A Case for Storytelling from an African and Indigenous Perspective:

Moving Towards Inclusivity

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study is concerned with how educators of African and Indigenous backgrounds experience the use of storytelling in their teaching practice. The study attempts to make connections to the use of storytelling from these cultural perspectives and inclusive practices related to education; namely, culturally relevant pedagogy. There is a particular focus on what shapes educators’ practices and how students are impacted by these choices. Semi-structured interviews with experienced educators were the source of the findings related to the study. The study is rooted in challenging Western educational practices and the findings point to practices that go beyond the accepted norm. The findings make a clear link between the practices of non-dominant educators as related to storytelling and inclusivity through encouraging student voice, meaning making, and student-centred learning. The study advocates for educators of non-dominant cultural practices to be incorporated into teaching practices and the need for additional training for educators. Furthermore, the study speaks to the benefits for educational communities when non-dominant practices like storytelling are incorporated into teaching.

Key Words: storytelling, inclusivity, culturally relevant pedagogy, African, Indigenous
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“Beyond mountains, there are mountains.” (Haitian proverb)
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The following chapter will introduce the research study by giving background information related to the researcher. Understanding my interest as a researcher, on the topic of inclusivity and storytelling will give readers insight into the purpose of the study. This chapter will also explore the purpose of this study and the main questions that guided that purpose. This chapter will also address some of the limitations of the research study and give a quick overview of the chapters ahead.

1.1 Background of the Researcher

My particular interest in storytelling and issues of inclusivity are far-reaching. My family has been shaped by waves of migration and displacement, giving me a value for being rooted in culture and tradition. I was born in Trinidad and Tobago into a family with a strong storytelling tradition: I have been surrounded by stories my entire life. My parents, grandparents, aunties, and uncles would break down family history in humorous stories, often around meals and gatherings. When my family immigrated to Canada in 1989, these stories became a direct connection to all the people, places, and things my family left behind to make a home in Canada.

Previous to university, I had no historical context for my family’s history, but I always had questions: how did we, as people of Indian descent, end up in the Caribbean? And why was our culture notably different from the Indian immigrants I encountered in Canada? This all changed in 2004 when I ventured into the Caribbean Studies program at the University of Toronto. During my time in that program, I learned the answer to those questions. Namely, I learned that in 1838, after the period of enslavement of
African people in the Caribbean, Indian workers were brought to the Caribbean as indentured labourers in the sugar plantation to replace the freed African workforce (Mangru, 1993; Itwaru, 1999). I learned about the effects of colonization on my family’s culture, language, religion, dress, and migration (Mangru, 1993; Itwaru, 1999). I learned about the tensions that were created and still exist between people groups in the Caribbean. I also learned about the creation of various Caribbean cultures (Mangru, 1993, Itwaru, 1999). This knowledge placed many of my family’s stories into their historical and cultural context. Furthermore, I was able directly apply what I learned to understanding the dynamics, culture, relationships, and tensions within my own family.

When I was growing up in Canada, my grandmother would recount tales from Trinidad and Tobago. The stories my grandmother told were often terrifying and evoked creatures like *La Diableresse* (the devil woman that stole people’s babies), of *Soucoyant* (the woman that could turn herself into a ball of fire by night), and of *Jumbies* (ghostly figures that would haunt the night). These stories horrified and intrigued me because they were rooted in Trinidadian culture: these stories reminded me of home. However, my experience of family and these stories were quite different from what I was feeling in my Canadian schooling. Although I enjoyed my schooling in Canada, I always felt removed from what was being taught. When I studied the significance of English texts, World Wars, Pioneer times, or Shakespeare, I often asked myself how my family’s story fit in with what I was learning.

I felt a disconnection between what I was being taught in school and what I was being taught at home. This feeling did not resolve until my undergraduate experience in the Caribbean Studies program. There for the first time I saw myself and my culture reflected in what was being taught and also how it was being taught. During my time in
the program, our classes read and discussed some of those terrifying tales I heard from my grandmother and identified them as folktales that transmitted important cultural knowledge and values. In one year-long class, “Performing and Transforming the Caribbean”, I not only studied the material, but also was given opportunities to re-enact some plays, traditional songs, celebrations, and performances from across the Caribbean. This class was particularly eye-opening as it validated the Caribbean use of performance, and more specifically stories, as essential to cultural preservation. Storytelling was central to the makeup of this class as students were given space to voice, explore and preform their own personal and cultural stories throughout the class. Through a series of performance pieces, I realized the value of storytelling. Storytelling increased my sense of personal identity, cultural identity, artistry, and engagement in education.

Learning about my past impacted my current reality in very tangible ways. Learning about my family’s history and culture within the school context made me feel affirmed. My Caribbean studies teachers used culturally relevant teaching, through performance and storytelling. This helped me to feel included. Furthermore, it caused me to feel rooted in a history, tradition, and culture that had many positive implications for my current reality. Some of those positive implications were that I felt more confident, saw my place in a larger community, and felt a deeper sense of purpose in life.

This helped shape my decision to pursue teaching as a profession. Much of my decision to become a teacher has been shaped by learning about my past, recognizing it as valuable. I want students to have the experience of seeing themselves as valuable when they see their cultures reflected in education. When I began my studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the Masters of Teaching program, I quickly learned about how inclusive education is built into the Ontario Ministry of Education’s
curriculum goals. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009a) defines inclusivity as “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (Rolheiser, 2011, p. 90). My desire for all students’ cultural backgrounds to be reflected in the curriculum is now an identifiable goal within the education system of Ontario. Naturally, this has further confirmed for me the need to explore diverse practices within teaching.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

There has been a significant shift within Ontario towards inclusivity in schools and in school cultures (Rolheiser, 2011, p. 90). Societal, political and migration changes have resulted in the acknowledgement of the many differences that exist for students (Dei, 2002; Rolheiser, 2011). This climate has created the goal of inclusivity. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009a) recently defined inclusive education as “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (Rolheiser, 2011, p. 90). For education to be inclusive, students must recognize their diverse perspectives and identities in the ways teachers teach.

Teachers are being asked to pursue inclusive classrooms in various ways, but my area of interest is within the context of the following definition, “learning environments that are respective of the diversity of the students who inhabit them” (Dei, James-Wilson, Zine, 2002, p.4). More specifically, I want to examine how the practices of the culture a
curriculum is based on includes or excludes students from learning. In an attempt to meet the needs of the diverse population, the Ontario College of Teachers has produced a Course Guidelines in Creating Inclusive Classrooms. Specifically the Ontario College of Teachers has outlined Course Components for teachers in making their classrooms more inclusive. One of these components is “exploring a variety of conceptual and cross curricular frameworks that support Inclusive Classroom” (Rolheiser, 2011, p. 90). I am interested in the types of cultural frameworks that are being used in the classroom, and more specifically, how those frameworks shape practices in the classroom. The intersection of students’ cultural identities and practice is a specific concept within inclusivity.

Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the term culturally relevant pedagogy as a subset of inclusivity in 1995 (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Ladson-Billing’s work related to culturally relevant pedagogy initiated conversations that incorporated students’ culture into the set-up and content of the classroom. Since the inception of her theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, educators have been wrestling with how to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy in the classroom. One of the critiques of has been of viewing culturally relevant pedagogy as simplistically celebrating different cultures at schools (Sleeter, 2012). However, the intention of culturally relevant pedagogy is “the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture.” (Ladson-Billings, 2014). One of the ways principles of learning can be linked to understanding and appreciation of culture is through the use of storytelling in the classroom.

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of storytelling in the classroom as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy. In Inclusive Schooling: A Teacher’s Companion
to Removing the Margins, George Sefa Dei, Sonia V. James-Wilson, and Jasmine Zine, wrote, “…storytelling becomes an important mode and medium of communication, cultural transmission, and source of identity construction” (2002, p. 35). The authors advocated for making space in the classroom for students to share family and cultural stories. Storytelling is a means by which respecting student diversity is achieved (Dei, James-Wilson, Zine, 2002). My research has developed with this goal of respecting student diversity in mind, not just through what is told, but also through how teaching is practised.

1.3 Research Questions

The goal of my research is to explore how storytelling, as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy, is currently being used in teacher practice within the high school context to promote inclusivity. More specifically: how do teachers experience using storytelling in their teaching practices to promote inclusivity through culturally relevant pedagogy from an Indigenous or African framework? In answering the previous question, I hope to then understand the implications for how teachers are creating culturally relevant pedagogy through the use of storytelling in the classroom. What informs teachers who use storytelling in the classroom to achieve culturally relevant pedagogy? How do students benefit from the use of storytelling in the classroom when it is used as culturally relevant pedagogy? Furthermore, how are teachers best supported to use storytelling in their classroom practices?
1.4 Limitations of the Research

While I believe storytelling has potential to create inclusivity, it is certainly not the only way to do so. The limitation of this study is that in choosing to look specifically at storytelling, I will inherently miss the many other inclusive practices being utilized within the classroom. I recognize using storytelling does not mean all students will feel like their learning needs are being met. Storytelling is not a practice that everyone adheres to, so it could be seen as an exclusive practice to some. Furthermore, I recognize that storytelling may present particular challenges for new immigrants who are learning English. The scope of my study is limited given that I am hoping to talk to three teachers. My findings will be limited to these interviews. The particular investigation into storytelling from an African and Indigenous perspective will uncover ideas related to inclusivity; however, limiting the scope of storytelling to these cultural frameworks will not represent other cultural worldviews where storytelling is utilized. Furthermore, the study does not fully encapsulate the wide diversity that occurs within an African or Indigenous perspective: there is a redaction of these cultural perspectives that has taken place in the scope of this study.

1.5 Overview

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature that will explore the terms and frameworks of storytelling, oral tradition, and oral history. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedures used in this study, including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 identifies the participants in the study and
describes the data as it pertains to the research question. Chapter 5 includes limitations of the study, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and areas for further study. References and a list of appendixes follow at the end.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction and Purpose of Literature Review

Stories are told in many different ways. When some people think of storytelling, the immediate image of reading a book comes to mind, for others an image of movie scene, another may think of a piece of art, and yet others may recall tales around a campfire, a sacred performance, or family members telling stories over meal. For some, telling stories can be a serious matter. For others, it’s a casual event. Needless to say, how one tells stories and receives stories is complex. This may depend on contributing factors including culture, ethnicity, family, level of education, location, and ability. Thus, educators who utilize storytelling in their teaching practices are shaped by a myriad of these factors. The particular focus of this research is to look at educators who have been shaped by African and Indigenous cultures.

This chapter presents the larger context of how Ontario teachers experience the use of storytelling in their teaching practices as a means of promoting inclusivity through culturally relevant pedagogy from an Indigenous or African framework. The literature review lays the groundwork for how important and deeply rooted oral traditions and oral history are within an Indigenous or African framework. In understanding the importance of these practices, the research aims to understand how teaching practices of storytelling
can promote inclusivity in the classroom. The starting point of this review is to explore the literature that helps to define oral traditions and oral history in the academic context.

Stories can be communicated out loud or orally. Recently, much writing has advocated for the validity of oral history and traditions in North American education (Blackhawk, 1990; Doherty, 1990; Archibald, 2008; Dei, James, Wilson, Zine, 2002; Restoule, 2011). Furthermore, there has been the recording of oral traditions into written text. While this is a complex and contentious venture in and of itself, it is not the concern of this paper (Ritchie, 2003, p.19). The research is primarily interested in how stories are audibly recounted. It is also concerned with the definition of oral history that relates to the practice of interviewing and recording personal accounts for the purpose of historical evidence (Ritchie, 2003, p. 19). While the review might discuss family history or personal accounts, it is primarily concerned with the telling and not the recording aspect of these types of histories. The scope of the literature review draws on American and Canadian sources, since both countries have faced diverse populations due to “(g)lobalization, immigration, civil warfare and resettlement communities (that)have resulted in an increase in transnational communities, ethnic and religious and linguistic diversity across both Canada and the United States” (Dei, James-Wilson, Zine, 2002, p.3). Furthermore, with the 2015 release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, there is an urgent need for educators to adapt teaching practices that are more inclusive of Indigenous students (TRC, 2015). Consequently, this has implications for educational practices.

The use of storytelling, oral traditions, and oral history in the classroom has an important role in the incorporation of different cultural frameworks. Furthermore, using these cultural frameworks can help create inclusive spaces that promote culturally
relevant pedagogy. One of the limitations in defining a body of work on oral traditions is that its foundations are not in academic literature. To define the body of work being reviewed, the terms of storytelling, oral tradition, and oral history need to be evaluated within the literature to bring clarity to how these terms are used and perceived. Specifically, the review will utilize Indigenous and African cultural understanding of these terms. The literature review will explore the critiques and limitations of how storytelling, oral tradition, and oral history are contextualized in the classroom environment. The body of work that has developed the understanding of storytelling, oral traditions, and oral history will frame their application in creating inclusive classroom environments.

To appropriately set up this review, it is important to clearly define inclusive space meaning, “learning environments that are respective of the diversity of the students who inhabit them” (Dei, James-Wilson, Zine, 2002, p. 4). While this research will apply what is learned about the cultural frameworks of storytelling, oral traditions, and oral history to the creation of inclusivity in the classroom, this chapter will contextualize these terms and their cultural frameworks. The literature review hopes to give background to the research question, which is: in what ways do Ontario teachers experience their use of storytelling in their teaching practices to be a means of achieving culturally relevant pedagogy?

2.1 Making Sense of Storytelling, Oral Tradition, and Oral History

Within Western academia, there tends to be an ethnocentric view of education; this ethnocentric view reiterates white, European, Christian, and middle-class values (Contenta, 1993; Regan, 2005; Kemph, 2006). Inherent within this ethnocentric view is a
mistrust of other frameworks of education and learning (Regan, 2005). Ethnocentrism plays out in what is taught by teachers and what is not taught. For example, Timothy Regan gave the following example of Western education’s preferences for literary traditions, but not other types of traditions (Regan, 2005). During the 1970s and 80s, Western academics Jan Vansina and Walter Ong, sought to affirm oral traditions and to legitimize oral cultures within Western academia.

In order to look at the development of oral traditions in Western frames of thought, and specifically its use in education, it is important to reference the work of Walter Ong. Ong created a framework to make sense of oral cultures, particularly in his book *Orality and Literacy* (1982). Ong’s work on orality expanded the views of primarily oral cultures and looked at how they differ from predominantly literate cultures (Ong, 1982). Ong argued that oral cultures connote words with great power (Ong, 1982, p.32). Ong pointed to the idea of naming as a way that power is shown because in some oral cultures, naming something means the one who gives the name has power over the named entity (Ong, 1982, p. 33). Thus, oral cultures associate oral traditions with power.

Ong also stated that oral cultures depend on systems of memory in order to communicate and pass on information (Ong, 1982, p. 34). Oral traditions, storytelling, and oral histories make sense within this system because these are means to remember and pass on significant information from one generation to the next. Furthermore, people convey these systems of memory, not books (Ong, 1982, p. 34). The value of people as systems of memory is the noticeable difference between literate cultures and oral cultures (Ong, 1982, p. 34). Ong’s assertion was illustrated well in the following definition of an elder by Jo-Ann Archibald: “Usually, wisdom is attributed only to Elders, but this is not because they have lived a long time. What one does with knowledge and the insight
In Archibald’s definition, how wisdom is used is a factor in what makes them an elder. Influenced by Havelock, Ong added a similar idea, arguing, “For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known (as cited by Ong, 1982, p. 45-46). Ong asserted the individual finds meaning through the material world and by belonging to a community; therefore, community is central to personal identity (Ong, 1982, p. 46). Ong’s work created greater understanding of oral cultures and opened up the exploration of oral communities to others in academia (Archibald, 2008, p. 15).

Another important figure in the field of oral communities and, specifically oral traditions, is Jan Vansina. Vansina worked with people groups in Central Africa and he was integral in validating oral traditions as a legitimate form of history to Western academia (Newburry, 2007, p. 213). While others had advocated for the validity of oral history, Vansina’s work argued understanding oral traditions was intrinsically linked to understanding the African worldview (Newburry, 2007, p.213). Furthermore, Vansina used the academic practices of his day in the fields of anthropology, history, linguistics, and archaeology to show academia could understand and interpret African history as much as European history (Newburry, 2007, p.214). Vansina advocated for the use of oral traditions in interpreting and legitimizing African history (Newburry, 2007).

Vansina defined oral traditions as “Oral history testimony transmitted verbally, from generation to the next on or more.” (Vansina, 1971, p. 444). Vansina differentiated oral traditions from oral history. He argued:

The sources of oral historians are reminiscences, hearsay, or eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, that is, which occurred
during the lifetime of the informants. This differs from oral traditions in that oral traditions are no longer contemporary. They have passed from mouth to mouth, for a period beyond the lifetime of the informants (Vansina, 1985, pp.12-13).

Vansina defined oral history as a recent event and oral traditions as something that has happened in the past (Vansina, 1985, pp. 12-13). However, this distinction between oral tradition and oral history is problematic as it seems to be an outsider perspective on societies that use oral methods to communicate meaning, history, and values. As an ethnographer, whose purpose was to “describe and interpret a culture-sharing group” (Cresswell, 2013, p.104.), Vansina’s primary focus was to collect data that would help to describe and interpret his findings (Cresswell, 2013, p. 104). Ultimately, Vansina’s perspective is a very different viewpoint than someone who belongs to the cultural group being described and interpreted.

2.2 An Indigenous Framework for Understanding Storytelling, Oral Traditions, and Oral History

One of the most significant aspects of oral traditions, storytelling, and oral history is that what is being told has implications for the present (Archibald, 2008, p.12). Jo-Ann Archibald presented these implications in her book *Indigenous Storywork Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* when she wrote that “Some stories remind us about being whole and healthy and remind us of traditional teachings that have relevance to our lives” (Archibald, 2008, p.12). Archibald offered the perspective of some of the present relevance that oral traditions have: they are not simply repositories of knowledge, but they are a way to form belief and find belonging in the community (Archibald, 2008, p.26). Archibald summated that oral tradition and storytelling are Western constructions
that do not encapsulate the intention and meaning of their place in Indigenous life (Archibald, 2008, p.16). Archibald applied Kimberly Blaeser’s critique of interpreting Indigenous literature through Western means to the interpretation of Indigenous stories (as cited by Archibald, 2008, p. 16). Blaeser argued, “The insistence on reading Native literature by way of Western literary theory clearly violates its integrity and performs a new act of colonization and conquest” (as cited by Archibald, 2008, p. 16). Thus, it is possible to recolonize through the act of interpreting Indigenous stories and their forms from Western methods, which brings back Vansina’s distinction of oral tradition and oral history. This questions if oral tradition and oral history are really that separate.

Stephen J. Augustine identified that there is no difference between oral tradition and oral history in Mi’kmaq culture and tradition: the two are one and the same (Augustine, 2008, p.2-3). Augustine stated that in some Indigenous societies there may be a distinction between oral histories, which are specific to a family’s story, and oral traditions, which is the collective story (2008, p. 2-3). Augustine illustrated the distinctions between oral traditions and oral history are more about who they belong to as opposed to when the events they describe happened. Vansina indicated this as one of the differences between the two (Vansina, 1985, pp.12-13). Furthermore, the differing viewpoints reveal the different frameworks at play: one of an outsider and the other of someone belonging to an oral culture. Oral traditions and oral history seem to be defined by the worldview of the hearer. One of the guiding frameworks that shape the perception of oral traditions and oral histories in Indigenous cultures is the concept of holism (Archibald, 2008, p. 11). The concept of holism is the context for Indigenous storytelling (Archibald, 2008, p. 11). Holism is defined as:
An indigenous philosophical concept of holism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behavior/action) realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one’s family, community, band, and nation (Archibald, 2008, p. 11). Jo-Ann Archibald spoke to the communal purpose of oral traditions. The worldview that informs oral traditions situated within Indigenous cultural value of holism is mutually reinforcing due to the interrelated nature of body, mind, spirit, community, and life in general (Archibald, 2008, p. 11). Storytelling is inextricably linked to the belief of holism; thus, storytelling becomes a “way of acquiring knowledge” and is a “code of behaviour” by which harmony is achieved between people, the Creator, and all living things through communication (Archibald, 2008, p.11). This philosophical concept shares some similarities to a traditional African worldview that also uses oral traditions.

2.3 An African Framework for Understanding Storytelling, Oral Tradition, and Oral History

The works of Geneva Smitherman and Tempii B. Champion are helpful to gain a fuller understanding of the importance of oral traditions in the African worldview in the American context. In her book Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America, Smitherman traced the roots of Black American culture and language to the traditional African worldview. Smitherman made a case for a general African worldview to draw upon in her work (Smitherman, 1977). Like the Indigenous worldview that Archibald explored, Smitherman pointed to the idea that in the African worldview, the spiritual and physical world are deeply connected (Smitherman, 1977). Furthermore, these worlds
mutually impact one another (Smitherman, 1977). Within this world, words are not merely words, but they connote power. Smitherman highlighted that even though most African Americans speak English, the African worldview pervades how and why words are used (Smitherman, 1977). Furthermore, she wrote about the use of language in African communities as “a functional dynamic that is simultaneously a mechanism for learning about life and the world and a vehicle for group approval and recognition” (Smitherman, 1977, p. 80). Making meaning and finding a place in community is central to the use of language in the African worldview.

Community is the location of storytelling within the context of an African worldview because storytelling is seen to be a cultural and social practice (Champion, 2003, p. 1). In her book Understanding Storytelling Among African American Children, Champion illustrated how storytelling is used. Storytelling happens in all aspects of daily life and enables the preservation of history of self, family, and ethnicity (Champion, 2003, p.1). Furthermore, storytelling can be used to teach about morality, spirituality, the past, history, and group belonging (Champion, 2003). These are some of the ways storytelling is used within African American culture.

Prescribing an exact definition of what storytelling is within the African American context is challenging. What is clear, however, is that it is tied to people and it permeates everyday aspects of life. Furthermore, storytelling seems to encompass both oral traditions and oral histories. Comparing an African definition of storytelling to an American definition of storytelling helps show how the two differ. In his article “A Case for Storytelling in K-12 Language Arts Curriculum” R.C. Roney gives the following definition,
Storytelling thus defined is an art form, because it is a creative process which, in this instance, involves both the teller and the audience in the co-creation of the story. As such, storytelling is an immediate and personal process. The story is created by the teller and audience “in the moment,” “in person,” and “just between us.” (Roney, 2008, p. 49)

While the idea of a co-creative process aligned with an African American and Indigenous worldview, Roney’s definition is problematic in his idea of “art form.” This term connotes an exceptional moment where this happens; this contradicts the everyday ways story intersects with life that is a feature of how the African American worldview perceives storytelling. Furthermore, the definition of storytelling differed from the ones explored using Smitherman and Tempii’s articles because it doesn’t relate how the past and the future have implications on telling stories. In the African and Indigenous worldview, stories are told from the perspective that the present and past are intrinsically linked (Smitherman, 1977, p.75). Roney defined storytelling as a present and contextualized act. This definition did not account for the past, present, and future being interconnected, a key feature in the Indigenous and African worldview. The theme of resistance within the African American worldview shows some of how this interconnectedness plays out.

Throughout the period of enslavement of African people in America, “oral tradition has served as a fundamental vehicle for gittin ovuh” (Smitherman, 1977, p.73). The term, “gittin ovuh,” described the process of overcoming suffering in order to get to a better place (Smitherman, 1977, p. 73). Here, the nuanced definition of acknowledging struggle and resistance is added to the notion of oral tradition:
That tradition preserves the Afro-American heritage and reflects the collective spirit of the race. Through song, story, folk sayings, and rich verbal interplay among everyday people, lessons and precepts about life and survival are handed down from generation to generation. (Smitherman, 1977, p. 73).

Furthermore, the idea of words having supernatural power, or *Nommo*, was a cultural belief that Africans brought to America (Smitherman, p.78). More so, the previous quote shows that words hold power within the context of community and struggle.

Archibald alluded to a similar type of struggle as she uncovered her decision to use the term “storywork.” Archibald explained, “I coined the term ‘storywork’ because I needed a term that signified that our stories and storytelling were to be taken seriously” (Archibald, 2008, p.3). Archibald decided to use “storywork” as the word that encompasses not just the definitions of oral tradition, oral history, and storytelling, but also the active nature of passing on, listening to, and being transformed by stories (Archibald, 2008, p.7). Furthermore, Archibald used the term to describe her own journey in writing *Indigenous Storywork Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit*, where she has had to figure out a new way to “respectfully place First Nations stories within the academic educational milieu” (Archibald, 2008, p. 7). Archibald called attention to the different ways of learning and interpreting; she provided a bridge between the world of Western academia and the world of Indigenous people. She made a case for their co-existence (Archibald, 2008, p. 7).

One of the cases Archibald made is that in order for Indigenous stories to be used outside of the culture from which they developed and hold meaning, they must be accompanied by a pedagogy that matches the values intrinsic to the Indigenous culture (Archibald, 2008). Archibald proposed the following frame: “the principles of respect,
responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interconnectedness, and synergy helped me get to the “core” of making meaning with and through stories” (Archibald, 2008, p. 140).

It is not enough to just repeat the stories; these stories need to be offered within an appropriate framework.

Through examining the previous literature as it pertains to storytelling, oral history, and oral traditions, the following framework has emerged: the power of words, the context of struggle and resistance, the need to make meaning, the value of community, and the value of intergenerational relationships in the passing on of story. My research project explores the implications of each of these values and how they can be used to create inclusive classrooms. Teachers can incorporate different cultural frameworks to help students learn the deeper implications of oral traditions.

Understanding the role of teachers is an important part of understanding this framework. The role of teachers to incorporate different cultural frameworks to create an environment for students to be taught the deeper implications of oral traditions is an important aspect in further understanding this framework. Since the perceptions educators have of these terms are influenced by their own cultural frameworks and those in which they have been taught it is important to explore the initial approach that creates an inclusive environment for storytelling. From this point on, the term “storytelling” will be used to encompass both oral tradition and oral history alongside the telling of personal stories. After reviewing the previous literature, there is evidence to use the term storytelling to encompass all of the differentiated terms. Furthermore, the remainder of the review is primarily concerned with the practice of storytelling and not so much the content of the stories being told.
2.4 Storytelling and Inclusivity in the Classroom

Many teachers have difficulty incorporating cultural frameworks that are unknown to them. This shows that, for many, the importance of storytelling is not inherently obvious. Before even understanding how to teach and apply the holistic expression of storytelling in the classroom environment, teachers must first recognize its value to students. Teachers must model a safe environment for the expression of storytelling. This section will begin by highlighting the work of teachers Lucia Doherty and Terry Blackhawk to introduce literate that recognizes the value of storytelling. Their work will further develop an understanding of how to respectfully explore storytelling from different cultures to create the foundation for what Archibald framed as “storywork.”

In her 1990 article, “The Spark that Initiates Learning: Oral Language in the classroom,” Doherty referred to Walter Ong’s idea that oral language is the oldest form of communication to validate the use of oral culture in her classroom (Doherty, 1990). After recognizing that sound was the primary mode of communication for teenage students that she worked with, Doherty positioned her students in a similar place as people of oral cultures (Doherty, 1990, p.35). Doherty expressed the importance of oral expression by highlighting students’ need to relate new experiences with experiences already known to them to participate in experiences of learning more than memorize it, and to have words to relate to the tangible world around them (Doherty, 1990, pp.35-38). Thus, Doherty utilized oral language because it appealed to the aforementioned needs of students. Furthermore, she saw its value in helping students make meaning in their lives.

Blackhawk referenced Doherty in his article “The Gifts of Story: Using Oral Tradition in the Classroom.” Blackhawk moved beyond how the use of oral language in
the class benefits students and addressed the class environment (Blackhawk, 1990). Blackhawk wrote, “A storytelling approach, which makes use of students' own oral culture as well as the oral tradition that has come down to us over the centuries, can help foster an encouraging, respectful environment in the classroom which enhances language learning of all kinds” (Blackhawk, 1990, p. 29). What Blackhawk described is a picture of inclusivity, because it promoted a culture of respect for students’ experiences. Furthermore, Blackhawk offered insight on how teaching in a way that encourages and welcomes oral traditions means that he must model this to his students by sharing his own stories, and caused him to be “a vulnerable teacher” (Blackhawk, 1990, p.31). Thus, he modeled and passed on the value of storytelling alongside his own stories (Blackhawk, 1990, p.31). This is strikingly similar to the way elders function within the Indigenous culture by passing on wisdom, as aforementioned by Archibald. Blackhawk welcomed the diversity of students and their stories in his classroom.

The classroom is a diverse place if one considers the many voices and experiences that inhabit it: making space for voices to be heard, for family histories and stories to be shared, and cultural stories to be recounted, makes it a place where that diversity is identified and made known (Blackhawk, 1990). While this is clearly a vulnerable act for students and teachers to partake in (Blackhawk, 1990), it is a necessary act if true inclusivity is to occur. Inclusive space is again defined as “learning environments that are respective of the diversity of the students who inhabit them” (Dei, James-Wilson, Zine, 2002, p. 4). Pamela Bolotin-Joseph described the opposite of diversity in the following passage:
The null curriculum deals with what is systematically excluded, neglected, or not considered. Thus, we find null curriculum if we teach history as “the true story” but do not present the perspectives from non-dominant cultures- or we choose as “the greatest literature” only works by European males. (Bolotin-Joseph, 2011, p. 5).

Another way of terming the null curriculum is the default curriculum of teachers who are unreflective and uncritical of their teaching practices and the methods they use. Furthermore, the trouble with the null curriculum in Western educational practices is that it is an ethnocentric curriculum that is reproduced (Regan, pp. 5-6). Thus, it is essential for teachers to be reflective and critical of the curriculum and how it shapes their practice. Both Doherty and Blackhawk chose to employ orality and storytelling in their classroom curriculum. Doherty’s reflective moment came when she observed the dominant belief that a silent classroom is a better one (Doherty, 1990, p. 34). Blackhawk’s moment came when he chose to bring his experience with storytelling outside of the classroom into the classroom (Blackhawk, 1990, p.29). Diversity does not come just by acknowledging that it exists; it comes when educators employ different methods of teaching. Storytelling in the classroom is one method of many that could be utilized to create more inclusive spaces.

One of the challenges inherent to repeating indigenous stories in the classroom is the question of whether or not non-indigenous educators can share and teach these stories. Archibald gave an example in her book where she asks this very question and recounts watching a group of teachers in British Columbia retell indigenous stories within a curriculum book (Archibald, 2008, p. 150). While the teachers were positive about the use of the material, they did not perform the act of storytelling. Furthermore, Archibald
emphasized that “Without basic cultural sensitivity among teachers, appropriation and disrespectful use of stories are more likely to occur” (Archibald, 2008, p. 150). If stories from Indigenous backgrounds and, for that matter, other ethnic and cultural backgrounds are to be used, those from outside these cultures must be sensitive and respectful in the way they handle these stories. Archibald’s argument that the conceptual frameworks and beliefs belonging to Indigenous people must be considered and the story within that is a good application for using stories that are outside of the teacher’s experience (Archibald, 2008).

Jean-Paul Restoule in his article “Everything is Alive and Everyone is Related: Indigenous Inclusive Education” advocated for the important role non-Aboriginal educators play in inclusive education. Restoule acknowledged the necessity for non-Aboriginal educators “to learn, respect, and use indigenous perspectives in their classrooms” (Restoule, 2011, p.18). While it may be intimidating for teachers to take on the challenge of learning about a culture, history, or language quite different than their own, it seems necessary for educators to do so in order to rightly reflect the diversity of their students (Restoule, 2011). Furthermore, Restoule challenged teachers to not “be experts,” but to be people willing to learn (Restoule, 2011, p.18). Restoule advocated teachers build relationships with “indigenous people and organizations” so they can respectfully learn about indigenous culture. Restoule held, “Building such relationships defuses the appropriation issue because one is no longer speaking for but speaking with.” (Restoule, 2011, p.18). Archibald echoed these same words in the example of non-Indigenous and Indigenous teachers sharing teaching as a way to create respectful and inclusive learning environments (Archibald, 2008, p. 150).
The body of work outlining the initial approach to understanding storytelling frames how inclusive classrooms can be modelled for a diversity of students. In *Inclusive Schooling: A Teacher’s Companion to Removing the Margins*, Dei, James-Wilson, and Zine offer 13 strategies towards diverse and thereby more inclusive classrooms. The authors’ suggestions of “Introduce different ways of knowing across the curriculum areas…Examine the role of stories as a tool for understanding and transmitting culture” (Dei, James-Wilson, and Zine, 2002 pp, 33-38), are both examples that highlight the benefits of using storytelling to create inclusivity. If employed, using storytelling in the classroom could bring life to the above strategies. Storytelling would be an appropriate way to do this since students, if willing, could share their own perspectives. Since students’ perspectives are rich because, like all people, their perspectives are shaped by diverse factors. In essence, students could draw on themselves, in all of their complexities, to interpret various subject matters and learn. Also, the proposed list could also be an invitation to learn from elders, members of the school community, educators who specialize in specific fields, and in general, people who bring knowledge that the teacher is unable to teach. This could be hugely successful or not.

### 2.5 Potential Critiques of Storytelling as Related to Inclusivity

In considering the use of storytelling in the classroom towards inclusivity, there is a need to address conflicting views. Students who are learning English may not respond well to this practice. Furthermore, there has been increasing advocacy for the need for silence in the classroom (Olin, 2004; Forrest, 2013). Examining these potential critiques is necessary to understand storytelling’s place in teaching practice.
A potential critique of storytelling in the classroom is how this might impact English Language Learners (ELLs). Being in a classroom environment where storytelling is utilized might make ELLs feel excluded because of their unfamiliarity with English. In the article, “Teaching Practices for ESL Learners,” Ellen “Aileen” Curtin examined helpful practices teachers could implore to make the classroom a better learning space for ELLs (Curtin, 2005). Curtin’s suggestions are conducive to the use of storytelling. Learning environments where there is “a high level of verbal communication between students and teacher,” “oral practice,” “collaborative learning,” and “language rich” are all seen as beneficial to students who are learning English (Curtin, 2005, pp22-23). All of the previous suggestions could be implemented through storytelling. Furthermore, the use of storytelling could allow ELLs to learn through interaction with peers by hearing diverse stories. Notably, “being forced to read in front of the class” (Curtin, 2005, p.23), is viewed as an unbeneﬁcial teaching practice to ELLs. What is the difference between these two acts that makes one beneﬁcial and one not? Each act comes from a different framework. Reading in front of the class is an act of proving competency. Sharing a story is an act of participation. Furthermore, storytelling could, if used respectfully, promote “learning that is relational and holistic and employs thematic approaches” which seems beneﬁcial to ELLs.

The focus of this literature review has been making sense of and seeing how storytelling is used in the classroom as a means of engaging different cultural practices and moving towards inclusivity. The focus has been on talking and sound, but silence is also needed in the classroom. In her article “Practicing Silence in Teaching,” Michelle Forrest unpacked notions of silence in the classroom and looks at the positive uses of silence in the classroom. Forrest used the work of Ros Olin to show that, in Western
classrooms, there is a preference for talking (as cited by Forrest, p. 613). Forrest located this bias for talking in a Eurocentric value system and considers other traditions to validate the use of silence (Forrest, 2013). Forrest shared how she used silence in the classroom through the “Mi’kmaw practice of passing the Talking Stick” (Forrest, 2013, p. 615). Through passing the Talking Stick, she allowed students to either talk or remain silent when holding the stick (Forrest, 2005, p. 214). Forrest drew from the work of Covarrubias who suggested that feelings of interconnectedness are a result of enabling silence in the classroom. Similarly, this is also a result of storytelling in the classroom (Forrest, 2005, p. 613). The similarity between storytelling and silence in achieving interconnectedness showcases the need for varied practices within the classroom. Storytelling, while valuable in the classroom, is surely not the only means to achieve inclusivity. However, the use of varied frameworks that challenge the dominant order is necessary in creating diverse spaces for the diversity of students.

2.5 Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature drawn upon has given the backdrop of understanding storytelling from an African and Indigenous perspective. The connection made between storytelling and inclusivity as it relates to culturally relevant pedagogy is a new link made by the literature review. The review appropriately sets up storytelling, shaped by African and Indigenous perspectives, as a practice with the potential to facilitate inclusive practices within education.
Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The following chapter will address various components of the research methodology and design to justify the study’s dependence on qualitative research as the best approach for looking at the research questions. This chapter will explore instruments of data collection, elaborate on the use of interviewing and explain the techniques for gathering teacher participants for the study. Furthermore, the chapter attempts to clarify how the information/data obtained was analyzed and the ethical procedures put in place to guide all aspects of the study. Finally, I address the methodological limitations and strengths that are inherent to this particular study.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

I utilized qualitative research to explore the question: how do teachers experience the use of storytelling in their teaching practices to promote inclusivity through culturally relevant pedagogy from an Indigenous or African framework? Qualitative research attempts to uncover information through the experience of people in order to gain “a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena” (2005, Silverman, p. 8). Since qualitative research relies on data captured from everyday life and an attempt to make meaning from that data (Silverman, 2005), it provided a beneficial means to learn from teachers’ experiences. Furthermore, qualitative research lends to people’s stories being told through unstructured interviews, so it reiterates a value of this particular study to promote using storytelling as a “way of acquiring knowledge” (Archibald, 2008, p.11). In short, people’s experiences matter.
Teachers are rich resources in understanding how practice influences students’ experiences; thus, interviewing teachers was a fitting way to explore the area of storytelling in the classroom. This study explored the area of storytelling and how it related to the promotion of inclusivity in education through semi-structured interviews with teachers. The use of a literature review, which examined relevant literature on storytelling and inclusivity, was also drawn upon to support this study.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The primary instrument for data collection was semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for teachers’ experiences to be voiced through the process. Silvia E. Rabionet wrote, “There is no doubt that qualitative interviewing is a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences” (Rabionet, 2011). The flexibility that Rabionet referred to showed that researchers do not merely elicit answers from their participants. Instead, the flexibility allowed participants to collaborate with the researcher/interviewer in making sense of a subject matter. In other words, the interviewer and interviewee become co-creators in the production of knowledge. This produces a “powerful tool” as it allowed those being interviewed to find value in their experiences by voicing them. Using open-ended questions further allowed participants’ voices to be heard. Open-ended questions invited teachers to engage with the topic of storytelling in the classroom without eliciting specific answers from them (Cresswell, 2013, p.163, Silverman, 2005, p. 123).

My interview protocol (Appendix B) consisted of five parts: background information, teacher practices, beliefs and values, feedback, and next steps. The first set
of questions was a set of close-ended introductory questions that established conversation and put the participants at ease (Dilley, 2000). Furthermore, these initial questions revealed some of the background of the teacher being interviewed. The second set of questions attempted to uncover teachers’ practices on the topic of storytelling. Two examples of questions from this section are: How does the teacher utilize storytelling in the classroom? What has informed the teacher’s use of storytelling in the classroom? The third section of the interview attempted to move beyond understanding the practice to understanding the values and beliefs that inform the practice. Namely, I wanted to know what promoted the teacher to start using storytelling in the classroom. In this third section of the interview, I hoped to expose whether culture, ethnicity, or experience had played a role in informing the teachers’ beliefs. In the fourth section, I asked questions to gain insight into any feedback teachers had received from other educators and I gave the interviewee space to name any obstacles they had faced in incorporating storytelling in the classroom. The final section attempted to elicit practical suggestions and advice about how other teachers could implement storytelling in their classroom. Depending on the teachers’ responses, some questions had follow up questions to further clarify or probe the response.

3.3 Participants

In the following section, I will expand on the participants I chose to work with in this research study. I will explore the areas of sampling criteria: elaborating on the particular qualities I looked for in the participants. I will also go into details about my recruitment procedures, which will make transparent how I recruited the various teachers
involved in the study. Finally, I will give a short bio of each of the participants, so that their connection to storytelling will validate them as creditable resources for this study.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Requirements for teachers:

1. Intentionally using storytelling in classroom to engage/partner/co-create with students

2. Each of the three teachers interviewed must self-identify as one of the following: African or Indigenous descent

3. Willing to talk about their experience using storytelling in the classroom

Teachers who are using storytelling in the classroom adhere to a nuanced pedagogical approach that seeks to engage students. In his article, “The Gifts of Story: Using Oral Tradition in the Classroom” (Blackhawk, 1990), Terry Blackhawk articulated some of that approach when he wrote, “A storytelling approach, which makes use of students’ own oral culture as well as the oral tradition that has come down to us over the centuries, can help foster an encouraging, respectful environment in the classroom which enhances language learning of all kinds” (1990, p. 29). Blackhawk’s description of encouraging and respectful environment captured a value of inclusivity. Furthermore, these teachers seek to not be the primary sources of knowledge, but to allow students to also fill that space by creating “learning environments that are respective of the diversity of the students who inhabit them.” (Dei, James-Wilson, Zine, 2002, p. 4). Blackhawk reiterated this by arguing that storytelling “makes use of students’ own oral culture.” (1990, p. 29).
Teachers who welcome students to also voice their stories are aiming towards empowering students and moving towards Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández idea of inclusivity as it pertains to culturally responsive pedagogy. Gaztambide-Fernández wrote “cultural production seeks to embrace, rather than manage, cultural difference….cultural production suggests an approach to schooling that is more akin to community and youth organizing, through which groups of youth and adult allies come together to produce creative self-representation” (2011, p. 14). Gaztambide-Fernández’s advocacy of cultural production challenged the idea of the teacher as the primary source of knowledge; thus, I was particularly interested in interviewing teachers that were partnering with students through storytelling.

The second requirement for teachers it that they would self-identify as either African or Indigenous. I insisted on this because I wanted to look at how culture shapes teachers’ understandings of the role of storytelling; furthermore, I wanted to compare and contrast these understandings to one another. As explored in my literature review, storytelling is central to African and Indigenous cultures [(Archibald (2008), Blaeser (1993), Champion (2012), Ong (1982), Reagan (2005), Restoule (2011), Smitherman (1977), Vansina (1971)]. In examining how both of these cultures define storytelling I gleaned the following framework that encompassed similarities between the two cultures: the power of words, the context of struggle and resistance, the need to make meaning, the value of community, and the value of intergenerational relationships in the passing on of story. Thus, I wanted to see if any of these values were what informed teachers of African or Indigenous descent. In choosing to look at a teacher who was Caucasian, I wanted to explore their reasoning for using storytelling and see if it differed to those of
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African and Indigenous descent. I knew from previous literature that some teachers who used storytelling in the classroom were influenced by oral cultures. I wanted to see if this matched experiences of other teachers.

Finally, I required teachers be willing to talk about their experiences. My assumption was that these teachers were people that valued sharing their experiences and resources. Also, I wanted to communicate to potential teacher participants that their experiences were valuable and worth learning from through an interview process.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

Teachers for the study were largely pursued through convenience sampling (Cresswell, 2013, p. 158). Due to being in an academic educational program, connections with faculty members in the Masters of Teaching program were utilized to gain access to potential participants. I also have personal connections to people who are connected to the Afrocentric and First Nations school in the Toronto District School Board. I utilized these contacts to gain access to potential participants. Due to the specificity of the subject matter, I decided convenience sampling was appropriate in locating teachers who were using storytelling from African or Indigenous frameworks. Furthermore, since relationships are significant to both African and Indigenous cultures, it seemed fitting to pursue teacher participants through existing relationships in my life [(Archibald (2008), Champion (2005), Smitherman (1977), Restoule (2011)]. I also asked the principals of the schools drawn upon permission to advertise my study in the staff lounge, so that I could make the study accessible to all teachers at the school and not just those who had personal connections to my contacts. Furthermore, I shared my
personal background with interested teachers so that they could get a sense of who I was as a person and my hopes as a researcher.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

Annie is an Indigenous woman and member of the Mocreebec Council of the Cree Nation in Moose Factory. Annie taught adult learning in an Indigenous education program at an Ontario university for a year. Annie is currently completing her Masters of Education. Her focus for her Masters of Education is Indigenous Education. Her experiences of being educated in and teaching from an Indigenous framework made her an ideal candidate for this study. Annie was introduced to me by a friend who was a former student of Annie’s and vouched for her frequent use of storytelling in the classroom. Furthermore, Annie’s use of storytelling has been shaped by her cultural background, which offered an Indigenous perspective to the study.

Marcus is African-Guyanese man who has been teaching for 23 years. He started his teaching career in South America where he taught for three years. He then moved back to Ontario to teach. He has been teaching at a diverse inner city high school in Toronto for the past 18 years. He has taught multiple subjects, including business and English, but is currently teaching and the department head of drama. I met Marcus during one of my practicum placements. My associate teacher indicated to me that he was someone who used oral storytelling to teach. Marcus’s intentional use of storytelling and the incorporation of oral traditions qualified him for the study. Also, his experience as a person of African descent fit the requirements of this study.
Lisa is an African-Canadian woman of Jamaican immigrant parents. Lisa has been teaching for approximately 12 years. Lisa is an elementary school teacher that has had experiences teaching kindergarten, Grades 1, 7 and 8 in two different school boards. She has taught core French, music, art, and drama. Lisa has taught at an Africentric school in Toronto for the past nine years. I got in contact with her through a friend who has close ties to the school. Lisa is a published author who frequently uses stories in her teaching practice. Furthermore, her background as a person of African descent and her experience teaching in an Africentric model aligned well with the requirements for this study.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this research project began with a literature review. David Silverman, in his book *Doing Qualitative Research a Practical Handbook*, advocated for doing research within the context of data analysis (Silverman, 2000, p. 136). Thus, the literature review was the first step in making sense of storytelling from African and Indigenous perspectives. After conducting interviews, the next step in data analysis was transcribing each interview. The teachers who were interviewed were then invited to review the transcriptions and to make any additions or changes they saw fit to their responses. In line with anti-oppressive research, the process by which research is conducted is just as important as the purpose for which it’s conducted (Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, 2005, p.267). Therefore, while time constraints did not permit me to incorporate teachers in the co-creation of questions, I wanted to enable teachers involved to be able to shape the data (Brown and Strega, 2005; Cresswell, 2013). This was an
invitation to pursue a mutual and respectful research design. None of the participants, after reviewing the transcripts, made any changes or additions to the original transcript.

After the teacher participants checked the data, I did a first reading of the transcript and coded each transcript individually into categories of data by using the interview questions as a guiding tool and by making notes in the margins of the transcripts (Cresswell, 2013). I highlighted repeating themes and compared them to the themes drawn out of each transcript. In a second reading of the transcript, I looked at categories and themes and synthesized where it made sense (Cresswell, 2013). I grouped themes into sub-categories and then synthesized them into the following major categories: educators’ experiences, educators’ practices shaped by storytelling, and benefits of storytelling on students. Once the themes were synthesized, I attempted to make meaning of the data (Cresswell, 2013).

The final stage of the process was looking at null data or the data that was not included in what teachers disclosed (Cresswell, 2013). I chose not to involve teacher participants in this stage of the data analysis in the case that biases or blind spots of the teacher would influence how this section was interpreted. Furthermore, I wanted to offer my own analysis with the literature review as a guiding framework.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Ethical procedures were a strong consideration of this study. I attempted to acknowledge my role as a researcher and the unbalanced power dynamic inherent to a design where one person is acquiring information from others (Brown, Strega, 2005 p. 258), by putting in place several measures to balance that power dynamic. First,
confidentiality was upheld through the signing of a letter of consent (Appendix A), and the use of pseudonyms for teacher participants (Cresswell, 2013). Any identifying features of the teachers revealed in the interviews were changed in order to maintain confidentiality. There were no known risks associated with the study; however, I was sensitive to acquiring information from ethnic groups that have historically been oppressed and tried to put in place several steps that would create more of a balanced and mutual relationship (Brown and Strega, 2005, p. 262). Thus, many of my practices in this area were shaped by Brown and Strega who challenged researchers to “approach them as if we may be in relationship with people for life” (Brown, Strega, 2005, p. 263). In order to respectfully acquire knowledge, teachers could decline to answer any of the questions asked. I also implemented member checking at two points in the study: I allowed teacher participants to review the transcript of their interview and make additions or changes.

Brown and Strega wrote, “data in its origins means gift” (2005, p. 269), so I attempted to treat the data collected in this way. The tape records of the interviews and data collected were stored in a password protected laptop and word file. The file and tape records will be destroyed 5 years after the study is presented and/or published. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point during the study even after consent had been given. Honesty and transparency were pursued at all stages of the study, as outlined in the previous steps.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strength

Qualitative research is primarily about people sharing their experiences in natural settings and providing in-depth snapshots into a topic (Hammersley, 2013). Martin
Hammersley advocated for three strengths of interviews as the primary source of data: “As a source of witness information about the social world…As a source of participant-analysis…As an indirect source of evidence about informants’ attitudes or perspectives” (2013, p.68). All of the aforementioned reasons are merits of qualitative research and by-product this study which utilized interviews from teacher-participants. Teachers were given an opportunity to voice their experiences and to reflectively assess the pedagogical approach of storytelling in the classroom, which in turn offered an in-depth study of the practice of storytelling. The study provided a means to voice non-dominant approaches to teaching in the academic sphere and attempted to put in place anti-oppressive practices (Brown, Strega, 2005). Furthermore, interviewing teachers of African, Indigenous, and Caucasian descent offered a fuller picture of why and how storytelling is being used from these different perspectives. This provided a rich discourse between these approaches.

However, looking solely at these three perspectives compromised the depth of the study since only one teacher-participant from each cultural group participated. A significant limitation of the study is its scope; one member of a cultural group can in no way communicate the variance and vastness of that culture (Cresswell, 2013). While this study adds to a deeper understanding of storytelling and its ties to culturally responsive pedagogy, it only skims the surface of this practice. The study only interviewed teachers on the topic of storytelling, so classroom observation and student response was indirectly gathered. This indirect gathering of student response is a limitation of the study. The assessment of students’ engagement in storytelling depended on the perceptions of the teacher-participants. Ideally, the study would have also been designed to incorporate student interviews and to gather classroom observations, but the ethical limitations of the
MTRP did not permit to this. Another limitation of the study was time, which shaped some of the anti-oppressive aims of the study. Teachers were not given the option to co-create questions, which arguably created a power imbalance in how the data gathering was achieved. While the limitations of the study are apparent, there was much value of gleaning more information on this topic.

3.7 Conclusion

The previous chapter helped to frame some of the key choices made for this study. The decision to use qualitative research and to interview teachers was made so that teacher’s experiences would be highlighted. Furthermore, the emphasis on looking at teachers from African, Indigenous, and Caucasian backgrounds was utilized to compare and contrast the various cultural values and choices as it pertains to the use of storytelling as a teaching practice. Ethical considerations that reiterated anti-oppressive values were drawn upon in when gathering and analyzing data for the study. The following chapter will make the transition to the findings of the study.

Chapter 4: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

The following chapter describes the findings of a qualitative study on how teachers experience the use of storytelling in their teaching practices, specifically from their own Indigenous or African frameworks. The findings come out of three 40 minute, separately conducted interviews with educators. Each interview was initially coded into individual pieces of data, then synthesized into larger themes (Cresswell, 2013). Finally,
the findings were organized based on the sub-questions of the primary research question that they best related to. Participants will go by the pseudonyms: Annie, Lisa, and Marcus so to maintain their confidentiality. Participants were recruited through personal contacts who connected me with potential participants that fit the research requirements (see Appendix A for the consent letter that described requirements).

The section on findings will be organized into three major categories that directly relate to the sub-questions of the research topic. The first category relates to the question: what informs teachers who implore use of storytelling in the classroom? This category will be broken down into subsection that will explore findings of the educators’ culture and their derived values, education and professional development and the values tied to that experience, and finally how educators defined storytelling. The second category relates to the question: how are teachers creating culturally relevant pedagogy/inclusivity through use of storytelling in classroom? This category will illustrate the educator’s practice shaped by the use of storytelling. Notably, there were six common areas that the use of storytelling spoke to as it pertained to the educator’s practice: the emphasis on orality, the creation of community, student-centred learning, meaning making, and challenges of using storytelling. Finally, the third category will explore the sub-question: how do educators think students benefit from use of storytelling in classroom when used to create inclusivity? This category will look at educators’ perceptions of the benefits and limitations of storytelling on students. Finally, the findings will be analyzed to make sense of what the use of storytelling might mean for educators and for the students they teach.
4.1 Educators’ Experience

4.1.1 Culture

Educators spoke about how their cultural identities shaped their use of storytelling in teaching practices. Annie responded to a question about her background as an educator by saying: “My background first of all is Cree.” Annie described her Cree background as her primary identity and what has largely shaped her as an educator. Furthermore, Annie shared that she is an intergenerational survivor of residential schools. Annie learned about residential schools through her father’s stories about his experience attending one. Annie’s experience with storytelling is directly tied to her relationship with her family and culture. Similarly, Marcus spoke to how his family’s cultural background influenced his use of storytelling. Marcus spoke of his Guyanese “roots” as the inception of his interest in storytelling. Marcus expressed his fascination with his mother and aunties telling stories; furthermore, he expressed how these stories “prompted me to stay connected to Guyana in a way that I don’t think anything else has.” When Marcus’s mother passed away, he asked his aunts to tell him stories about her life. Through that experience, he learned new stories about his mother. These educators’ experiences with storytelling were informed by ties to family and culture. Lisa described her culture in reference to her teaching practices by drawing on her family’s Jamaican background. For example, Lisa used stories from the Caribbean and Africa to teach students. Lisa described that her former principal advocated for oral storytelling as reinforcing “our culture” (African culture). His support was one of the impetuses for being part of the From 3 to 3 program. According to Lisa, From 3 to 3 emphasizes literacy through story. Each study participant referenced using their culture as they practise storytelling in the classroom.
Participants’ cultural backgrounds influenced their teaching practices related to storytelling. Annie stated that her “Cree background resonates because…I’m able to bring that into the classroom and share.” Notably, Annie, utilized storytelling to teach her students about residential schools, which directly connects her experiences to her students’ understanding and educational experience of residential schools. Furthermore, Annie, approached storytelling from an Indigenous perspective. This is also seen in how she set up her classroom: students were invited to sit in a circle, a smudge was performed at the beginning of class, students’ questions determined what the class discussed, and an elder was invited to co-facilitate. Annie incorporated the Indigenous concept of holism into various aspects of her teaching. Jo-Ann Archibald defines holism as:

An indigenous philosophical concept of holism refers to the interrelatedness between the intellectual, spiritual (metaphysical values and beliefs and the Creator), emotional, and physical (body and behavior/action) realms to form a whole healthy person. The development of holism extends to and is mutually influenced by one’s family, community, band, and nation (2008, p. 11).

Annie’s experience of belonging to the MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation in Moose Factory, have strongly influenced her practice as an educator. Furthermore, the university she worked for encouraged her to bring Indigenous approaches into learning.

The previous examples illustrate that there is a direct link between educators’ cultural experiences of storytelling and their ability to use it within the classroom. Geneva Gay argues that, “Ethnic identity is a powerful need and valuable resource that should be employed and facilitated by instructional leaders” (1999, p. 196). Both Marcus and Annie exemplified this as they described strong familial and cultural ties to
storytelling. There was a parallel between Marcus’s experience with his aunties and mother telling stories, and his practice of allowing students to sit together to share their own stories. Marcus described his interest in storytelling as something he “always migrated to for some reason.” I would go a step further and say that Marcus’s interest in storytelling is directly linked to being a person of African descent. Tempii Champion posits that African American storytelling happens in various aspects of daily life and enables the preservation of history of self, family, and ethnicity (2003, p.1). This is illustrated as Marcus described his connection to Guyana and his family through stories told by his mother and aunts. In allowing students to draw on their own personal experiences to explore their origins, Marcus reiterated his own experience in hearing stories that allowed him to connect to his origins in Guyana. In essence, Marcus passed on what he himself experienced. Annie also invited her students into traditions and stories that her family passed on to her. Lisa drew on stories from her ethnic and cultural background, as a person of African-Jamaican descent, and brought these stories into her teaching practices. All of these examples spoke to educators’ cultural experiences of storytelling as being resources they can draw from in teaching practice.

Furthermore, both the African and Indigenous worldviews facilitate the interconnectedness between past experiences and current realities (Archibald, 2008; Champion, 2003; Ong, 1982; Smitherman, 1977; Vansina, 1971). The practices of the educators interviewed for this study show this interconnectedness. Annie articulated this idea in her decision to “bring that background into the classroom,” through the practice of storytelling and through the content of the course on Indigenous studies. Marcus also suggested this when he described his belief that “everybody has history” and a need “to
connect to that origin” as a reason for deciding to use storytelling in his classroom. Lisa’s belief that she could draw on stories from her culture to be utilized within the classroom space seemed to motivate her decision to use Caribbean stories. These examples illustrated an interconnectedness between the personal and professional lives of these educators. This finding raises the question: should teachers be more intentional about incorporating their ethnic and cultural practices into teaching? Further, how do dominant-race teachers do this already without noticing and thus support dominant, but too often invisible, norms in the classroom and in schools. Terry Blackhawk advocates for this personal sharing within the context of storytelling as it is being “a vulnerable teacher” (1990, p.31). Blackhawk describes educators’ functioning more like elders or transmitters of cultural practices than just teachers. In the case of storytelling, it would be beneficial for educators to draw on their cultural practice of storytelling because this reiterates “a lived experience.” These “lived experiences” could extend beyond the formal curriculum and more aptly reflect diverse perspectives.

Teachers reproduce the ideas that have been passed on to them. Often, these ideas are hidden curriculum. In Western education, this means practices that purport white, Christian, European, and middle-class values (Contenta, 1993; Kemph, 2006). Educators from African and Indigenous backgrounds challenge this hidden curriculum when they use storytelling. In the case of storytelling, educators can offer what they know and have experienced. In her article “Teachers of color creating and recreating identities in suburban schools,” Vera Lee speaks to the varying experiences that non-white teachers bring to their practice. Lee writes, “moreover, teachers of color often bring to their classrooms alternative pedagogies that counter traditional notions of schooling and
learning” (2013, p.1). The power to counter the hidden curriculum and to explicitly draw on cultures where storytelling is central is a strength of storytelling from Indigenous and African frameworks. The cultural experience of storytelling is a rich resource in shaping teaching as it draws on practices that are beyond what is formally taught and valued in Western educational practices.

While there are clear links to educators’ practices of storytelling and culture, not all educators indicated their cultures were strong drivers in their decision to use storytelling. Neither Marcus nor Lisa, while speaking of their cultural backgrounds, clearly articulated this as the predominant reason for their use of storytelling. In contrast, Annie identified her being Cree as the impetus for her decision to use storytelling in her teaching practice. This difference made me question what factors might contribute to cultural background being a driving force in storytelling practices. Lee describes the following, “teachers of color need more professional and social support in mainly white school settings” (2013, p. 3). While Lisa had primarily worked at an Africentric school and described her former principal advocating for her learning about and using storytelling, Marcus did not describe this same support in his relationship with his colleagues.

Furthermore, neither Marcus nor Lisa referenced their teacher education programs as fostering their practice of storytelling. Lee contends, “The idea of fostering alternative images of teachers to preservice is particularly critical for students of color who plan on entering the profession” (2013, p.2). One of the ways fostering alternative images of teachers can happen is if teacher education programs support the “norms and values” (Sleeter, Thao, 2007, p.5), that non-dominant teachers bring to teaching. Naturally, this
raises the questions of the role of teacher education programs in supporting teachers from non-dominant perspectives to incorporate their cultural practices into their educational practices.

Sleeter and Thao argue:

By failing to recognize the norms and values that students of color bring into teaching, teacher education programs give the message to people of color that they are not wanted. Students of color need mentors for guidance, role models to inspire them, and education programs that model respect and encourage them to become engaged in the classroom. (2007, p.5)

Even though educators did not speak to teacher education programs as fostering their practice of storytelling, they did speak to the role of prior education and professional development.

4.1.2 Education and Professional Development

Participants spoke to education and professional development as being places where they developed their value and practice of storytelling. Marcus referenced a course he took in university on oral narratives as a significant moment when he learned about the value of storytelling. According to Marcus, the course had an “Indigenous base to its teachings.” This course emphasized passing on stories through generations and this directly linked to Marcus’s own family practices of passing on stories. At the moment, Marcus is working with the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education (OISE) in a global drama research initiative; the current unit he is teaching emphasizes students telling their
stories. From 2011-2012, Lisa was also part of *From 3 to 3* (mentioned above), that trained her in oral storytelling. Lisa described several techniques she learned and resources she received through her involvement with the program. Lisa described the value of the program as it taught her “different rhymes and poems and using those in transition times, to help build community.” Furthermore, the *From 3 to 3* program taught her how to use storytelling in other classroom activities, like writing and drawing pictures connected to the oral stories told. Alongside teaching, Annie is completing her M.Ed. at an Ontario university. Through this education program, Annie continues to practise storytelling. She described a particular course where she explored the theme of “memory and commemoration” through storytelling about her family’s “lived experience” of residential schools Annie is not only using storytelling as a teacher, but she is also using it as a graduate student. Furthermore, Annie used a “framework of decolonization” within her teaching practices. This framework actively challenges implicit curriculum and Western educational practices in general. There seems to be a relationship between Annie’s current educational training and her classroom practice.

Professional development and teacher education were both referenced by participants as places where they gained further skills in storytelling. This raises the question: what is the role of professional development and education in the use of storytelling? While Lisa referenced her culture as a place that she drew upon for stories, she largely cited the *From 3 to 3* program as where she learned actual storytelling practices. Marcus also cited a course he took in university that piqued his interest in storytelling. Marcus’s current use of storytelling is fuelled by his partnership with a drama project at OISE. Both examples suggest that additional training and educational
opportunities increased teachers’ capacity to utilize storytelling. Returning to the concept of the hidden curriculum, educators whose cultural practices utilize storytelling within the context of an ethnocentric school system may find it difficult to advocate for their cultural practices in their teaching (Lee, 2013). However, when educational institutions affirm this, it could make it easier for those practices to be utilized. This is clearly seen in the case of Annie, who described the institution she worked at incorporating storytelling into its curriculum. This enabled her to freely utilize this in her teaching practices. While it is problematic to rely on institutions to affirm storytelling, as it harkens to a power-differential where Western institutions affirm non-Western educational practices, this affirmation is necessary for storytelling to be increasingly utilized. A consideration that will need to be made alongside education and training in storytelling is the framework in which storytelling is taught.

Jo-Ann Archibald proposes the following frame: “the principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interconnectedness, and synergy helped me get to the ‘core’ of making meaning with and through stories” (2008, p. 140). While Archibald specifically refers to a framework related to Indigenous storytelling, her point illustrates the need to be mindful of the framework in which storytelling occurs. The following section will look more closely at how the participants utilize storytelling, which will inform what this framework might look like.

4.1.3 Educators’ Definition of Storytelling

Before looking at how storytelling shapes classroom practices, I will explore each participant’s definition of storytelling in order to better understand the pedagogical values
they use. Lisa defined storytelling as “me speaking and kids listening. They could be participating in the story with me.” Since Lisa works with elementary-aged children, she often used stories that have a rhyme or a pattern to encourage students to participate. She often told the stories to engage younger students. Lisa described using music and drama as part of the process of storytelling. Drama also influenced Marcus’s definition of storytelling, but the high-school aged students he works with caused him to offer a different view. For Marcus “Storytelling is using your thoughts and imagination to construct… I’m just compelled to say story is story.” Marcus further connected storytelling with “taking somebody on a journey of a particular event... It’s history. It can be ancestry and so many things.” While Marcus acknowledged he often thinks about storytelling in terms of its original form as “oral communication”, he also acknowledged that storytelling takes on various forms today that are tied to technology. Annie described the Medicine Wheel that illustrates “the social, the emotional, cultural aspects of life” to storytelling. Ultimately, Annie defined storytelling as “a lived experience of Indigenous peoples’ histories and lives, not just in a historical context, but contemporary, how we got here today, and we have to understand the sacrifices that our ancestors gave to contemporary lives of Indigenous people today.” Annie’s definition related storytelling about the past to the current reality: storytelling has real-time implications for those involved.

Educators’ personal experiences shape each of their definitions of storytelling. Lisa recounted telling stories to students, but also inviting them to participate in the story too. Lisa learned this technique through the From 3 to 3 program. Lisa also incorporated music and drama into her use of storytelling, which is linked to her interest in the arts and
her particular training in teaching music. In the case of Marcus, his description of storytelling as a “journey” was exemplified in how he invited students to journey into their own origins. Marcus also invited students to co-construct, within the context of his drama class, as they used story to build community and dramatic pieces. Annie created her definition by using the Medicine Wheel and various Indigenous practices in her classroom. Furthermore, Annie’s concept of a “lived experience” was tied to what she shared as a teacher and what she invited students to share.

Educators’ definitions of storytelling determine how storytelling is utilized in the classroom. This affirms beliefs about teaching are clearly linked to practice (Fang, 1996, p. 50). Educators’ experiences and the context in which they teach influence the definition of storytelling they produce. The context in which educators are using storytelling will ultimately shape how it is used. Furthermore, this definition is directly related to practice. All educators paused to consider how they defined storytelling. Marcus even remarked, “That’s really difficult.” The interview seemed to provide a space, through direct questioning, where educators could articulate their beliefs about storytelling.

4.2 Educators’ Practice Shaped by Storytelling

4.2.1 Orality emphasized

Educators described classrooms where orality was emphasized. For Annie and Marcus, this often took place in the context of students voicing their own stories or experiences. After the smudge was performed at the beginning of class, Annie would establish a “sharing circle” where she would ask her students if they wanted to share how
they were doing. Students often discussed personal aspects of their lives with the larger group. The sharing circle could be reopened at any point during the class. Lisa’s students would use orality when they learned stories with patterns and participated by telling these stories. Often, Lisa used rhymes or poems to help students learn and be part of the stories. Marcus said he often begins a class by “introducing a story to get the students to kind of speak first of all.” In Marcus’s class, there are times when students sit for an entire 75-minute period “with people just talking.” Marcus acknowledged this experience was unfamiliar for many students. In all cases, educators described a classroom where both educators and students were talking and listening; orality was being emphasized. Lucia Doherty argues oral language is the oldest form of communication, thus validating its use in her classroom (1990, p.35). After recognizing that sound is the primary mode of communication for teenage students that she worked with, Doherty positions her students in a similar place as people belonging to oral cultures (1990, p.35). Similarly, the educators involved in the research saw value in students talking and connecting with this primary form of communication.

4.2.2 Create community

Storytelling was found to create community amongst class members. In his article “Making Connections through Holistic Learning”, John Miller advocates that “Students must also see the classroom as a learning community where they can work collaboratively with other students in cooperative learning groups” (1999, p.7). Annie described that the sharing circle allowed students to feel comfortable with one another. Marcus very intentionally used storytelling at the beginning of a unit for students to get to
know one another by sharing students’ personal origin stories. He also used it to “develop the ideas of the collective.” In the context of teaching drama, Marcus used personal storytelling to develop a team of students who trust and communicate well with one another. He did this to create cooperative space in which students can collaboratively participate in drama. In order to engage students in personal storytelling, “establishing an environment of trust” is an essential first step in community building. Promoting a trusting and safe space for students to relate to one another was considered a benefit of using storytelling. Working together contributed to the students have a sense of the collective. They were not producing something apart, but rather producing something together. Thus, learning becomes a less individualized and more of a collective experience. This references the work of constructivist educational theorists like Piaget and Vygotsky who contend that students should be constructors of education along with teachers (Woolfolk, 2012). The community of students is central to how the class engages with learning: in the case of Annie, students’ questions and lived experiences were what guided the class.

4.2.3 Student-centred learning

Storytelling also leads to student-centred learning. Student-centred learning is defined as “Students are seen as active participators rather than passive receivers” (Tangney, 2014, p.267). Participants often described their students as active members through their students’ contribution to knowledge production. One of the reasons Annie used storytelling was “so students are able to generate more knowledge and that understanding when we have a discussion.” She then went on to say that it’s “not just my
viewpoint.” Annie does not see herself as being central to knowledge production, but
rather she helped to generate knowledge production, and in so doing, encouraged student-
centred learning. Similarly, Marcus suggested that while he intentionally used
storytelling to develop ideas with students and to form a collective, there were also
moments where “we shift gears” because of something a student said. By allowing
students to bring up pertinent issues or ideas, Marcus enabled them to shape the trajectory
of a class. Alongside getting students to join in with rhymes and poems, Lisa created
stories in which students’ names would be substituted into the stories. Excited students
would demand, “I want to be in the story too!” While students did not create the content,
they took part in being a character in the story. All participants used storytelling to
promote student-centred learning and this seemingly benefitted students.

4.2.4 Meaning-making

As a result of orality being emphasized, community being created, and students
being central to knowledge production, students were encouraged to make meaning.
Geneva Smitherman’s description of making meaning can be applied to how this
occurred in the classrooms of the educators interviewed. Smitherman describes making
meaning as “a functional dynamic that is simultaneously a mechanism for learning about
life and the world and a vehicle for group approval and recognition” (1977, p. 80).
Smitherman’s description allows for students to make sense of the world around them
and simultaneously find belonging in a community. Marcus recounted a story of a
former student who “wrote a play that we had in the Sears festival last year… she
actually used the whole idea of story to basically tell her personal story in a way.”
Seemingly, this student’s ability to connect personal storytelling and drama through writing a play suggested the student derived meaning from the process. This happened for other students in Marcus’s class. He recalled students sharing very personal stories with one another. Marcus described sessions where storytelling led to “meaningful discussion.” Also, his use of origin stories was particularly useful as a catalyst for students understanding themselves more deeply. Annie also spoke about how storytelling helped students connect what they were learning in her class to their own personal stories. Students’ questions drove class discussion. Annie described engaging students’ questions as a beneficial way to help students make meaning. This is also true with younger students. Lisa noticed that using storytelling can be used to model behaviour to students. Modeling behaviour extends beyond just teaching knowledge; it includes teaching students how to behave, and ultimately, respectfully belong to a community. Going back to Smitherman’s definition of how meaning is derived for students in an African worldview, it is apparent that meaning-making is a by-product of storytelling.

4.2.5 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

I expected the desire to use culturally relevant pedagogy to be a primary reason why educators used storytelling in their teaching. Yet, this did not appear to be the case. Culturally relevant pedagogy was coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings as “the ability to link principles of learning with deep understanding of (and appreciation for) culture.” (2014. Pg. 77). When asked if students’ culture was a reason for using storytelling, Marcus responded with “not particularly.” While Lisa’s principal advocated that storytelling “reinforces our culture” it was not emphasized by Lisa as a reason for her personal
decision to use storytelling. In the case of Annie, her use of storytelling was largely prompted by the context of teaching Indigenous education and her own personal experiences. While educators clearly see a value in storytelling, they did not outright use it for the purpose of culturally meeting the needs of their students. That said, the practice of teachers sharing their personal experiences could lay the groundwork for culturally relevant pedagogy, and in turn facilitate the process of students making meaning.

Culturally relevant pedagogy draws on the idea of students being contributors and meaning-makers in their educational practices. This study supports these findings. Thus, it would seem that educators were drawing on aspects of culturally relevant pedagogy whether they were aware of it or not.

4.3 Students Shaped by use of Storytelling

4.3.1 Benefits of Storytelling to Students

Educators’ perceptions of the benefits of storytelling for their students include: increased student voice, student ownership of learning, student connection to the class community, and student enjoyment of learning. Increased student voice was illustrated as educators encouraged students to also partake in storytelling. Annie recounted an informative example when she described a student who was shy and very reluctant to share when she entered her class. By the end of the course, the student was “answering questions, generating conversations.” Tied to the idea of increased student voice was the perceived benefit that students took more ownership of their learning. This is demonstrated as students contribute in knowledge production by participating in telling stories, asking questions, and inserting themselves into stories. Furthermore, storytelling
was seen as an impetus for other work being created. The largest benefit stories had on students was in the way storytelling increased students’ sense of being part of a community. Jo-Ann Archibald reinforces this view when she argues that the use of storytelling is a way to find belonging in the community (2008, p.26). Educators described students feeling a sense of trust, vulnerability with others, openness to sharing, and connections to one another as the result of using storytelling in the classroom. The previous description illustrates aspects of belonging. Marcus observed the impact of trust and openness built between classmates when he said “the environment seems to have changed as a result for this particular group. It’s been quite amazing to see them work on that.” Belonging to a community is a perceived benefit of storytelling. Educators said students enjoyed and appreciated learning because of the community created through using storytelling.

4.3.2 Challenges of Using Storytelling in the Classroom

While storytelling was mostly talked about in positive terms by educators, they also spoke to challenges of using it in the classroom. These were often specific to the contexts in which the educators were teaching. While the vulnerability that is established in Marcus’s class is beneficial to students’ sense of belonging to a community, he explained that sometimes students can be “triggered” when they share very personal stories. Marcus admitted he is not a guidance counsellor, so he cannot always appropriately support students in those vulnerable moments. Lisa spoke about behaviour sometimes being an issue when stories are being told. Through her training in storytelling, she was encouraged to not discipline students whilst telling stories.
According to Lisa, this was difficult to avoid, especially if students were misbehaving while she was telling a story. In the case of younger students, it would seem that it would be necessary to help students negotiate behaviour during storytelling. Annie described not being able to bring in Indigenous elders to tell stories as a challenge to using storytelling. This is a challenge because, as she described, “Indigenous elders bring a richness because they lived through the experience.” This point raised by Annie harkens to Archibald’s caution to not re-colonize through the act of appropriation; thus, raising issues around cultural respect. Educators described instances where work connected to storytelling could be assessed. None described an assessment tool for the actual storytelling. While these challenges raised are legitimate, the use of storytelling is strongly linked to inclusivity, which will be further discussed in the following chapter.

4.4 Conclusion

Inclusivity was seemingly cultivated when educators used storytelling in their teaching practices. The focus of the findings began by looking at how educators’ practices were particularly shaped by their cultural backgrounds, education, professional training, and ultimately their definition of storytelling. There was a direct correlation between educators’ definition of storytelling and the experiences that shaped that definition and their practice related to storytelling. Findings indicated the emphasis on orality, community, student-centred learning, and meaning-making as central tenets of educators’ practices. Furthermore, this had numerous positive impacts on students that gestured towards inclusivity, like increased voice, ownership of learning, connection to the class community, and enjoyment of learning. However, the findings largely indicate
an undervalued focus of inclusivity: the significance of creating inclusive spaces for teachers.

Chapter 5: IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The study reported on illustrates how three Ontario teachers experience the use of storytelling in the classroom from an African and Indigenous perspective. The study attempted to uncover: what informed the practice of teachers who employ storytelling; how teachers are creating inclusivity through the use of storytelling; and how educators think students benefit from the use of storytelling.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

Overall, the results suggested the African and Indigenous educators interviewed for the study were shaped by their respective cultures in their use of storytelling. Furthermore, these educators’ propensity for using storytelling was further cultivated through education and participation in professional development. The findings highlighted the significance of educators incorporating their cultural practices into the classroom and the need for educators to be provided with opportunities to develop these practices. An emphasis on orality, community, student-centred learning, and allowing students to make meaning as related to aspects of their lives shaped how educators used storytelling in their classrooms. These previous qualities appear to be linked to cultural values generally associated with African and Indigenous cultures. More so, students benefitted from the use of storytelling in the classroom as it promoted students’ voice,
ownership of learning, connection to the class community, and enjoyment of learning. The use of storytelling in the classroom promoted an inclusive space that gave rise to a community of learners.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Inclusivity for Teachers

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009a) gives the following definition for inclusive education: “Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (p.68). Storytelling is a powerful tool in enabling students to “see themselves reflected in the curriculum” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p.68), as it draws on class members’ experiences, questions, and stories as described by participants. Furthermore, it places students at the centre of learning. This was illustrated powerfully in the research as educators’ practices facilitated increased student voice and ownership of learning. However, findings pointed to a larger theme that highlighted the role of educators.

In the case of my research on storytelling, the definition of inclusivity, as outlined by Ontario’s Ministry of Education, is redirected. Not only is it necessary for the diversity embodied by students to be respected in the classroom, but the diversity embodied in teachers also needs to be respected. All participants spoke to their cultural backgrounds as places where storytelling was cultivated; one of the participants, Marcus, articulated this as, “I was always fascinated with the whole idea of story and how that
sort of transferred down to generations. So I trace that very closely to my whole family history.” Furthermore, educators did not stop at having had a cultural experience of storytelling. They emphasized the need to “bring that into the classroom and share,” as described by Annie in regards to her Cree background. This idea of educators bringing their culture into the classroom through storytelling strongly points to the idea that educators who are inclusive of their own cultural practices related to storytelling in the classroom end up creating inclusive spaces for students.

Sleeter and Thao urge, “Race does not determine teacher quality. However, race, ethnicity, and language shape the nature of experiences teachers bring to the classroom, as well as insights they bring to the teaching profession at large” (2007, p.4). This diversity of the teaching profession is demonstrated as educators’ cultural experiences of storytelling shaped their classroom practice. Furthermore, it suggests that all educators bring their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic biases into their practices. For teachers that adhere to dominant white-cultural values, the differences they experience are seemingly less noticeable in the landscape of Western education, which reiterates white-dominant values (Contenta, 1993; Reagan, 2005; Kemph, 2006). For educators of non-dominant backgrounds, the question of how their respective cultures find their way into their teaching practice is a relevant challenge.

In this study, education and professional development were factors that encouraged educators to make a link between their cultural practices of storytelling and their classroom practices. Seemingly, education and professional development bridged the gap that enabled these teachers of African and Indigenous backgrounds to incorporate storytelling into their teaching practices. Needless to say, this highlights the culture of
the curriculum as being one that is shaped by dominant white values (Contenta, 1993; Kemph; 2005; Regan, 2006), which these educators challenged through their practice of storytelling “through a framework of decolonization,” as Annie described it. Not all educators articulated this direct challenge to the curriculum; however, they inadvertently expressed this through their lived experiences as educators. As a result, the educators’ practices were infused with their cultural practices of storytelling. This research reinforced that when educators incorporate their cultural practices into the curriculum, “diversity is honoured” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a, p.68). When teaching practices are dominated by white and middle-class values, which seem to be shared by the majority of the teaching population in Ontario (Eslinger, 2013), then this has negative impacts on student populations that do not reflect these values. Simply put, these students are relegated to the periphery of education and are not given equal access to learning. This can be seen in the case of the low academic achievement for students of African and Indigenous descent (Dei, 2008; Gallagher-Mackay, Methot, Kidder, 2014).

This research study advocated that if students are to ultimately feel included in the curriculum, then teachers need to first feel included. Annie, Lisa, and Marcus included their culturally shaped practices of storytelling into the classroom and, as a result, created classrooms that promoted inclusivity for their students. The educators in this study allowed their students to shape classroom practice alongside them. Geneva Gay advocates that teachers who identify as non-dominant, but are teaching in dominant curriculum spaces, are “cultural brokers” who “provide mechanisms for establishing continuity between ethnically and socially diverse cultures and mainstream school culture” (1993, p. 293). This point fortifies the need to empower teachers from diverse
non-dominant backgrounds to insert their cultural practices, where appropriate, into their teaching practices.

5.2.2 Inclusivity and Professional Development

One of the ways to empower teachers from non-dominant backgrounds is through intentional professional development of staff in the area of cultural training. These educators need to be affirmed in their cultural practices. Training can offer avenues that help them make that link between their cultural experiences and their teaching practice. In Lisa’s case, her principal powerfully enacted this as she encouraged Lisa to take part in the From 3 to 3 program as it “reinforces our culture.” Within the context of the Africentric school, practices that reinforce African culture are clearly a value, but how does this occur in schools that do not have explicit ties to a particular culture?

School systems must see the cultural diversity of teachers as an asset; furthermore, if this wealth of experience is not supported and encouraged through additional training and education, then it is inevitable that true inclusivity will not be realized. Educational communities lose out on the possibilities of what teachers of non-dominant backgrounds may bring to their own classrooms and with colleagues. What would more intentional incorporation of cultural practices mean for the teaching practice? Possibly, this could mean more shared and diverse learning amongst staff teams of educators, as colleagues would decidedly learn from one another. In this way, staff teams could be influenced by non-dominant teachers who represent “bicultural actors who are able to straddle or syncretize different cultural systems and integrate elements of ethnic cultures into classroom procedures, programs, and practices (Gentemann & Whitehead,
1983)” (Gay, 1993, p.293). Non-dominant teachers can challenge the implicit curriculum as they reflect back their cultural norms and offer who they are through teaching practices. Assumedly, dominant-race teachers do this already, but perhaps without noticing the dominant white system that surrounds them reinforces their practices. So how do educators from non-dominant races receive support in this context? The university Annie worked for supported her use of storytelling and Indigenous practices. This was key in her freely using these methods in her classroom. This example, as well as others cited in Chapter Four, suggests that support by educational institutions is necessary for the cultural practices of non-dominant teachers to be animated in the classroom.

Inclusivity was born out of the recognition that “Globalization, immigration, civil warfare and resettlement communities have resulted in an increase in transnational communities, ethnic and religious and linguistic diversity across both Canada and the United States” (Dei, James-Wilson, Zine, 2002, p.3). While the previous quote has largely been applied to students who are part of the current education landscape in Canada, there is a need to acknowledge that this has simultaneously shaped who educators are as part of this same landscape. When a school system values the diverse background of teachers as an asset for students to better understand non-dominant cultural practices of learning, it recognizes the influence that globalization will increasingly have in students’ lives. Ontarian students have a growing need to adapt to living and working environments that demand a better understand of varied cultural communication practices. Naturally, educators who intentionally and skillfully implement these practices into their teaching-educators who embody their roles as
“cultural brokers” - create beneficial learning environments for their students (Gay, 1993, p. 293).

Such analysis may have the added benefit of drawing critical attention to the overrepresentation of certain stories, norms, values and histories among a largely racially homogenous teaching population. While there are shifts in the ethnic make-up of the teaching population in Ontario, the population at large is still made up of teachers of western European origins. This study intentionally sought the perspective of African and Indigenous educators; thus, representing a nuanced representation of the teaching population.

5.2.3 Personal Implications

As a non-dominant educator, the implications of the study challenge me to first recognize the value of my cultural upbringing. This is something that I’ve often wrestled with incorporating in my teaching practices. Being predominantly schooled in Western institutions, I have often felt dissonance in incorporating my culture into my teaching practices. However, I have come to recognize that my familial and cultural experiences, like the practice of storytelling, are invaluable. This research study has enabled me to see that a practice like storytelling has huge value in the classroom, especially as it pertains to creating community. In future practice, I will intentionally use storytelling within my teaching. Furthermore, I would like to take a class on storytelling so to better learn how to incorporate this into classroom practice. This goal is bolstered by the study’s findings that point to the need to shape my practice to include myself. While this will have benefits for me, it also suggests benefits for students especially as it relates to inclusivity.
5.3 Recommendations

With the implications of the study in mind, it is recommended that school boards better support professional development as it relates to affirming the culture of their non-dominant staff. As illustrated by the participants in the study, there is a need for educators to make a link between their personal and professional lives, especially for educators who are from non-dominant backgrounds. Thus, built-in mechanisms to enable teachers to do this would promote the incorporation of teachers’ cultural practices into the classroom. In specific regards to the practice of storytelling, the *From 3 to 3* program, as well as other storytelling development courses, would be beneficial in training teachers. In terms of resources specifically linked to Indigenous educators or those wanting to be shaped by Indigenous ways of knowing, the Toronto District School Board’s Aboriginal Education Centre, Indigenous Friendship Centres, and the Native Canadian Centre are all resources that Annie cited as valuable communities from which to learn.

Teacher education also plays a huge role training new teachers for the field. Within teacher education programs, there is a need to create space for teacher-candidates to explore the implications of their ethnic and cultural identities as it pertains to teaching. Rosa Hernández Sheets advocates for teacher education programs to ensure that teachers of color, “be provided opportunities to transfer their prior knowledge of culture to pedagogical content knowledge” (2004, p. 164). While there is emphasis on intercultural training and anti-discriminatory education in some teacher education programs, there needs to be intentional spaces for future educators to reflect on how their cultural practices might be utilized within their teaching practices. Teaching institutions must
meaningfully engage non-dominant teacher candidates in how the institution’s environment and curriculum can foster intentional dialogue and support the incorporation of cultural practices into their personal teaching pedagogy. In conclusion, promoting inclusivity within the classroom through practices like storytelling starts with school boards and teaching institutions identifying opportunities that encourage non-dominant teachers to develop cultural practices into their teaching methods.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

The implications of this study strongly suggested a need to draw on teachers’ cultural practices and backgrounds in order to shape classroom practice; however, this does raise the question of how teachers might determine if a cultural practice should be utilized within the classroom. Storytelling is a practice seemingly broad enough to appeal to a wide array of students. However, until the existing best practices in teaching more fully encompass the diversity of cultural teaching practices, there will always be a need to better understand the benefits of these practices in the larger system. Furthermore, this study only looked at culture in terms of place of origin or ethnicity, but it leaves a gap in knowing how teacher identities are shaped by qualities like gender, age, economic class, religion, sexual identity, and physical or mental exceptionalities. Educators could potentially draw on these other identifiers to inform their teaching.

One potential roadblock to applying this research is that institutions will shallowly incorporate storytelling into their classrooms, similar to the rudimentary attempts of recognizing cultural names and holidays as a means of promoting inclusivity of other cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Sleeter, 2012). The challenge is to go deeper to
have non-dominant staff be part of leading and shaping new practices and having
teaching approaches change from the ground up. Furthermore, there needs to be systems
of accountability put in place to support these teachers in seeing through these practices.

Another concern related to this topic is exploring how educators can use practices that
promote inclusivity and not exclusivity. While it was beyond the scope of this study, it
will be important to explore how students experience the use of storytelling, and if they
ever experienced exclusion during the process, and if so, why? Overall, there needs to be
a meaningful application of storytelling, and simultaneously, a sincere supporting of the
diversity of staff to see this actualized. The potential of this suggests further areas of
research in order to build a strong foundation of knowledge that would work to
counteract the systemic issues this research highlights.

Further study must be done in regards to how storytelling is wielded to reinforce
colonial power structures. Thus, there is a need to learn more about the invisibility of
storytelling used by dominant bodies. While storytelling is effective in rupturing colonial
narratives in education, there is also a high chance that it is equally effective in
preserving dominant relations if the stories reinforce colonial values. These might
include stories that normalize middle upper class, heteronormative, white values as part
of daily practice. While this type of storytelling is often unnoticed as powerful tools in
the classroom, it is no less impactful in affirming the students from privileged and
dominant classes while further marginalizing others.
5.5 Concluding Comments

I started off this research by sharing my own story about how I was shaped and educated by storytelling from a young age. What is striking about my own experience is that this was not done in isolation, but through a supportive familial community and through additional education related to storytelling. Educational communities have the potential to be supportive communities in seeing the diversity of staff honoured. While educational communities cannot replace the identity formation that happens in a family, cultural, or ethnic community, they do have the potential to foster their staff’s identity as educators. More significantly, these communities can be inclusive of non-dominant staff members and create means for their cultural practices to be included in the curriculum through support and additional opportunities for training. This research highlights the notion that individuals who make up the field of teaching in Ontario are uniquely different and that their teaching practices are influenced by their diverse personal experiences. Affirming the culture of educators has implications for other practices. Storytelling pushes back on the homogenizing of culture by challenging the implicit curriculum and moving towards a truer picture of diversity.
REFERENCES


Dei, G. S. (2002). In Zine J., James-Wilson S. V. (Eds.), *Inclusive schooling: A teacher's companion to removing the margins*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear __________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the use of storytelling from an African and Indigenous framework in the classroom for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr._________________. My research supervisor is ___________________. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be electronically-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you in your primary place of instruction and at a time convenient to you. Ideally, I would like to conduct the study in the place you primarily teach and utilize storytelling; however, I am open to meet at a place more convenient for you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. During the interview, you may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy. I will also give you the transcript of our interview and allow you to make any additional notes or changes to ensure further accuracy and partnership. If you are willing, I will also ask for your feedback in the final stage of the data analysis, after I’ve attempted to make meaning of the data collected, to ensure that partnership continues.
Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am truly grateful for your willingness partner with me in this research and look forward to how this might shape my practice and the practice of other teachers.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Stacy Sankar
Phone number, email: XXX-XXX-XXX, stacy.sankar@utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: _____________________________
Phone number: _____________________________ Email: _____________________________

Research Supervisor’s Name: _____________________________
Phone #: _____________________________ Email: _____________________________

Consent Form

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

I have read the letter provided to me by _____________________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: _____________________________

Name (printed): _____________________________

Date: _____________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this interview. The aim of this research is to learn how educators use storytelling in their teaching practices to promote inclusivity through culturally relevant pedagogy from an Indigenous or African framework. The interview should take approximately 40 minutes. I will ask you a series of 15 questions focused on your practice as it relates to storytelling. I want to remind you of your right to choose not to answer any question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. What is your experience as an educator?
   a. Do you teach particular courses or subject(s)? What context do you typically teach in?

2. How many years have you worked as an educator?
   a. How many years at this specific school/institution?

Section 2: What/How? Teacher Practices

3. How do you utilize storytelling in your teaching practice?
   a. Is there a particular course/subject that you find it easier to incorporate storytelling?

4. How do you get students to engage with storytelling?
   a. Do you use specific techniques or approaches to help students engage with storytelling?
   b. Do students participate in telling their own stories?

5. How do you define storytelling?

6. What has informed your use of storytelling in your teaching practice?
   a. Are there any particular experiences that have influenced your use of storytelling?
   b. Has your culture/ethnicity shaped your use of storytelling?
Section 3: Beliefs and Values

7. What prompted you to utilize storytelling in your educational practice with your students?
   a. were you responding to the needs of students in your use of storytelling?
   b. was the culture of your students a consideration in your use of storytelling in the classroom?

8. How does the incorporation of storytelling in the classroom impact students?
   a. can you describe a case when a student has benefitted from your use of storytelling?
   b. what are the success criteria you use to judge your use of storytelling with students?

Section 4: Who? Feedback

9. Have you faced any obstacles when incorporating storytelling in the classroom?

10. What type of feedback have you received from other educators regarding your use of storytelling in the classroom?

11. What are some of the limitations of using storytelling in the classroom?

Section 5: Next Steps (What steps?)

12. When teachers are choosing to incorporate storytelling in the classroom, what are important steps that need to be taken during the planning phase? During its implementation? When evaluating its success?

13. Are there any resources you would recommend to other teachers to help them incorporate storytelling in their classroom?

14. Am I neglecting to ask a question that you would like to respond to as it pertains to the use of storytelling in your teaching practice?