:

A storyteller has the responsibility to tell the right stories at the right time and the right place. This requires that the storyteller have a significant repertoire of stories, and presumably many of the key stories of culture, or at least stories with universal themes. It also requires the storyteller to be proficient in the telling so that the stories have the necessary impact. (2014, p. 225-226)

The storytelling in-service that Groce conducted as part of her research study was designed to acquaint teachers with “the nature of storytelling” and how it could be effectively infused into their pedagogy (Groce, 2004, p. 123). The in-service mainly required the teachers to engage in storytelling by “sharing family stories as well as telling traditional tales without reading them from a book” (Groce, 2004, p. 123). The in-service was not just about using lived experiences to develop a storytelling capacity, but also about challenging teachers to use their own creativity to retell traditional tales. Storytelling training is an area that my research study seeks to address and examine in greater detail. To truly reap the rewards of storytelling and help students attain cross-cultural understandings, the literature suggests that teachers must be trained to acquire the skills needed to deliver stories effectively and to facilitate the sharing of stories amongst their students.

2.5 Conclusion

I conclude by stating that a review of the literature has allowed me to comprehend that oral storytelling is an enriching experience. Oral storytelling enables both teachers and students
to experience a holistic moment of interconnectedness which is conducive to the co-creation of meaning to arrive at cultural and cross-cultural understandings. My qualitative research interviews serve to uncover both the benefits and challenges of incorporating oral storytelling to help students acquire cross-cultural understanding. In understanding the challenges that arise during the storytelling process, it will create new avenues for further research to address those challenges.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

This chapter elucidates the research methodology that I will employ for my qualitative research study. I will present my research approach, procedures, and data collection tools before presenting my sampling criteria, and delving into a description of my research participants. This will be followed by a discussion about my data analysis methodology and the ethical considerations that are germane to my study. While I will identify methodological limitations, I will also highlight the strengths of my research methodology. I will conclude the chapter by providing the rationale behind my methodological decisions in light of my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

I conducted this research study by adopting a qualitative research approach. I primarily rely on a literature review and semi-structured interviews with two research participants (teachers) to inform my study. One of the benefits of using a qualitative research approach is that it provides an opportunity for research participants to exert agency in the study. Creswell alludes to this notion when he contends that “we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants” (2013, p.48). It is important to acknowledge the value that my research participants can impart on my research because I am a teacher candidate who must continue to grow and improve in my practice. However, my findings are not solely for personal gain. Rather, I will share the insight gained with my fellow colleagues and the educational community at large. The data I have collected about best practices...
and resources serves to enrich our understanding of how storytelling can be introduced into secondary classrooms.

Aside from providing a deeper understanding of a topic, qualitative research studies may serve to “fill a void in existing literature” and “establish a new line of thinking” (Creswell, 2013, p. 133). These two aims are pertinent to my qualitative research study because minimal research has been devoted to the use of oral storytelling in secondary classrooms. As such, gaining an understanding of how oral storytelling can be effectively implemented as a pedagogical and learning tool in secondary classrooms may prompt teachers to consider using oral storytelling to foster cultural inclusivity in their classrooms.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

My principal instrument of data collection for my qualitative research study is my interview protocol. When designing the interview protocol, I ensured that it aligned with the aim of the qualitative research interview which is “to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for interviewees” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). As such, my interview protocol invited my research participants to draw upon their teaching experiences to inform my research study.

Although qualitative research interviewing must adhere to certain rules, the value of qualitative research interviews lies in the researcher’s ability to use their discretion to decide which interviewing techniques will elicit rich responses from the research participant (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 87). Consequently, Rubin and Rubin describe qualitative interviewing as
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“both an art and a science” because “techniques are modified to reflect the individual style of the artist” (2012, p. 15).

Because I crafted my interview questions as a semi-structured interview protocol, it signifies that I created a “set of predetermined open-ended questions”, yet exercised a fair degree of flexibility during the actual interviews when I believed that probe questions were needed to elicit more detailed answers (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). For Kvale and Brinkmann, the knowledge that is to be gained from a qualitative research interview is “understood as buried metal and the interviewer is a miner who unearths the valuable metal” (2009, p. 48). As a result, it is the responsibility of the interviewer to “dig nuggets of knowledge out of a subject’s pure experiences by not asking any leading questions” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48). During the interview process, my probe questions remained open-ended to ensure that my participants determined the course of their responses.

3.3 Participants

Herein I will identify the criteria used when selecting my research participants, discuss the sampling procedures I used when recruiting participants, and provide brief biographies of my research participants.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Research participant should be a secondary school educator (or intermediate/senior educator: grades 7-12).

When composing my literature review on the use of oral storytelling to teach cross-cultural understanding, I predominantly encountered studies that focused on the use of
this learning tool in elementary classrooms. As such, there is a gap in the literature that needs to be addressed by my qualitative research study.

**Research participant routinely employs oral storytelling as a pedagogical and learning tool in his/her classroom(s).**

This criterion ensures that my research study will allow me to harness a breadth of data to well inform and further my understanding of oral storytelling as a pedagogical and learning tool. Teachers who use oral storytelling on a routine basis are able to draw on multiple experiences, resources, and knowledge to provide my qualitative research study with invaluable insight.

**Research participant ideally has a minimum of 3-5 years of teaching experience.**

Participants who have been teaching for a minimum of 3-5 years are better able to attest if the use of oral storytelling has been successful across different educational settings.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

As a qualitative researcher, I had the option of using either purposeful or convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling refers to the act of selecting potential participants and sites “because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem or central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 156). I opted to use convenience sampling because it entailed the “selection of the most accessible subjects” (Marshall, 1996, p.523). Given that I had a limited time frame to conduct my research interviews and that I had access to a community of educators by virtue of being a teacher candidate in the Master of Teaching program, convenience sampling was the most suitable type of sampling for me to recruit research
participants. Nevertheless, my sampling criteria ensured that the participants I selected for my research study were those who possess a certain degree of expertise in the area I am researching.

My main recruitment strategy was to contact a professional storyteller who has worked with teachers. This strategy was suggested to me by one of my Faculty Advisors when we were discussing possible ways to locate research participants that were suitable for my research study. When contacting the professional storyteller, I provided this individual with an overview of my research study and asked if she knew any teachers who would be suitable participants in light of my sampling criteria. Because I was unable to recruit secondary school teachers using this recruitment method, I contacted an acquaintance who referred a secondary school teacher as a potential participant. In addition to this secondary school teacher, I was also able to recruit an experienced colleague of mine to participate in my research study.

I was transparent about the purpose of my research study when recruiting research participants to ensure that my recruitment process was ethical. Creswell advises that qualitative researchers need to “convey to participants that they are participating in a study, explain the purpose of the study, and do not engage in deception about the nature of the study” (2013, p. 174). When making initial contact with my potential research participants, I introduced myself to establish basic rapport, and provided them with an overview of my research study in order for them to understand the purpose and significance of my study.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

**Zara:** Zara has 3 years of teaching experience as a classroom teacher in Ontario. Zara has taught grade 5 students in a French immersion program and is currently teaching a variety of subjects to her split grade 7/8 class.
**Elena:** Elena is an educator who has been teaching youth (intermediate/senior level students) in Ontario in a variety of different educational settings for the past six years. Elena is an experienced oral storyteller and has been primarily teaching history in Ontario secondary school classrooms (grades 9-12) for over a year.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Following my data collection, I conducted a data analysis to derive meaning and extract knowledge from my participants’ responses. Once the research interviews were transcribed and organized into computer files, I conducted a preliminary reading of the interview transcripts by highlighting the sections that were most relevant to my research question and addressed my sub-questions. Creswell discusses the importance of making annotations or “memos” in the margins when conducting a preliminary reading of the data (2013, p. 183). As such, I jotted down key words and phrases that facilitated ability to create codes. This process enabled me to get a holistic account of the interviews before I looked at the data in greater detail (Creswell, 2013, p. 183).

I categorized data according to codes while I discarded information that was irrelevant and/or did not fit under any of the codes (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). While the creation of categories is described as an intuitive process, the purpose of my study, “and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” guided the type of categories I created (Merriam, 1998, 179). When assigning labels to my codes, I took into consideration Merriam’s (1998) suggestion that labels can be informed by “the researcher, the participants, or sources outside the study such as the literature” (p. 182). After conducting a preliminary round of coding for both interviews, I carried out Auerbach and Silverstein’s (2003) recommendation to use my central research...
question and the purpose of my study as guiding tools to streamline the coding process (as cited in Saldana, 2008, p. 18). This resulted in the creation of sixteen codes.

Following the coding process, I classified the data by identifying major themes. In qualitative research, themes are defined as “broad units of information that consist of several codes” which are combined to create a common idea (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). Some of the most salient types of information that I sought to analyze were instances where my research participants echoed ideas and themes that are present in the existing literature as well as divergences and new ideas that emerged that are not found in the literature. The final themes that emerged are: Student engagement, student agency, oral storytelling as an equitable and inclusive teaching practice, community building, and storytelling methodology.

Data analysis is a complex process which required me to “move back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, [and] between description and interpretation” in order to arrive at insights and findings (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). By following this process, I am able to discuss the significance of my findings in light of the existing literature on the use of oral storytelling to teach students about cross-cultural understanding. I do not view interviews as sources of data that are solely meant to be analysed. Rather, I regard the interviews as stories that provide a window into the teaching practice of my two research participants. As such, I conceive of my role as a researcher as an interpreter of meaning, not a conveyor of absolute truth or knowledge.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

It is integral to adhere to certain ethical review procedures to ensure that my research study is ethically sound. To protect my research participants’ anonymity, I assigned them
pseudonyms and used these to refer to my research participants throughout my study. To further protect the confidentiality of my research participants, my research paper does not include any information that may reveal my research participants’ identities. As such, my research participants spoke freely without the possibility of being admonished by any institution for expressing their views or opinions.

Additionally, my research participants were informed about the nature and purpose of my study. Kvale and Brinkmann underscore the importance of informing research participants about the consequences of participating in the research study (2009, p.73). According to Kvale and Brinkmann, qualitative research studies should uphold the ethical principle of *beneficence* which signifies that the risk of harm should be as minimal as possible (2009, p. 73). As far as I was concerned, there were minimal risks associated with participation in my research study. The only risk I anticipated was that question eleven and twelve of my interview protocol (See Appendix B) could have potentially elicited an emotional response from my research participants if they happened to reveal that they integrate oral storytelling into their classroom because they or their students are/have been subject to discrimination and oral storytelling is/was used to mitigate this experience. I curtailed this possible risk by informing my research participants that they were entitled to refrain from responding to questions that they did not feel comfortable responding to and were free to withdraw from my research study at any moment. My research participants were informed of this option in the consent form and during the interview process as well.

As a qualitative researcher, it was important for me to convey that participation in my research study was strictly voluntary. I designed the informed consent form to obtain the voluntary participation of my research participants, address the ethical implications of my study,
provide potential participants with an overview of my research study, and inform them that their participation would be in the form of a 45-60 minute semi-structured interview that would be recorded. As such, I also informed my research participants that agreeing to sign the consent letter signified that they were giving their consent to be audio-recorded throughout the entire interview. Lastly, I informed my research participants that the audio-recordings as well as the transcribed versions of the interviews have been safely stored in my password protected laptop and will be destroyed after five years. Ultimately, it was my duty to ensure that I adhered to all of these ethical considerations because my research participants have a right to have their privacy and well-being protected.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

In light of the Master of Teaching Research Project’s ethical boundaries, I did not collect data from classroom observations, surveys, or interview with parents and/or students. Rather, my research study was limited to the collection of data from the two research interviews I conducted with teachers. As such, my findings are not be able to provide a widespread understanding of how oral storytelling is used to teach students about cultural and cross-cultural understanding. I designed my interview protocol to elicit information about students’ reactions and responses to oral storytelling to ensure that I did not get a singular perspective of this learning tool being implemented in a classroom. While my research would have benefitted from the voices of students themselves, I have used the data I collected from the teachers to make inferences about students’ experiences.

In contrast to a survey which only allows research participants to select pre-determined answers, my research interviews can be highlighted as the methodological strength of my
research study because open-ended questions invite participants to speak more freely and to select which information they choose to share and which they choose to withhold. As a qualitative researcher, I am “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed” and “how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in their world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). While the data I collected serves to help me understand the meaning my participants have constructed, the interview process also provided my participants with the opportunity to actively think about their teaching practice and make sense of their pedagogical decisions and strategies.

3.7 Conclusion: Brief Overview and Preview of what is next

I began this chapter by discussing the suitability of using a qualitative research approach for my research study given that I want to understand the meaning and significance of using oral storytelling as an approach to teach students about their cultures and, by extension, cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. I then elaborated on the efficacy of qualitative research interviews as a tool for data collection. This was followed by a list of my sampling criteria which included rationales to justify the criteria I selected to recruit research participants. I briefly discussed the sampling strategies I used to increase my chances of recruiting participants that met my sampling criteria. I then proceeded to describe the stages of data analysis that I used to ensure that I could present sound, useful, and informative findings. The section dedicated to a discussion of my ethical review procedures primarily established my necessity to be transparent with my research participants to warrant that their confidentiality would be protected, they would be fully informed about all ethical considerations pertinent to my research study, and to ensure that their participation was voluntary. While I acknowledged the limitations of my research study, I also
highlighted the effectiveness of using research interviews to garner an understanding of how teachers and students use oral storytelling classrooms to enrich their understanding of different cultures. The following chapter will focus on reporting my research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

The findings I uncovered from the research interviews will not only help illuminate my understanding of how I can use oral storytelling to help students attain cultural and cross-cultural understandings, but equally serves to enlighten other educators who seek to purposefully infuse oral storytelling into their teaching practice. As I have established in my research methodology chapter, I view the research interviews as stories that are open to interpretation and not as data that reveal objective truths. I will primarily draw upon oral storytelling as a conceptual framework, Gordon Wells’ interpretation of socio-cultural learning theory as a theoretical framework, and the existing literature on oral storytelling to make sense of the research findings.

The findings trace the stories of two educators who offer a wealth of knowledge and insight into their teaching practice to elucidate how oral storytelling can be used to achieve cultural and cross-cultural understandings amongst students. It is worth noting that Zara and Elena offer very distinct insights into the use of oral storytelling as a pedagogical approach. Zara implicitly uses oral storytelling by occasionally weaving it into her lessons and providing a space for stories to be shared in her classrooms, whereas Elena is well versed in oral storytelling and intentionally incorporates it into her pedagogy.

This chapter is organized into five main themes that will be thoroughly explored. The findings indicate that oral storytelling actively engages students. Student engagement is essential in laying the foundation for students to develop an understanding of the knowledge they gain during the storytelling process. Zara and Elena’s responses also exemplify that oral storytelling fosters student agency, helps cultivate an inclusive and equitable classroom, and provides an opportunity for community building within the classroom. I will conclude the chapter by
discussing Zara and Elena’s recommendation that educators receive oral storytelling training if they are to gain a thorough understanding of how oral storytelling can be purposefully used in classrooms.

4.1 Student Engagement

I will be referring to student engagement as the act whereby students actively engage with oral storytelling by inquiring into the knowledge they are co-creating with teachers. Elena theorizes that the novelty of storytelling is a contributing factor that causes students to be actively engaged during the oral storytelling process. Although the act of storytelling is not a new phenomenon, she rightfully draws attention to the fact that storytelling is not typically used as a pedagogical approach in Ontario classrooms. Elena is echoing the sentiments of other researchers who have contributed to the research on oral storytelling such as Davis who notes that Western educators have a tendency of viewing storytelling as a form of entertainment and not a learning tool (2014, p. 84). As I examined in my literature review, this belief stems from the commonly held perception in the West that oral tradition is not a legitimate form of conveying and disseminating knowledge (McCabe, 1997, p. 453).

Elena believes that students “become curious and… inquisitive” when oral storytelling is introduced as a learning tool because they are not accustomed to learning content in this manner. While there may be some truth to this, Elena and Zara’s interview responses illustrate that students are highly engaged due to factors that are beyond them merely regarding it as a novel way to learn.
Why is oral storytelling conducive to student engagement?

Reflecting on her teaching practice, Zara asserts that students are more engaged when she has used oral storytelling to deliver a lesson than when she had conducted a lesson in a lecture format. Zara supports her claim by explaining that her students’ facial expressions and body language indicate that they are attentive to the story being told and that they are actively creating mental images in their minds to visualize the story. In particular, Zara has observed that her students appear to be transfixed when she has told stories because they have made and sustained eye contact with her. Additionally, Zara posits that her students’ gapping mouths indicate that they are focused on her story. To truly derive meaning from the oral storytelling process, First Nation elders elucidate that the listener should actively use their senses, emotions, and their minds to engage with the story being told (Archibald, 2008, p. 76). As such, attentiveness and active listening are necessary precursors that enable students to critically engage with stories. Yet, sustained and active listening alone do not suffice to qualify as student engagement.

Zara contends that storytelling is a medium that easily captures student interest because the storytelling form invites students to find relevance in the story being told. Indeed, Wells contends that students make sense of new knowledge by using their existing understanding of the world which is informed by their lived experiences (1999, p. 84).

While I concur with Zara that attentiveness is a form of engagement, Elena’s conception of engagement is more in alignment with the definition of student engagement that I have established. Beyond making connections to the story being told, students demonstrate engagement when they are actively inquiring into the new knowledge being imparted on them. According to Elena’s responses, students are actively engaged in the oral storytelling process
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when they listen to a story that draws upon lived experiences. Elena asserts that “the power of the individual story” is able to engage students in a way that cannot be replicated when they are simply learning from a textbook. Elena spoke at length about using her family history and lived experiences to inform her history students’ understanding of colonization’s impact on First Nations cultures and way of life. Elena consciously delivered her personal story as a means of counteracting the grand narratives that Canadian students are often exposed to.

As discussed in my literature review, Sarris contends that it is vital for North American educators to use oral storytelling to “bridge the chasm” or divide between the cultural teachings and values that culturally diverse students learn at home and the dominant discourses that are often perpetuated in classrooms (1990, p. 174). Sarris suggests that storytelling should be used as a learning tool that allows students to interpret and analyze their lived experiences and the experiences of others in order to reach a point of “critical discourse” (1990, p. 171). By intentionally helping students relearn history through a First Nations’ lens, Elena effectively challenges her students’ preconceived notions about Canadian history and ideas surrounding First Nation cultures.

Upon telling the story of how her family was personally affected by the residential schools system in Canada, Elena recounts that her students experienced a moment of “disbelief”. Elena explains that her grade 10 history students were unaware that residential schools had even existed, nor did they have prior knowledge of the atrocities committed against the Aboriginal children who were forcibly taken away from their homes and obligated to attend residential schools. Elena discloses that her students were initially disoriented when acquiring this newfound knowledge and reasons that they were a “bit shocked” when she taught them “this
dark chapter of Canadian history” because they had a misconception of Canada as a nation of equality.

Elena’s oral story was met with an influx of questions from her students. According to the literature, this is not an uncommon student reaction. Al-Jafar and Buzzelli assert that oral storytelling engages students in a free flow of discussion and inquiries (2004, p. 38), while Baldasaro et al. also note that the students who participated in the Blanket Exercise expressed a desire to seek out more knowledge about Aboriginal history (2014, p. 224).

Elena’s students raised a series of questions to make sense of the new knowledge they had received. Elena reveals that her students began questioning why Aboriginal people were and continue to be treated unequally when they have been taught the grand narrative of Canada being a nation of “equality”. Elena underscores that her students demonstrated a keen desire to understand the rationales behind why the Canadian government, the federal authorities, and the other institutions involved in the residential school system allowed Aboriginal children to be subjected to different forms of abuse, be denied access to quality education, and to be taken far from their homes to live in atrocious conditions.

Reflecting on her practice, Elena notes that her students were “a lot more inquisitive” about inquiring into this chapter of Canadian history by hearing her recount her family history and lived experiences. Elena consciously makes note of her students’ inclination to interpret Canadian history through her lens:

…I taught them so much about Canadian history and the horrors of Canadian history and the questions I got were still about: ‘Can you tell me more about what happened to your grandmother, or can you tell me more about what it’s like to be you?’ So it was
interesting that their questions were not anchored in the content that was being delivered that they would likely have been tested on or having to write an assignment but they wanted to know more about what I had shared with them about myself as an individual.

Reflecting on this statement, Elena surmises that her students’ high level of engagement was likely due to the “power of the individual story”. Evidently, personal stories yield student inquiries in a way that allows them to attain new understandings in collaboration with their teacher. Wells and Bereiter contend that discourse is only purposeful when “students share, question, and revise’ their opinions in order to build knowledge that results in a ‘new understanding that everyone agrees is superior to their own previous understanding’” (as cited in Wells, 1999, p. 112). Wells and Bereiter rightly signal the need for students to not only interpret, analyze, and question the knowledge they receive from their teachers, but to be given opportunities to convey their own knowledge in relation to their teachers and their peers. As I will discuss in the following section of this chapter, oral storytelling provides an ideal platform for students to be conveyors of knowledge.

4.2 Student Agency: Students as Conveyors of Knowledge

The theoretical framework that I have employed in my research study promotes student-driven creation of knowledge. By using oral storytelling as a conceptual framework, I illuminate how Wells’ approach to socio-cultural learning theory can practically be applied in classrooms. Alongside their teachers, students can use oral storytelling to derive meaning from their lived experiences in relation to their culture. While Zara has not intentionally used oral storytelling to achieve this aim, she provides insight into students’ reactions when they are given an opportunity to share a story. According to Zara, when students have shared their own lived experiences
through storytelling, students are actively “engaged” in the telling of their story because they realize that the “whole class is listening to them”. This implies that students gain a sense of self-importance because they recognize they are at the centre of classroom learning in that moment.

Elena exposes her students to metacognitive thinking to help them explicitly and consciously arrive at the realization that they are conveyors of knowledge. Due to her expertise as an oral storyteller, it is no surprise that she is able to articulate the value of providing students with a platform to be sources of knowledge. As such, I heavily draw on Elena’s insights to inform this section of the chapter.

Wells (1999) underscores the importance of ensuring that students are given an opportunity to build their own knowledge. By constructing their own knowledge with the teacher as a facilitator or guide, students will not automatically view published information as sources of legitimate and objective truth and instead realize the subjective nature of knowledge building (Wells, 1999, p. 91). For Elena, oral storytelling is a responsive approach that meets the learning needs of culturally diverse students. Due to Elena’s experience teaching in an area of the Greater Toronto Area where there is a large newcomer population, she believes it is invaluable for newcomer students to use oral storytelling to provide their individual perspective that is informed by their cultural values and belief systems.

Elena problematizes the traditional role of the teacher as the sole authority over the knowledge that is taught within the classroom. Elena challenges educators who wrongfully assume that students “have a very limited understanding of what’s going on [in] the world around them” because her own teaching practice has taught her that students have an abundance of knowledge. Furthermore, Elena subverts the traditional roles of teacher and educator in her
teaching practice by referring to her students as “experts” and acknowledging that she is not omniscient. According to Elena, teachers should be comfortable acknowledging that students are legitimate sources of knowledge who can use their experiences and understandings to “inform” and educate their teachers. This notion aligns with Sarris’ belief that “an experience is not expressed so that it might simply be validated, but so that it might inform, and be informed by other experiences” (Sarris, 1990, p. 174).

Elena draws attention to the shift that occurs in the classroom’s power dynamics by referring to her students as “experts”. She concedes that it is a “tremendous amount of power” to provide students with. By acknowledging students as experts, Elena conveys her understanding that students and teachers can mutually teach and inform each other. Upon being referred to as experts, Elena highlights how students are usually more inclined to share their personal stories and lived experiences, even when she has not “directly invited them” to do so. Elena surmises that inviting student voice is particularly important when teaching Canadian history because it is a way of balancing out the dominant discourses that typically receive the spotlight in survey courses.

Although Elena heavily draws on her experiences to inform her students’ understanding of how colonization in Canada had a detrimental effect on First Nations cultures, she observes that when she uses the “lens of marginalization, oppression, [and] systemic racism” during the storytelling process, students readily relate to her story. In particular, Elena divulges that a few of her newcomer students draw parallels between the type of racism she describes in her stories and the racism that they have witnessed or been subjected to in in their native countries. Evidently,
oral storytelling can enable both teachers and students to discover the underlying commonalities that they share and to collaboratively make sense of their experiences.

Elena contends that when teachers explicitly teach students that storytelling is a medium through which their experiences can be “validated” and “legitimized”, it teaches students that their understandings are valuable and that their experiences are worth disseminating. According to Elena, this in turn facilitates the students’ ability to “develop a voice” and “begin to see value in their own voices…and in themselves”. Furthermore, Elena theorizes that this imbues students with the “confidence” they need to be “advocates for themselves”. Elena emphasizes that the “ultimate goal” of educators should be to empower students to be agents of change and active participants in society. For Elena, engaging in oral storytelling provides the ideal platform for students to develop the oral skills and confidence to accomplish this endeavour.

According to McCabe, North American educators who are only familiar with Western storytelling forms such as the conflict-crisis-resolution model may have a propensity to regard non-Eurocentric storytelling forms as incoherent and “illogical” (1997, 462). As a strong advocate for providing students with a space to share diverse storytelling forms, McCabe encourages teachers to “assume that children’s narrative productions have narrative form instead of assuming it lacks one” (1997, 465). This recommendation essentially calls for educators to embrace diverse storytelling forms as legitimate types of stories. As a First Nations student who was solely exposed to Western perspectives and ways of seeing, Elena has a firsthand understanding of why it is important for students to use their cultural lens to interpret new information and to use their cultural understandings to teach others about their culture. Because a plethora of cultures exist and it is unrealistic to expect teachers to have a thorough understanding
of all those cultures, Elena posits that students should be invited to convey their knowledge. Failure to do so can result in the teacher “putting together a tokenizing lesson” that does not represent a culture in a respectful manner. In the following section, I will explore why my research participants advocate for the inclusion of diverse storytelling forms into classroom learning.

4.3 Creating Inclusive and Equitable Classrooms via Oral Storytelling

My research participants help illuminate the importance of exposing students to diverse, non-Eurocentric oral storytelling. Through Zara and Elena’s insights, it is readily apparent that introducing students to diverse storytelling forms helps foster an inclusive and equitable classroom. In her own teaching practice, Elena is adamant about familiarizing students with the First Nations perspective to broaden the horizons of student thinking and signal that the Eurocentric narrative of Canadian history is just one interpretation among many. Once more, Elena recounts that she challenges her students to engage in metacognitive thinking about the way history is presented and told. By doing so, Elena is mitigating the ubiquity of dominant discourses in Canadian history and challenging her students to view history through multiple perspectives.

Because Elena has mainly taught newcomer students and students of racialized backgrounds, she contends that it is an “injustice” to solely present students with a Eurocentric narrative. Elena rightfully underscores that it is inequitable to exclusively teach students through a Western lens because it is denies them the opportunity to gain cultural and cross-cultural understandings. I wholly concur with Elena when she problematizes the predominance of Western ways of seeing. Elena contends: “…it’s almost like…we’re asking them [students] to
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forget who they are and where they come from in exchange for this Eurocentric narrative that we’re going to present them with”. Indeed, to deny students opportunities to engage in oral storytelling about their cultures is essentially a denial of the students themselves. For Canada to “truly [be] a nation of equity and equality”, Elena argues that a First Nations student “should be able to walk into a classroom and learn just as much about themselves and their own identity and culture” as do students from Western European backgrounds.

Although Zara does not consciously infuse oral storytelling as a pedagogical approach, she provides an example of a time when a newcomer student from Africa told a story using the oral conventions and the speaking style of her culture. Although Zara admits that she does not have extensive knowledge about African storytelling traditions, she draws on her existing understanding to explain how her student told a story that was heavily influenced by cultural norms. Zara observed how her student engaged in oral storytelling as if it were a “method” and carefully crafted the story to captivate the attention of the entire classroom. Zara describes how this student was methodical in her approach to oral storytelling by inserting several pauses and pacing herself to create suspense and generate interest in the story she was telling. Zara asserts that this student told her story “from her perspective and wasn’t really influenced so much by…Westernized thinking”. Zara contends that her students’ facial expressions were indicative that they had noticed the cultural differences in the story that the African student was telling. Zara explains that it “opened” her students’ minds and that they arrived at the realization that “there are people who think differently”.

Herein lies the opportunity for educators to build a community in their classroom and cultivate a positive classroom environment that invites students to use oral storytelling for
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cultural and cross-cultural understandings. Zara notes how oral storytelling can be an effective way to build a sense of community and create a non-judgemental space for students to learn in harmony. According to Zara, oral storytelling “gives you a perspective of another point of view so that you are more accepting…of other people”. Zara believes this is particularly necessary in intermediate grades where she has observed that some students are self-absorbed and often ask questions such as: “How does this relate to me?” and “Why is this important for me?” I will presently be discussing how my research participants elaborate on both the benefits and challenges of using oral storytelling to build a sense of community within classrooms.

4.4 “You can’t really hate a person if you know [his/her] story”: Using Oral Storytelling for Classroom Community Building

The literature supports the notion that storytelling creates a space for students to experience a moment of interconnectedness when it dawns on them that they have shared experiences despite coming from different cultural backgrounds. In particular, Baldasaro et al. argue that oral storytelling helps build bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to allow for healing to occur (2014, p. 229). Zara is “convinced” that the reason why her grade five class had a strong sense of camaraderie and were “accepting of each other” was because they had shared personal stories with each other. To support her claim, Zara makes reference to a quotation that she learned while still a pre-service teacher in a teacher education program. Reciting the quotation in verbatim, Zara exclaims: “You can’t really hate a person if you know their (sic) story”. Upon reciting this quotation, Zara reflects on her current teaching practices and realizes that the reason why “there is a lot of disagreement”, “gossiping”, and “a lot of hostility” in her split grade 7/8 is because they “do not know enough about the other person”. When I
asked Zara if she would consider intentionally incorporating oral storytelling to mitigate the tensions being bred in her classroom, she expressed a willingness to try it because she had prior success with her fifth grade students who openly spoke about their lived experiences. However, Zara is apprehensive about using oral storytelling for community building because she is uncertain that her seventh and eighth graders “would be as accepting to share” or “be comfortable enough to share their story when they feel that people in the class are judging them”.

Zara is not alone in her belief that oral storytelling cannot be imposed on a classroom of students who do not have an existing rapport with one another. While Elena firmly believes that oral storytelling “is a good opportunity to work on building a sense of community” she also concedes that teachers have to build trust amongst students and between the students before storytelling is integrated as a learning tool. As such, she advises against introducing oral storytelling at the outset of the school year. One way of ensuring that students feel at ease when sharing stories is for the teacher to model the sharing of personal stories beforehand. Elena underscores that teachers can establish rapport with their students by allowing themselves to be seen as human beings and to be vulnerable in front of their students. By allowing students to see their teachers “in a different light”, Elena argues that the students will comprehend that they are being “trusted with information…that’s deeply personal”. According to Elena, this in turn “creates a safe space” for students to feel comfortable sharing their stories.

Furthermore, Elena explains that community building can occur in the post-oral storytelling process when students have to interpret and make sense of the knowledge they have gained. By establishing the meaning making process as a collaborative endeavour, it creates a communal culture of assessment. Because Elena believes that oral storytelling yields an array of
different understandings and interpretations, she suggests that teachers explicitly invite students to ask questions. Elena recommends that both the teacher and students collaborate to find the answers. By creating a collective community that works in unison to create meaning, Elena’s pedagogical approach aligns with Wells’ socio-cultural learning theory model which purports that the teacher mediates and facilitates students’ knowledge construction, while providing them with an opportunity to arrive at their own unique understandings (1999, p. 85).

Another challenge that Elena has come across in her practice regarding the use of oral storytelling is that it can be anxiety provoking for some students. While oral storytelling certainly has the potential to create a sense of community, it can also isolate or alienate students who are not comfortable voicing their opinions, have a speech impediment, or are English Language Learners. To mitigate the pressure of orally sharing stories for students who may not be able to express themselves using this medium, Elena underscores the importance of being responsive to students’ different learning needs. As such, Elena recommends that teachers incorporate differentiated assessments by allowing them to tell stories in a format that highlights their learning strengths and styles. In particular, Elena suggests that they be given the option of using different storytelling mediums such as comic strips, journal entries and film.

4.5 Storytelling Methodology

Aside from Groce (2004) whose research study examines how storytelling training can help teachers meaningfully and purposefully infuse storytelling into their teaching practice, the literature reviewed in this study does not explore the steps that teachers and students must undergo to familiarize themselves with oral storytelling practices. My research findings help
illuminates that a methodology must be followed if oral storytelling is to truly help students arrive at cultural and cross-cultural understandings.

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, teachers must ensure that they have already cultivated trust within their classrooms before students can even be expected to divulge their lived experiences. While Elena sees the value in teacher vulnerability, Zara thinks teacher vulnerability could potentially be problematic because she fears that students will not maintain a positive conception of their teachers if they reveal the mistakes they have made. As Elena effectively articulates, herein lies the opportunity for teachers to build trust with students as opposed to weakening the teacher-student relationship. When teachers openly acknowledge their faults and stress the importance of learning from mistakes, students can be taught that no human being is immune to folly. As Archibald notes, a storyteller is responsible for using their discretion when telling stories (2008, p. 76-77). Elaborating on this notion, Baldasaro et al. emphasize that storytellers must not only have an arsenal of stories in their repertoire, but they must learn to understand which stories are appropriate to tell in relation to their audience and the context in which the story is being delivered (2014, p. 226). Because Elena advises against using oral storytelling at the commencement of the school year, this signals that teachers must acquire an understanding of when it is appropriate to introduce oral storytelling into their classrooms.

Beyond establishing the importance of building a positive classroom environment that is conducive to the sharing of stories, Elena emphasizes the need for teachers to establish the “value of stories”. This teaching practice invokes students to engage in metacognitive thinking to comprehend the benefits that storytelling yields. Following this step, Elena recommends that teachers contextualize the oral stories they share with students before and after the storytelling
process. Elena reveals that in her own teaching practice she has shared the “story of how she came to be” and roots her personal and family history by “looking at different chapters of Canadian history that are often overlooked” such as “the implementation of the reserve system, the sixties scoop…and the residential schools”. Elena is conscious that explaining the detrimental effects that colonization had on Aboriginal ways of life must be discussed in order for students to comprehend how First Nations cultures have been altered. By providing this necessary context, Elena ensures that students will not hold negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people and understand that colonization is the root cause behind many of the struggles Aboriginal people face in present-day Canadian society.

Elena underscores that it particularly critical for stories to be “situated in a broader context” when they are about sensitive topics. Using the example of teaching students about the Rwandan genocide, she notes how students can easily arrive at misguided conclusions and “toss racist sentiments and statements” if they are not provided with the proper context to understand the root cause of the genocide that took place. By informing students that colonization “created divides and created poverty and desperation”, Elena believes that students “have no excuse but to think critically about it [the genocide] and to understand it in a way where they’re not passing judgment”.

Both Zara and Elena expound that teachers need to have effective classroom management skills in order to facilitate the sharing of oral stories within the classroom. For Elena, it does not suffice for teachers to simply anticipate that some students will make insensitive comments and unsolicited remarks or that misunderstandings will arise from the storytelling process. As such,
Elena suggests it is important that teachers understand how to respond effectively to students in a way that is not punitive but instead seeks to provide them with informed understandings.

Additionally, Zara contends that effective classroom management skills are needed to ensure that teachers include the voices of all their students during oral storytelling exercises. By doing so, teachers will prevent a select few from monopolizing the discussion or being the only ones engaging in oral storytelling. For classrooms to truly be equitable and for students to gain cultural and cross-cultural understanding, all students must be invited to share their stories. Referring to her own teaching practice, Zara recalls how she provided “positive reinforcement” to a “very quiet girl” who once mustered the confidence to share a story with the entire class. This insight signals that teachers must make conscious efforts to make more reserved students feel comfortable telling stories and providing them with the necessary supports to do so.

Both Zara and Elena readily agree that teachers should ideally receive storytelling training before adopting oral storytelling as a pedagogical approach and introducing it as a learning tool for their students. In particular, Elena believes teachers should be trained to maintain a safe space during the oral storytelling process and to learn how to be mindful of their students’ mental health. Drawing upon her own teaching practice in which she often shares stories about residential schools and introduces her students to the testimonies of residential school survivors, Elena is cognizant that these “horrific and violent stories…can severely impact your [students] mental health and they become so shocked by what they’re hearing that they can’t see past that shock”.

To mitigate these types of student reactions and to ensure that students do not become emotionally overwhelmed, Elena advises that teachers provide disclaimers before oral
storytelling takes place. In her own practice, it is customary for Elena to inform her students that they have the option of leaving the room and she also encourages them to speak with her beforehand if they have certain emotional triggers so that they can work in unison to get the proper supports for the students. Ultimately, Elena does not think educators should shy away from allowing “deeply personal [stories] that touch on pain and trauma” to be shared within the classroom because these perspectives are part of the “reality of human experience”.

4.6 Conclusion

The qualitative research findings provide both theoretical and practical insight into how oral storytelling can be applied into classrooms to help students achieve cultural and cross-cultural understandings. While Zara and Elena are proponents of using oral storytelling for this purpose, they also highlight some of the drawbacks of adopting oral storytelling as a pedagogical approach. Aside from merely highlighting the challenges they experience when oral storytelling is used in their classrooms, Zara and Elena provide useful and practical advice to familiarize educators with the practices and strategies that they can employ to ensure that oral storytelling is purposeful. In chapter 5, I will proceed to discuss areas that require further research and inquiry.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In the final chapter of my research study, I draw conclusions based on the findings that were presented and examined in the previous chapter. After summarizing my research findings, I delve into an exploration of the implications that my research findings have for both the educational community at large and for my own teaching practice. Additionally, I provide recommendations for teachers who are contemplating the use of oral storytelling as a pedagogical and learning tool for their classrooms. Lastly, I conclude the chapter by indicating areas for further research and study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Among the findings that my research study yielded, my research participants elucidated that oral storytelling fosters student engagement. Oral storytelling is capable of engaging students to be inquisitive about the knowledge being disseminated. Elena in particular noted that the “power of the individual story” leads to inquiry-based learning as students pose several questions to inquire deeper into the content being shared. Students are typically drawn in by personal stories because they are more accessible and relatable in comparison to the type of information they are used to receiving from textbooks. Because textbooks are often written in the third person, they may create the impression of being far removed from students’ lives and may consequently disengage students.

When teachers and students share their cultural knowledge via oral storytelling, they are offering each other alternative perspectives that are not widely disseminated in mainstream
Canadian society. In Elena’s teaching practice, she not only offers her students a non-mainstream perspective of Canadian history, but she challenges dominant discourses surrounding her culture. In Elena’s experience, students are bewildered to learn about residential schools because it challenges their preconceived notion of Canada as a peacekeeping nation of equality. To make sense of their bewilderment and gain a deeper understanding of Elena’s family history, students are keen to question and inquire further into her perspective. Consequently, students are able to attain new cross-cultural understandings and knowledge.

As my research participants suggest, oral storytelling provides students with a platform to convey their cultural knowledge and affords them agency within the classroom. Oral storytelling can be regarded as a culturally responsive approach for culturally diverse and newcomer students. Teachers can help counteract the marginalization that culturally diverse students often face in mainstream Canadian society by allowing their voice to be heard and their cultural stories to be accepted as legitimate sources of knowledge. To achieve this aim, Elena subverts traditional teacher and student roles by explicitly acknowledging that students already have an abundance of cultural knowledge and validates their knowledge by referring to them as “experts”. In turn, Elena’s students are more predisposed to share experiences and stories through their own volition.

As I discovered from my research participants, oral storytelling creates an awareness surrounding the subjective nature of knowledge. When students conceptualize themselves as knowledge holders, they realize that their understandings and experiences are no less important than the information conveyed in books, the Internet, and the media. This in turn teaches students to not accept information at face value and to vet sources to collect reliable and credible sources.
of information when conducting research. Additionally, when students understand that they are conveyors of knowledge, they may gain a sense of self-importance. Beyond simply feeling self-important for the sake of self-efficacy, Elena theorizes that when students are given a platform to share their stories within the microcosm of the classroom they feel empowered and consequently inspired to be active participants in society.

Both research participants see the value of having diverse storytelling forms be a staple of their students’ learning. For Zara and Elena, inclusion of diverse storytelling forms is a means of counteracting the predominance of Eurocentric storytelling forms. As Elena underscores, teachers should view this as a necessity, not an option, to ensure that Ontario classrooms are inclusive and equitable. Zara posits that the more students learn about another culture, the more accepting they become of those cultures and intolerance can be ousted. Furthermore, Zara has observed that her students are more understanding of each other when they learn about the lived experiences that have shaped and influenced their peers. Evidently, oral storytelling has the potential to become a bonding experience for students.

Although my research participants are adamant in claiming that oral storytelling is useful when establishing a sense of community within their classrooms, they caution that this cannot be achieved unless a supportive and welcoming classroom climate is established beforehand. It is essential to create a non-judgmental classroom environment to ensure that oral stories can be shared openly and without fear of ridicule. Having a positive classroom environment in place not only facilitates the oral story sharing process, but also helps to cultivate a communal culture of assessment. Elena in particular emphasizes the need for teachers to invite students to ask questions after a story has been told. While each student can arrive at his/her own individual
understanding of a story, meaning making is a collective process that requires students and teachers to work in unison to contextualize stories and think critically about the knowledge being presented.

5.2 Implications

Herein I will discuss the implications that my research findings have for stakeholders within the educational community. It is my hope that my research findings not only serve to inform the educational community and my own teaching practice, but inspire educators to consider adding oral storytelling to their pedagogical repertoire.

5.2.1 Implications for the Educational Community

While it may be unnecessary to devote an entire teacher education course to oral storytelling, I do suggest that it be introduced to teacher candidates as a culturally responsive approach to incorporate into their teaching practice. For teacher candidates to truly recognize the value of using oral storytelling, they would need to be exposed to oral stories told by guest speakers and professional storytellers who use stylistic devices and lived experiences to captivate their audience and convey cultural knowledge. Additionally, teacher candidates would need to learn specific strategies and practice oral storytelling to ensure that they can deliver stories in a purposeful and effective manner. Similarly, teachers would greatly benefit from oral storytelling workshops and professional development days that are aimed at teaching them oral storytelling skills. As is the case with any craft, oral storytelling is a skill that requires practice to refine.
5.2.2 Implications for the Teacher-Researcher

As a teacher-researcher, it does not suffice to simply research about the use of oral storytelling to teach students about different cultures. Going forth in my teaching practice, I aim to receive oral storytelling training to infuse this tool into my own pedagogy. In light of my research findings, I have discovered that there are several considerations that I must contemplate before introducing my students to this learning method.

Before I can even expect my students to feel comfortable sharing personal stories and lived experiences, it is vital that I model oral storytelling by sharing my own cultural knowledge. To do so, I must embrace vulnerability and strive to establish a good rapport with my students. By trusting my students with this kind of knowledge, students are more likely to feel safe sharing their own experiences.

Another implication of using oral storytelling is the importance of contextualizing stories, particularly when they are about sensitive topics such as genocide and colonization. As Elena underscores, stories should be introduced to help dispel stereotypes and challenge dominant discourses rather than reinforce misconceptions about cultural groups. Aside from providing students with historical, social, or political context to greater understand oral stories about different cultures, I must use my discretion and intuition to know when students are ready to learn about sensitive topics. Knowing about my students lives and being aware of any struggles they may face helps increase my awareness of their state of mind and readiness to discuss delicate topics.
Lastly, my research findings help illuminate that I must not view oral storytelling as a “one-size-fits-all” approach. As a teacher and researcher, it is my responsibility to take into account the individual needs and learning styles of my students. I will ensure that I provide my students with differentiated options such as digital storytelling and written stories. Additionally, I will carry out Elena’s recommendation to offer my students the option of storytelling through “film, comic strips, and journal entries”.

5.3 Recommendations

Both research participants divulged important recommendations that educators should consider before using oral storytelling to teach students about different cultures. As mentioned above, it is important to safeguard students’ well-being and mental health when sharing cultural stories that broach sensitive topics. As Elena underscores, it is critical for teachers to be aware of his/her students’ emotional triggers and to provide “disclaimers” before recounting stories that contain distressing subject matter. Additionally, teachers must make conscious efforts to foster a safe, inclusive, and supportive classroom environment in which students learn to respect each other. When educators strive to cultivate camaraderie amongst their students, it lessens the likelihood that students will feel uncomfortable sharing their lived experiences.

As discovered in the research findings, oral storytelling should be methodically implemented into the classroom. As Elena explicates, teachers should have metacognitive conversations about the purpose and function of oral storytelling to help students recognize the relevance and value of this medium. Elena also highly recommends that teachers provide students with contextualization before and after oral stories have been told within the classroom.
This process enables students to collaborate with their peers and their teacher to inquire deeper into topics and arrive at sound and critical cross-cultural understandings.

Zara expounds that teachers need to have effective classroom management skills if they wish to incorporate oral storytelling as a pedagogical learning tool. In particular, teachers must have strong facilitation skills to ensure that they every student has an opportunity to be heard and no student dominates the discussion. By providing all students with multiple opportunities to share their cultural knowledge, students will exert agency and be imbued with a sense of self-efficacy. Additionally, creating an inclusive space for all students to be heard ensures that teachers uphold classroom equity.

To warrant that educators can truly fulfill the recommendations advanced by my research participants, educators must receive storytelling training. Oral storytelling training is necessary for teachers to learn effective strategies to protect the mental health of students, gain access to teacher resources that may help facilitate the oral storytelling process, and learn stylistic conventions to engage students in oral stories.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Because one of my research participants theorized that referring to students as “experts” and providing them with a platform to share cultural knowledge can inspire students to become active participants in society, more research needs to be conducted to investigate if these students partake in active citizenship after secondary school. While Elena alludes to the fact that oral storytelling can enable students to feel empowered, longitudinal studies would need to be conducted to determine if oral storytelling is directly correlated to students’ active participation.
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in society. While both research participants expound that oral storytelling is a beneficial way of building a sense of community within the classroom, more research needs to be conducted to determine the extent to which students gain social skills from the oral storytelling process.

5.5 Concluding Comments

Although the implementation of oral storytelling into a classroom may have its challenges, the findings reveal that it is an effective pedagogical and learning tool. Among the many merits of oral storytelling lies a platform for students to co-create cultural and cross-cultural understandings. All students deserve to have an education that affords them the opportunity to gain understandings of different cultures in order to succeed in an increasingly globalized world and in a nation with a culturally diverse population. In order for students to gain significant understandings of different cultures, oral storytelling can help them acquire cultural knowledge directly from individuals who are immersed in their own culture.
References


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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

Date:

Dear _______________________________,

My name is Victoria Cortes and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how oral storytelling can be used as a pedagogical and learning tool to expose students to cultural diversity and allow them to gain cross-cultural understanding. I am interested in interviewing teachers who teach at a secondary school, have a minimum of 3-5 years of teaching experience, and habitually integrate oral storytelling into their classrooms. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Arlo Kempf. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Victoria Cortes
(647)-520-9181 or (416) 741-5838
Victoria.cortes@mail.utoronto.ca
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 from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Victoria Cortes and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ____________________________________________

Name: (printed) ____________________________________________

Date: ____________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research interview. The aim of this research is to learn how oral storytelling can be used to teach students about different cultures. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio-recorded. I want to remind you of your right to decline answering any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. Do you have any questions before we begin?

SECTION 1: Background Information (Who?)

1) How long have you been teaching?
2) What grades and subjects have you taught so far?
3) What has been your favourite subject to teach and why?
4) Was oral storytelling ever a part of your educational experience as an elementary, secondary, and/or postsecondary student?

SECTION 2: Teacher Practices (What/How?)

5) What steps do you take to familiarize students with the use of oral storytelling?
6) What kinds of stories have you or your students told to learn about different cultures?
7) How do students respond to the use of oral storytelling in your classroom?
8) How do students benefit from using oral storytelling as a learning tool?
9) a. Is oral storytelling conducive to the creation of a collaborative learning environment?
   b. In what ways does storytelling create this type of environment?
   c. Can you please provide specific examples?
10) To what extent has oral storytelling facilitated your students’ ability to achieve cross-cultural understanding?

SECTION 3: Teaching Philosophy/Beliefs/Values (Why?)

11) What inspired you to incorporate oral storytelling into your teaching? OR What was your rationale behind using oral storytelling as a learning and teaching tool?
12) Do you believe that teachers and students should incorporate lived experiences when engaging in oral storytelling?
13) Do you believe students should be exposed to/familiarized with non-Eurocentric, diverse storytelling forms?
14) What do you/did you hope to achieve when using oral storytelling in your classroom?

SECTION 4: Barriers, Next Steps, and Recommendations

15) How do you ensure that students have understood the content covered during the storytelling process?
16)
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a. What teaching resources have you used to make oral storytelling an efficacious learning tool?

b. Would you recommend that teachers receive storytelling training before incorporating into their classroom?

17) a. Have you experienced any challenges when using oral storytelling as a pedagogical approach?

b. If so, what were these challenges?

18) What advice would you give a beginning teacher who wants to include oral storytelling in their classroom?