The quiet observer: Teacher perceptions of how introverted learners respond to Tribes learning communities

By: Rebecca Stones

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HOW INTROVERTED STUDENTS RESPOND TO TRIBES LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Abstract

The world and workplace value the extroverted learner, where interacting with others in a variety of social settings is key to success (Cain, 2013). Within the school system teachers are moving away from traditional teaching methods and towards a cooperative learning approach, where students become active participants in their learning (Brown & Campione, 2002; Gibbs, 2006; Levitt, 2002; Li & Lam, 2005; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). However, when the classroom structure relies on cooperative group work for student learning, introverted learners can be lost. In light of this problem, this research study set out to learn elementary teachers’ perspectives on how introverted learners respond to Tribes learning communities, a cooperative learning model that utilizes small group learning through following a set of four mutual agreements (Gibbs, 2006). The study found that the small group learning experiences in the form of Tribes can be helpful for introverted learners to engage in discussions and group work because groups are kept small and familiar. Reminding students of the mutual agreements, particularly the right to pass, can also help to foster a safe community for introverted learners. In order to honour multiple learning styles, participants in the study noted the importance of having a reflective teaching pedagogy, and using their observations and feedback to inform their teaching and student learning.

Key Words: Tribes learning communities; introversion; reflective pedagogy; safe space; cooperative learning
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Chapter One: Research Project Overview

1.0 Introduction

The traditional individualist paradigm of teaching in the elementary school classroom is on the decline, in order to make way for a community of learners (Brown & Campione, 2002). In the past, students were seen as a passive recipient of information, success was limited to one way answers, and learning was viewed as an individual activity (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Gibbs, 2006; Levitt, 2002). Today, students are seen as active participants in their learning, are encouraged to be open to a multitude of thoughts and opinions and are engaging in group work learning (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Gibbs, 2006; Levitt, 2002). In light of the paradigm shift, the current version of the Canadian curriculum calls teachers to promote more student talk, and diverse teaching styles in order to engage all learners in the classroom. As such, the emerging paradigm emphasizes a student centered focus, where students learn from one another through cooperative learning strategies (Li & Lam, 2005).

There are many known benefits of cooperative learning experiences, where students are asked to work together to achieve a common goal (Watson, 1992). Some of these benefits include opportunities for higher levels of thinking, more reflective responses, and an increased use of problem solving techniques (Antil, Jenkins, Wayne & Vadasy, 1998; Watson, 1992). The literature also shows that there are many academic and social benefits for students through peer learning and discussion (Watson, 1992). These skills, both academic and social, are considered to be of high value and a necessity in order to be successful in today’s changing world (van der Linden, Erkens, Schmidt & Renshaw, 2000). This change in teaching style to focus on social aspects of learning and problem solving is to help equip students with the necessary skills to
work collaboratively in the workplace (van der Linden, Erkens, Schmidt & Renshaw, 2000).

However, before cooperative learning strategies can be successfully implemented in the classroom, students need to have a guide and an awareness of what is expected of them. Since students do not automatically know how to interact with their peers in a respectful and encouraging way, it is necessary for students to be taught and given time to practice the skills. Thus, it is integral for teachers to take the time to “set up the conditions” for cooperative learning, in order for success (Mueller & Fleming, 2001, p. 265).

A training process that teachers use to promote classroom community and supports cooperative student learning is a teaching model called Tribes (Gibbs, 2006). Tribes incorporates cooperative learning through creating learning communities with students. Establishing a Tribes learning community (TLC) in the classroom is a step-by-step process where students are given the tools to build positive learning environments. As the foundation of the model, students learn and honour four mutual agreements that encourage community including: attentive listening, the right the pass, appreciation/no put downs, and mutual respect (Gibbs, 2006). Through learning the agreements, students begin to understand what behaviour is considered appropriate or inappropriate when interacting with others in a learning community, and the repercussions that ensue if an agreement is not being upheld. Overall, it is important to create an inclusive and respectful community in order for students to grow and learn together.

1.1 Research Problem

Tribes has the potential to appeal to multiple learning styles in the classroom and to build a strong sense of community and inclusion among students through cooperative learning (Gibbs,
It is through the small group learning and abiding by the Tribes mutual agreements that students are able to create a classroom culture that fosters supportive peer relationships. This, however, raises questions as to how teachers encourage students who are reluctant to participate in these group learning opportunities.

For instance, some research has found that introverted individuals are almost as common as extroverted individuals (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk & Hammer, 1998). This finding is based on the random sample by the Myers-Briggs organization with population percentages of (50.7%) for introverts and (49.3%) for extroverts (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk & Hammer, 1998). This has changed from the previous estimate where introverts were said to make up about 25 percent of the population (Bradway, 1964; Nierenberg, 2013). It should be noted however, that introversion and extroversion are on a spectrum, and do not provide a whole picture. Although an individual might favour one over the other, introversion is not a static trait, and as such, can change over time (Jung, 1921; Loomis, 1982). This speaks to the fluidity of the spectrum for an introvert can exhibit extroverted characteristics in some situations, but not in others (Cain, 2013; Jung, 1921; Loomis, 1982). With that being said, experts say that students with introversion typically exhibit introspective characteristics including (1) preference to work alone, rather than with others; (2) reserved and quiet; (3) hesitant to speak/think carefully before speaking, (4) overstimulated/overwhelmed easily; and (5) value reflection in comparison to action (Martin, 1997). In the context of classroom teaching methods that now put great emphasis on collaborative learning, research is showing that this model conflicts with a good number of students’ preferred learning styles (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk & Hammer, 1998; Schmeck & Lockhart, 1983). Overall, it is important for educators to teach to the needs of all students in the classroom and to support their.
learning. This is because Bryk and Schneider (2003) explain that children can become less motivated to contribute to classroom discussions or to participate in group activities when they do not feel the learning environment is a positive one.

**Purpose of Research**

In light of this problem, the aim of the project was to learn how a small sample of Tribes trained teachers enact the cooperative learning model in their classrooms, and how they support introverted learners in their classrooms. I aimed to hear teacher perspectives on the pedagogical choices and strategies they enacted, as well as their observations of student responses to activities and groupings that help to inform their practice. Through the interview process with teachers, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the Tribes learning community model and the considerations necessary to make the classroom space reflective of diverse student learning styles, including introverted learners.

**1.2 Research Questions**

Introverted learners are often described as being shy, good listeners and needing to ‘come out of their shell’ more often (Cain, 2013). The environment in which introverts best learn however, is less often taken into consideration. Thus, the formalized research question for this study is: *How are a small sample of teachers using the Tribes learning community model in ways that are responsive to the learning needs of introverted students?* In order to address this research question, the study considered the following sub-questions:
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(1) What indicators of introversion do these teachers recognize in students and how do they modify the model of Tribes learning communities in turn?

(2) How do teachers encourage introverted students to participate in group work?

(3) What outcomes do these teachers observe from their introverted students as a result of their practices?

1.3 Reflexive Positioning Statement

Group work has always been an aspect of learning that I dreaded in school. It was not necessarily because I was typically the person who carried the entire group to succeed in the activity, or because I did not like my classmates—there was a bigger matter at play. I have often considered myself to be an introverted learner, valuing the need for observation, reflection and careful planning before diving into the work or making my thoughts heard. This, coupled with feelings of anxiety surrounding presentations and being the center of attention, made group work a complete nightmare. Over the years I had found different ways to cope with the inevitable group work experiences that came during high school and beyond, but my elementary school self was not aware that it can get better. It was not until I was completing my undergraduate degree in Social Psychology at McMaster University that I began to feel more comfortable in speaking in group settings and taking on leadership roles. I attribute this change in learning to the way in which school life was modelled. Sure, there were seminar classes where you were often put on the spot, but, there were lecture style classes too—something that I excelled at. I was able to learn the material on my own, ask questions, and actively engage with the material through listening. It was my own little sanctuary of highlighting, colour coding and interacting with others when I felt
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comfortable enough to do so. In this way, I was in control and I had the power and choice to either dive into my own thoughts and understandings through lectures, or communicate and discuss with others through my seminar classes.

I want to make it clear that I am not opposed to group work. It is quite the contrary, for I am a big believer in the benefits that group work can have on student learning. As a matter of fact, I am trained in Tribes and plan to enact this teaching model within my own classrooms. It is through this project that I want gain deeper insight in how to create an atmosphere where all students feel as though they can succeed and that their learning styles are valued, even when it comes to working with others. There is value and beauty in both being an observer and participating in a discussion, but whether you prefer one style over the other, communication with others is an important skill that needs to addressed.

1.4 Overview

In this chapter, I stated the research question and outlined the focus of the study. The emphasis here is on how teachers are supporting both the emotional and academic needs of introverted students in Tribes learning communities. Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the literature in the areas of cooperative learning and Tribes, introversion and extroversion learning styles and differentiated instruction. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology of this research study, with careful consideration of the following: procedure, data collection, participants, ethical and confidentiality concerns, as well as strengths and limitations. In Chapter 4, I will report the research findings and their significance in light of the literature. In Chapter 5, I discuss the broader implications of my research, and I close by speaking to the significance of the research
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findings for the educational community.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in areas related to how introverted learners cope with group work activities. More specifically, I review themes related to cooperative learning, introversion and extraversion learning styles, and differentiated instruction. I begin by reviewing research on the known benefits of cooperative learning strategies in the classroom, and the Tribes learning community model. I then review the literature surrounding introverted students and their learning needs and preferences, and how it compares with extroverted learners. Next I review the research on differentiated instruction and meeting the diverse learning needs of students, including the known challenges faced by teachers who provide opportunities for all students to meet learning with success.

2.1 Cooperative Learning Strategies

2.1.1 Cooperative versus competitive Learning

There is a fundamental difference between cooperative and competitive learning strategies. In order to build a sense of community among students, students need to work together for a common goal, as opposed to working individually (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). In cooperative learning groups, students are responsible for each member’s learning, and as such, it motivates students to make sure that each member understands the concepts being addressed (Stevens & Slavin, 1995). When students work against each other in competition, however, they tend to think only for themselves and not for the benefit or best interest of others involved (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Vygotsky (1981) highlights the importance of social interaction as
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the foundation of learning. Much of the literature shares this understanding, where students engaging in peer conversations allows students to enact prosocial behaviours by finding commonalities between members (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; La Greca & Santogrossi, 1980). This process is strengthened in cooperative learning activities where the success of completing the task is dependent on students working together in small groups (Watson, 1992). As Stevens and Slavin (1995) note, the “interdependence” of group members to complete the assigned task is part of the learning experience, where social skills and are enacted (p. 323). Moreover, the role of group members moves from individualistic learning towards collectivistic learning, for “students perceive their role to be to help their group mates learn, not simply help them complete a single group task” (Stevens & Slavin, 1995, p. 323). Therefore, the goal of the group is not just to be successful in the assigned task, but rather, to ensure that all group members are gaining an understanding of the relevant material. In an earlier study, Stevens, Slavin and Farnish (1991) explain the benefits of group and individual incentives in order to achieve this success in small cooperative groupings. Giving students group and individual incentives, such as praise, “promote cooperation, on-task behaviour and collaborative dialogue” (Stevens, Slavin & Farnish 1991, p. 9). Stevens and colleagues continue on by saying that when students are aware of the expectations, they are more likely to be engaged in the task and contribute to the group conversation (Stevens, Slavin & Farnish 1991).

2.1.2 Benefits of cooperative learning

The notion that students being aware of the goals and expectations of the lessons is mirrored in a study on cooperative learning and its relation between research and practice. One of
the themes that Antil and colleagues (1998) noted regarding cooperative learning experiences of students was the involvement levels of students in the tasks. An interview response from a teacher stated that:

Learning is enhanced. They retain information. It’s a hands-on experience. They’re not sitting listening to you in a cooperative group. They’re doing something. If they’re all in little groups and know their expectations, they can talk together and don't key each other out (Antil et. al., 1998, p. 425).

Through collaborative learning tasks, students were able to gain a deeper understanding of the material, while being able to remain on task. This in part could be contributed to feelings of being safe, for students understood what was expected of them, and could communicate their concerns or misunderstandings of the material to their group members (Antil et. al., 1998).

Cooperative learning strategies are also helpful for conflict resolution. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994), there are three key benefits to managing conflicts, which include (1) creating a peaceful school environment, (2) use conflict resolution for educational purposes to “gain and hold attention, increase motivation to learn, arouse intellectual curiosity and improve the quality and creativeness of problem solving,” and (3) give students the problem solving skills they need for the future (p. 117). During conflict resolution practice in a cooperative learning environment, discussions between students are high and on task. This is because each student contributes to the dialogue and is informed on the discussion points that their peers contributed (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Moreover, “since they tend to trust and like each other, [students] are usually willing to respond helpfully to each other’s wants, needs and requests” (Johnson & Johnson, 1994, p. 119). This again highlights the importance of providing opportunities for students to talk and work together, for it contributes to both academic and social success of the
2.1.3 Challenges to using cooperative learning in the classroom

Although collaborative learning has a multitude of benefits for higher levels of thinking, there are some drawbacks. Group work, even in small groupings, is not always successful. Based on their study of elementary school students responses on cooperative learning, Mueller and Flemming (2001) note that in order for group work to be effective, three aspects need to be present, which include:

1. Sufficient time should be allowed to participants in cooperative learning projects to talk and work their ideas out
2. To listen and to exchange ideas with others
3. To present what they have learned to each other and to an outside audience (p. 264)

Even when these aspects are included in an activity some students are hesitant to participate in small group work, even when they see the value of the skills being learned through the process. This is clear in a statement by an elementary school student, “I think learning to work in a group is really good; I don't always like it but it is a good skill to have; like when you get older you'll have to work with groups and its more fun” (Mueller & Flemming, 2001, p. 264). Another student noted that “sometimes it was hard because groups didn't work out that well. But we learned how to work” (Mueller & Flemming, 2001, p. 264). It is through the hands on learning and the element of critical thinking that allows a student’s social and academic skills to be further developed (Antil et. al., 1998; Mueller & Flemming, 2001). Through these hands on experiences, students are more connected to their learning without the pressures that are sometimes associated with assessment (Antil et. al., 1998; Mueller & Flemming, 2001). In connection with this,
Cullingford (1988) notes that children recognize the value of having a partner to work through a difficult task, for students are better prepared to share their thinking with the teacher. In a study on children’s views on working together, Cullingford (1988) found that students working with a friend can be a disadvantage. Many students reported “that they did not want their work interfered with,” and felt that student conversation was distracting (Cullingford, 1988, p. 31). Some students also reported that when asked to participate in small group learning, one or two members of the group would dominate the conversation (Cullingford, 1988). Students felt that when this occurred, it took away from their learning because they were not able to contribute to the dialogue (Cullingford, 1988).

2.2 Cooperative Learning and Tribes Learning Communities

2.2.1 Using cooperative learning strategies to build a community of learners

Cooperative learning strategies are at the very core of Tribes learning communities, for students work together in small groups with a high sense of trust and familiarity, allowing students to feel safe (Gibbs, 2006). Tribes learning communities were originally introduced as a teaching method by Jeanne Gibbs to keep children in school, by building up self-esteem and providing students with entry points for success. Gibbs (1998) notes that in order to “fix kids” one has to begin with transforming the learning environment the child is exposed to, and the ways in which individuals interact with one another. Instead of pulling ‘problem’ students out of class, or negatively labelling them, one should “identify, appreciate and celebrate each young persons’s strengths and importance to self and others” (Gibbs, 1998, p. 3). Stevens & Slavin (1995) further this by explaining that having cooperative learning experiences where the success of the task is
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dependent on students working together helps to ensure that each student is included. This is due
to the social responsibility given to group members, for they are responsible for each others
learning during the activity. As such, students with varying abilities and skill sets contribute to the
group learning and discussions, for success is based on everyone’s learning (Stevens & Slavin,
1995). Moreover, this interdependence creates a positive learning environment among peers for
success cannot be achieved unless they work together (Stevens & Slavin, 1995). These
understandings are emphasized and shared by Gibbs (1998) in the following statement:

[Learning communities] meet our basic human needs for love and belonging; for
respect, challenge and structure; for involvement, power and ultimately meaning. In other
words, they meet our human need to be included—to be of value to a community (p. 4).

Ultimately, Tribes learning communities move beyond teaching to the curriculum, and towards
teaching students how to create healthy relationships.

Trust and inclusion are at the center of the Tribes philosophy, for in order to participate in
small and whole group activities that celebrate “different abilities, cultures, gender, interests and
dreams,” students need to trust their peers and environment (“Tribes Learning Communities
Introduction Packet”, n.d., p. 3). Through limiting the small groups to four students, the trust and
safety experienced is maintained. Students bring meaningful connections, stories and thoughts
into the discussions, which again helps to maintain the integrity of the group. Through fostering
the positive peer relationships by abiding by the Tribes mutual agreements, individual student
comments are valued. Bryk and Schenider (2003) explain that “trust grows through exchanges
where actions validate these expectations” (p. 4). When this trust is absent, and the mutual
agreements are being undermined, students might feel as though their ideas are not being
respected, and may draw back from the conversation (Bryk and Schenider, 2003). This can
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become a challenge for teachers to ensure that their students feel that their learning environment is safe, and that their voice is being heard among their group members.

2.3 Introversion and Extroversion

2.3.1 The introversion and extroversion spectrum

Research has shown that there are fundamental differences between how introverts and extroverts interact (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; Jung, 1973). Jung (1921) was one of the first theorists to speak about the dimensions of personality in terms of introversion and extroversion. He explained that the primary difference between the two personality types is that extroverts tend to get their energy from interacting with others, whereas introverts get their energy from inner thought and imagination (Jung, 1921). By comparison, introverts tend to be more comfortable alone, or with one or two other people, and extroverts tend to thrive on social experiences (Jung, 1921). Freyd (1924) compiled the opinions and ideas of writers on introversion and extroversion to conceptualize the personality types. As such, the compiled definition of each is as follows:

**Introvert:** An individual in whom exists an exaggeration of the thought process in relation to directly observable social behaviour, with an accompanying tendency to withdraw from social contacts.

**Extrovert:** An individual in whom exists a diminution of the thought processes in relation to directly observable social behaviour, with an accompanying tendency to make social contacts (p. 74-75).

The conceptualized definition of introversion and extroversion highlights that introverts have the tendency to withdraw from the social reality and value reflection, whereas extroverts readily engage in the social reality, and take action. This is further articulated in Bradley and Herbert’s (1997) chart summary of some of the characteristics of the two personality types, and how
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individuals approach and engage with everyday life, which can be seen below: (p. 341).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extrovert</th>
<th>Introvert</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>external</td>
<td>internal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outside thrust</td>
<td>inside pull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blurt out a comment</td>
<td>keep in comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breadth</td>
<td>depth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involved with people, things</td>
<td>interested in ideas/thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interaction</td>
<td>concentration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>action</td>
<td>reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do-think-do</td>
<td>think-do-think</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I. Words used to describe extroverts and introverts

Although there seems to be main differences between the two personality types, Jung’s (1921) typology on introversion and extroversion are not meant to be viewed as separate ideas, but rather, are part of a spectrum. Loomis (1982) explains that Jung defined eight basic personality types which combined the attitudes, feelings and ways of thinking of both introverted and extroverted personalities. In this way, individuals who identify themselves as introverted, might not exhibit those traits in all situations. In her book on introversion entitled, *Quiet: the power of introverts in a world that can’t stop talking*, Susan Cain highlights an important quote by Jung saying that “there is no such thing as a pure extrovert or a pure introvert. Such a man would be in the lunatic asylum” (2013, p. 32). The main idea here is that our personality traits combined with our experiences and interests create “widely different kinds of people” that have the power to grow and adapt (Cain, 2013, p. 32).

2.3.2 Learning environments

Extroversion as a personality trait is highly valued in today’s society. This is because most
jobs in the workplace include elements of interacting and socializing with others, taking on leadership roles and taking action (Cain, 2013). Due to the social expectations of participating and interacting with others from small to large groups, introverted individuals can feel vulnerable to their surroundings (Cain, 2013). Williams (1971) recognizes that teachers hope for more extroverted behaviour when they want their students to be “overtly involved in classroom discussions” (p. 193). To encourage student participation, teachers tend to create small group activities where students are able to communicate with their peers in a less intimidating environment, but also notes that these methods do not always work. Relatedly, there is an abundance of literature surrounding how to get students more engaged in the classroom learning in terms of whole class and small group discussions, and the factors that can impact engagement levels (Cazden & Beck, 2003; Fredricks & Blumenfeld 2004; Kuh, 2001; Kuh, 2003; Narayan & Webster-Stratton, 2007). Teachers often make comments in report cards stating that the student could benefit from participating more frequently in class, and is encouraged to work on enacting those skills in the classroom (Cain, 2013). This further emphasizes the necessity of being social and extroverted through sharing ones thoughts and opinions with others, in order to be successful in school (Cain, 2013). However, different personality types can approach the same learning condition in different ways (Soles & Moller, 2001). Schmeck and Lockhart (1983) note that “a learning environment stimulating enough for extraverted students may be too stimulating for introverted students” (p.54). By having the social expectations both in the classroom and workplace of group participation and socialization can therefore set introverts up for failure when they do not actively engage in the learning experiences.

When looking deeper into the preferred environments of introverted and extroverted
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individuals, it becomes clear that noise levels can have an impact on performance of a task. In a
study by Belojevic, Slepcevic and Jakovljevic (2001) extroverted and introverted individuals
were subjected to quiet and noisy work conditions. They found that when extroverted
personalities performed a task in the noisy condition, their performance was significantly higher
in comparison to the quiet condition. Moreover, the researchers found that concentration
problems were only observed in the introverted individuals when performing the task under the
noisy condition. Although a simple study, it speaks to the impact that noise can have on
introverted individuals and by extension, how noise and conversation in larger groups can inhibit
learning. These results mimic an earlier study by Geen (1984), where introverts and extroverts
either chose the intensity level of noise, or had one assigned to them. In both conditions, the
extroverted participants chose the higher noise intensity, and the introverted participant chose the
lower noise intensity. Moreover, Geen (1984) noted that this remained constant even when
participants were assigned the noise condition level of another participant in the same personality
classification. Since both noise and social engagement have an impact on introverted personality
types, the question then becomes, what is the ideal environment for work and learning for
individuals with introverted personality types?

When consulting the literature, it became clear that online and technology driven
communication styles were a ‘good fit’ for introverted learners for one suspected reason: a
greater opportunity to communicate freely. In a study on social media and higher education,
Voorn and Kommers (2013) suggested that the the act of online communication was more in line
with their true nature, in comparison to face-to-face interactions (Voorn & Kommers, 2013).
Since introverts find their energy from within and are often drained through participating in
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social experiences, it provides an explanation as to why communication via social media is helpful. This is due to the minimal physical interaction level that social media outlets provide. Moreover, Voorn and Kommers (2013) also noted that because of the lessened physical interaction, introverted students felt more self-confident in communicating their thoughts to others.

2.3.3 Social introversion

Research has shown that there are fundamental differences between how introverts and extroverts interact (Jung, 1973; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). For example, when comparing the two personality styles, introverts have a tendency to focus on internal thoughts and be “more socially anxious and inhibited” whereas extroverts have a tendency to be more socially outgoing (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 184). McCroskey (1980) used the term communication apprehension to describe the social anxiety experienced by some introverted individuals. The term communication apprehension refers to “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (Ibid, p. 241). When socially introverted or anxious individuals experience a situation where they are to communicate with others, there is a tendency to pull away and become quiet (McCroskey, 1980).

One of the reasons collaborative activities work is because there is a certain level of trust present, for each member will contribute and help the entire group move forward to reach a goal. If an introverted learner does not feel comfortable to participate, this trust is broken, and might get negative feedback as a result. This comes full circle, for the introverted students might pull back from the class even further for fear of failure. Thus, the social anxiety that some students
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feel in group work might inhibit the success of cooperative learning strategies. McCroskey
(1980) notes that having an expectation for highly socially introverted students to lead
discussions or give an oral presentation “increases apprehension and reduce(s) self esteem” (p.
243).

However, these experiences of socially introverted persons is not always the outcome. In
a study on how introverts and extroverts approached oral argumentative debates and discussions,
Nussbaum (2002) noted that a co-constructive approach to the argument provided “less of a
danger of social embarrassment from losing an argument, or social rejection by others from
winning an argument, because argumentation is not conceived in adversarial terms” (p. 185).
Moreover, since students were not divided into teams to compete with one another, introverted
students felt more comfortable in engaging in the group dialogue.

2.4 Learning Styles and Differentiated Instruction

2.4.1 Learning styles

There is a growing necessity for individuals to obtain higher education in order to be
successful in the working world. As such, Schroeder (1993) notes that with a multitude of
students coming into the classroom, comes a wider range of learning abilities. Moreover,
Schroeder suggests that “an overall understanding of how students learn and where they are in the
process can help us meet the needs of the new students who sit in our classrooms” (Schroeder,
1993, p.26). Schroeder’s (1993) view on learning styles brings attention to the idea that there
needs to be a plan of action in order to reach the diverse learning needs of the classroom.
Moreover, this includes styles that might be different from a teacher’s preferred teaching style
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(Drummond & Stoddard, 1992). No matter the learning style, it is important for teachers to search for and emphasize the strengths that each student has and to find the appropriate teaching method to meet the need of the child (Drummond & Stoddard, 1992). In a study on teaching styles and personality types and learning preferences, this mindset was applied. Undergraduate students in dental school at the University of Texas Dental Branch at Houston were asked to use the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and identify their learning preferences, and comment on approaches that would help support their learning and practice (Jessee, O’Neill & Dosch, 2006). This was in order to maximize the clinical and classroom curriculum to appeal to more learners (Jessee, O’Neill & Dosch, 2006).

2.4.2 Differentiated instruction: Mixed ability grouping

As seen throughout the literature, one of the most ongoing concerns for teachers is how to provide support and accommodations in their lessons in order to reach all learners in the classroom (Antil et al., 1998). Not all students feel accepted in the classroom, or see value in the different ways that they learn. This concept of peer acceptance is brought up by La Greca and Santogrossi (1980) in their discussion on students with exceptionalities in the classroom. In their discussion, La Greca and Santogrossi (1980) note that integrating exceptional learners in a mainstream classroom is complex, and does not necessarily equate “positive social contacts” with peers (p. 225). In cooperative learning experiences however, “individual differences are exploited to promote learning” (Antil et al., 1998, p. 420). Teachers can take advantage of different learning styles and abilities and provide different opportunities for learning. For example, teachers can provide visuals, questions with varying levels of difficulty, and peer mediation
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through the collaborative learning process. In a study about cooperative learning and math in elementary schools, Nattiv (1994) observed that “high achievers gave more explanations and other help than middle or low achievers” (p. 285). Additionally, it was found that lower achieving students were more willing to ask questions of clarification as well as other help more often when compared to non-cooperative learning tasks (Nattiv, 1994). Antil and colleagues (1998) contribute to the conversation, through an interview response regarding high achievers in collaborative learning experiences:

> For the higher kids, retelling and reteaching helps improve their understanding of what they’ve read…they get into discussions and ask each other questions that involve high level thinking skills, but they’re also bringing the lower ones along with them (p. 425).

Although collaborative and cooperative learning tasks are beneficial for all learning styles and abilities due to its adaptive nature, sometimes students prefer to work alone, or do not actively participate in group learning (Antil et al., 1998).

2.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to highlight what is known in the literature about cooperative learning, introverted learners, and the factors associated with Tribes learning communities. As outlined in the research, there are differences between how introverts and extroverts interact, and because of this, the conditions for learning might look different (Jung, 1973; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985). Since there is a range of learning needs in the classroom, teachers need to diversify their teaching strategies to appeal to multiple learners (Schroeder, 1993). The literature also noted the importance of fostering positive peer relations and its connection to community. For example,
Gibbs (1998) discussed how learning communities are powerful because they “meet our basic human needs for love and belonging” (p. 4). Antil and colleagues (1998) note that cooperative learning is not just beneficial for creating an inclusive environment, but also, has academic benefits through mix-ability groupings. By having students engage in conversation in their small groups, they are able to outline their thinking, ask questions and discuss strategies to improve their learning and understanding of the material. In connecting the current literature surrounding the themes of cooperative learning and introverted learners, this study will further contribute to the conversation of how teachers differentiate their teaching and classroom structures to meet the needs of their students, including introverted learners. As such, focusing in on the Tribes community building model and how introverted learners respond to the group sharing aspects of the learning experience, can better help teachers to create a positive and safe environment for introverted learners.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction: Chapter Overview

In this chapter I describe the research methodology. I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. I then explain the data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. Relatedly, I identify a range of methodological limitations to the study, while also considering the strengths of the selected methodology. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of the key methodological decisions and my rationale for these decisions given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

The research study was conducted by using a qualitative research approach, which involved a review of the literature and semi-structured interviews with teachers. The use of qualitative research has been on the rise in areas of social science to explore how individuals think, feel and describe their experiences to questions posed (Nueman & Robson, 2007). Essentially, qualitative research addresses “the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). Moreover, this research framework tends to look at the motivations behind human actions or characteristics through exploring relationships that exist within society (Northey, Tepperman & Albanese, 2009).

Another facet of using a qualitative research approach deals with the inquiry process. Qualitative research holds words and descriptions as being most important as opposed to numbers (Bryman, 2012). This allows researchers to see the whole person and not as a set of statistics.
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(Northey, Tepperman & Albanese, 2009). In this way, rich data is gained from speaking with individuals in a guided conversation.

For this study, I wanted to dive into teachers' lived experiences of using Tribes learning communities in their classrooms and how introverted students respond to the group learning. Since introversion has a wide range of observable characteristics that can vary from person to person (Cain, 2013), I believe that having a conversation is best suited. In this way, teachers are more easily able to communicate some strategies that work for their students (either past or present). As a beginning teacher, I also see value in having a conversation with teachers in my field of interest, in order to gain deeper insight into the benefits and challenges of applying learned theories to practice. Thus, a qualitative research framework allowed me to address the research question based on lived experiences, in a way that quantitative or statistical research would not.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Qualitative interview methods are a form of data collection that allows participants to share their thoughts openly without the boundaries imposed by a survey (Bryman, 2012). In my research study, I used semi-structured interviews as the primary instrument for data collection. Likewise, when conducting a semi-structured interview, the first thing that I as an interviewer needed to do was build rapport with the interviewee (Neuman & Robson, 2007). This is because without trust, or building a safe space, the interviewee might have been hesitant to respond, or not be truthful in their response (Neuman & Robson, 2007; Northey, Tepperman & Albanese, 2009). Conversely, research has shown that when trust is present, there are many known benefits to
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using semi-structured interviews. For example, with semi-structured interviews, the interviewee can ask clarifying questions, probe further into a response with follow-up questions, and/or move the focus to another reoccurring theme if it becomes relevant within the interview (Neuman & Robson, 2007). In this sense, the interviewer has the freedom to let the conversation happen freely and organically (Neuman & Robson, 2007), while still making reference to the interview protocol (see Appendix B) to guide and ensure that the questions asked are responsive to the research topic (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The interviewing process also allows for participants to self-assess their teaching strategies and pedagogy, as they speak to their personal or shared experiences (Cho & Trent, 2006).

3.3 Participants

In this section of the research methodology, I discuss how participants were recruited for the qualitative interviews, and the sampling procedures applied. Since the interview process looked at a small sample of teacher perspectives, I utilized the experiences of two classroom teachers in Toronto, Ontario. As an overview, both participants had different school board associations and teaching experience with multiple grade levels that ranged from primary (K-3) to junior (4-6) students over the course of their teaching career.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

In order to adequately answer the research questions outlined in Chapter one, there were a few sampling criterions that the participants needed to have in order to participate. Below is a list of the sampling criteria that I utilized in the study as well as my rationale behind each one.
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(1) Minimum of three years teaching

Although the participant did not have to be currently teaching, I set the condition that they must have a minimum of three years teaching over the course of their career. This was to ensure that they have had experience with a multitude of students and learning needs. Since each grade level and student body are highly variable, it was important for the teachers being interviewed to be able to recount and reflect on a number of experiences. Three years of teaching gives the participant a greater number of experiences, as well as provides deeper insight into strategies that might have worked for one introverted student and not another.

(2) Certified in Tribes learning communities

Since the topic focus of the research study was based on how introverted learners respond to Tribes learning communities, it was important that the teachers being interviewed were certified in Tribes. Through interviewing Tribes trained educators, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers utilize the Tribes model in their classrooms, and what they value from the program. Relatedly, it was important to hear first hand how teachers feel about the Tribes program and the strategies they regularly implement in their classrooms.

(3) Uses Tribes in their classroom teaching on a regular basis

My rationale behind this criteria of regularly using Tribes in the classroom is to see if introverted learners consistently respond in a particular way, or if their behaviour changes situation by situation. Moreover, if teachers were not regularly using Tribes in their classroom, it makes me question whether or not they find it beneficial for their students. If teachers use Tribes
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on an ongoing basis and make it a part of their teaching pedagogy, I feel as though they see value in the teaching model.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures/Recruitment

There is an abundance of possible sampling procedures that a research can take when recruiting participants for a study. For the purposes of this study, I used convenience sampling methods as the main form of recruitment. Through being a student in the Master of Teaching program at OISE, I am surrounded by a community of teaching colleagues and professionals who are the best in their field. I see value in communicating with educators who have the expertise and knowledge to share their thoughts and experiences. In order to recruit participants, I contacted my Associate Teachers (ATs) from my practicum experiences in the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) as well as professionals at OISE that I thought might be interested in participating in the study. When I contacted professors at OISE, I scanned faculty profiles for teacher who promote inclusivity, cooperative learning, or who integrate the Tribes model in their own University level instruction. When considering my ATs from my practicum schools, I recognized that the school board values Tribes learning communities and encourage classroom teachers to implement cooperative learning strategies in their classrooms in order to foster inclusivity and hands on learning experiences. As such, I contacted my associate teachers and selected professors at OISE through email, and provided an overview of my study with related contact information. When I contacted my associate teachers and professors at OISE, I provided a list of the criteria necessary for the study, and asked that they relay the information to other colleagues that they thought might be interested in participating. I made it clear that
HOW INTROVERTED STUDENTS RESPOND TO TRIBES LEARNING COMMUNITIES

although I would appreciate their participation, it was not an expectation that they volunteer their time, as well as relaying the message to other professional in their school. I wanted to ensure that the teachers I contacted did not feel any pressure to volunteer their participation at any capacity. This was in order to help limit the ethical concern that teachers might feel pressured and/or obligated to participate based on their previous relationships with me (i.e. teacher candidate in their classroom).

3.3.3 Participant Bios

This section will provide a snapshot of the participants being interviewed for the research study. In order to protect their identity, pseudonyms are used. In the study, two teachers were interviewed and met the sampling criteria of teaching for three years, were trained in Tribes and used Tribes regularly in their classrooms.

Participant #1- Jessica

Jessica had a combined teaching experience of thirty-six years in both elementary and professional school (i.e. university) settings. She had worked for the Toronto Catholic (TCDSB) and York Catholic District School Boards (YCDSB) educating kindergarten, grade two and grade three students. At the professional schooling level, Jessica was instructing pre-service teachers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. Jessica had been a trained Tribes educator for about sixteen years and regularly implemented the strategies and activities in her classroom. When Jessica had first found out about the Tribes model, she “fell in love with it from the very beginning” due to the potential it had to appeal to multiple learners.
and the varying ways that she could integrate it into her practice.

Participant #2- Penelope

At the time of the interview, Penelope had been teaching for about ten years in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). She had experience teaching both primary and junior grades and had experience working with students with diverse learning needs. Penelope became a Tribes trained educator about two years after she started teaching when she saw a colleague integrating the strategies into her practice and the impact it had on bringing her class together. Penelope observed a range of benefits behind having a community of learners in the classroom and relayed how it has transformed her instructional choices and the atmosphere of her classroom spaces.

3.4 Data Analysis

Once the interviews are over and the audio recordings are transcribed, it is time to code the data. When coding the data, I looked for common themes and divergences that both support and refute what the literature claims. During the initial reading of the interviews, I used my research questions as an interpretive tool and be searching for broad trends that arose in the interview responses. I then moved to refine the broad trends and placed them into categories where I searched for common themes that are more specific to the findings. I then went through all of the interviews and synthesized the themes based on the responses, and underwent a meaning making process. Essentially, I reflected on how teachers spoke about their experiences in supporting their introverted learners within Tribes learning communities and what it can mean
HOW INTROVERTED STUDENTS RESPOND TO TRIBES LEARNING COMMUNITIES

for my own teaching practice.

The meaning making process in data analysis is significant because it allows the researcher to reflect on the data in a unique way. By seeing the connections among the responses, it can provide deeper insight into the questions being studied. In an article by Krauss (2005) on research paradigms and meaning making, he explains that the meaning making process is an important element of the human experience. This is because one can receive both the context and consequences behind certain behaviours, thoughts and ideas that motivate everyday life (Krauss, 2005). Overall, interpreting the data has an impact on learning, for it has the power to bring awareness to the overall consequences, both good and bad, of a particular action.

3.4.1 Ethical Review Procedures

There are many ethical considerations that need to be taken into account for this research study. One of the main concerns are issues of confidentiality and consent. Before a participant was interviewed, they were given a consent form (see appendix A) to read through and sign. From the consent letter, participants understood that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and that they have the right to refrain from responding to the questions asked by the interviewer. The consent form also asked permission for the interviews to be audio recorded, and later transcribed verbatim. This is to ensure that the conversation is in ‘real time’ where the interviewer can be fully engaged in the discussion, as opposed to frantically writing down the details of the conversation. This also helped to ensure that participant’s voices were not being misrepresented. Each participant was also assigned a pseudonym name to protect their identity, and any markers that have the potential to identify the participant will be removed. The
audio recordings of the interview as well as the transcribed notes were stored on a password
protected computer that only the interviewer had access to. The transcripts and audio records will
be destroyed after five years. My course instructor who provided support during the research
study also had access to the data. The results of the study will be shared with both classmates and
in the educational community (i.e. OISE) as a learning opportunity. All participants were made
aware of all the facets of the study, how their identity is being protected, and were reminded of
their rights at the end of the interview. Contact information was also provided in case a
participant would like to retract a comment or wish to add on to the conversation now that they
have heard the questions. Ultimately, there are no known risks to the participant in regards to
being interviewed in this study.

3.4.2 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

As with all research methodologies, there are limitations and challenges to using one
method over another. In terms of using qualitative research methods for the study, the scope of
the research was limited. Based on the ethical procedures that I had protocol for as being a
student in the Master of Teaching program at OISE, what we can learn from the project is limited.
This is due to a number of reasons including small sample size, the teachers being interviewed
and the questions being asked. Sandelowski (1995) explains that when a sample size is too small
in qualitative research, it cannot sufficiently support claims being made by the researcher. It is
important to note that although research from a small sample size can inform the topic, it cannot
and will not be generalized to reflect all teacher experiences. However, since the purpose of the
research study is to inform my own practice through communicating with a few teachers and
relating to their experiences, the small sample size will suffice. Another limitation of the study is
the population being sampled and its relation to voice. Since this study relied on convenience
sampling methods, I connected with teachers in my practicum placements as well as the
professional community at OISE. This was limitation for it showcased only a selected sample of
perspectives and understandings, leaving other voices in the educational field unrepresented.
Likewise, given the parameters of the Master of Teaching expectations for the study, only
teachers and educators could be interviewed. Although interviewing teachers and gaining their
rationale for using cooperative learning strategies in the classroom and their thoughts about how
introverted learners respond are important, the student perspective is lacking. A final limitation of
the study is the possible breakdown in communication. Qu and Dumay (2011) stress the
importance of planning and caring for how the questions asked can possibly be interpreted by a
participant, in order to help avoid this challenge in communication. Moreover, in the teaching
world there are many acronyms, definitions and terms that can be misunderstood. As a way to
cope with this, clarifying questions regarding how teachers define relevant terms including
introversion and Tribes learning communities can help to make their thoughts more transparent.

There are also many strengths that can be seen in this qualitative research study. For
instance, through communicating with teachers with a wide range of experiences, you are able to
get a more in depth picture of the rationale behind the decisions that they make in the classroom.
Teachers are able to share their stories openly, and are not restricted to a streamline of responses.
The conversations are very organic and provide an opportunity for reflection and are also a way
to validate teacher voices through providing meaning to their experiences.

3.5 Conclusion
HOW INTROVERTED STUDENTS RESPOND TO TRIBES LEARNING COMMUNITIES

In this chapter I outlined that the research study used a qualitative research methodology as the approach to the topic of how introverted learners respond to Tribes learning communities. In terms of the instruments of data collection, semi-structured interviews with a few teachers were used. Having semi-structured interviews allowed for the conversations to occur freely, while still making reference to the interview protocol, as a guide. When looking at the teachers being interviewed, there were three criterions that needed to be present including, (1) have taught for a minimum of three years; (2) trained in Tribes and; (3) used Tribes cooperative learning strategies in their classroom on a regular basis. This was in order to gain insight into how a multitude of classes and students respond to the teaching model, since there can be much variability. In order to find teachers to interview, the study relied on convenience sampling. I utilized my contacts from my practicum placements through OISE, as well as a large network of educators and professionals who are highly accredited in their areas of interest and research. Some ethical considerations of the research project are issues concerning confidentiality, the right to withdraw from the study, and the right to refrain from answering a question that the participant does not wish to answer. As part of the ethical protocol, participants were given a pseudonym name to protect their identity, and signed a consent form that outlines the topic and the expectations associated with the study. The signed consent form also notified participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and that they are under no obligation to answer the questions being asked.
Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will be analyzing the data on teacher perspectives of Tribes learning communities and introverted learners. Through reviewing the responses in the two interviews, I identified five common themes. I organized my analysis to include discussions on (1) the characteristics of a community of learners; (2) characteristics of introverts; (3) cooperative learning and introverted learners; (4) strategies to encourage participation, and (4) reflective teaching practices. Although some of the strategies used by the teachers were different, the common element of being sensitive to the needs of the students and using that understanding to inform instructional strategies remained the same. Both teachers stressed the importance of not only creating a safe and supportive learning environment for students, but also maintaining a deep sense of community and connection throughout the school year. The observations and reflection of teachers and their instructional strategies are integral to the research project for they explore how pedagogical choices can impact student participation levels. As outlined in chapter three on research methodology and protocol, the names and identifying information of participants presented in this section will be kept confidential. As such, I have assigned pseudonym names to both participants, which will be used throughout the remaining discussion of the study.

4.1 Teachers believed that in order to have a community of learners and positive peer relations, students must understand and uphold the four mutual agreements: mutual respect, attentive listening, right to pass, active participation.
Before getting into conversations around introverted learners and Tribes learning experiences, it is important to understand the characteristics of the four mutual agreements and how it translates into creating a community of learners. To begin, I asked the participants to describe what an observer would see and hear in a classroom where Tribes learning communities were implemented. Both participants shared the understanding that when the learning agreements are put into practice it builds a strong sense of community among students in the classroom space. For example Jessica said,

So it is definitely a tight knit community when the agreements are being practiced. You see a respectful community of learners where they are working together, playing together, learning from each other, learning from the teacher. It really is as they say in the Tribes book as a way of learning and being together.

Similarly, Penelope shared that,

You would see lots of group work and conversations among students where they are learning from one another. You would see their desks in clusters, the learning agreements posted somewhere, and that students are being respectful of their peers thoughts, ideas and values. You would generally see students helping other students and working together.

The emphasis in both responses is the idea of children working and learning together as part of a respectful community. This is strongly connected to Gibbs’ (2006) description of Tribes for when students are a part of a learning community and work in small groups there is a high sense of trust and familiarity, which provides a safe environment for students. Although not explicitly mentioned by Penelope, Jessica continued on to say that the mutual agreement called “the right to pass” is key when trying to build a strong and safe learning community. She noted that if the classroom teacher consistently “encourages the agreements, particularly the right to pass for introverted learners, that they will eventually catch on and understand that it will be okay.” What
was brought out in this discussion is the idea of feeling comfortable and uncomfortable and how the classroom and peer climate can have an impact on whether or not students are motivated to vocalize their thinking and have their voice heard. Bryk and Schneider (2003) reiterate this point when they explain how negative experiences in the classroom environment can deter students to participate, especially when they feel as though they are threatened or put in a vulnerable position. Even though both teachers stressed the importance of upholding the mutual agreements, neither participant specifically mentioned their strategies and/or approaches to reinstating the positive community environment if an agreement is threatened. This was surprising, since both educators strongly believed in the power that the mutual agreements had in maintaining a balance of safety and encouragement to participate. Perhaps an interview question focusing on this aspect of a learning community would have been appropriate in order to gain a deeper understanding of the next steps teachers should undergo to maintain and reinforce the healthy dynamics of the classroom culture. It is then up to the classroom teacher to create a learning space where students are encouraged to participate, but also to have a choice in what that participation level is going to look like.

Although the participants acknowledged the benefits of using the four mutual agreements to foster community, the challenge then becomes how teachers plan to introduce the agreements to their students. During the interview Penelope spoke about how the focus is student centered and that after a discussion about what the words in the agreements means, she has the children create their own definitions and images of the four agreements to be later displayed in the classroom. She also has her students sign a document that symbolizes their acknowledgement of the classroom rules and their obligation to try their best to carry them out on a daily basis. As
Muller and Fleming (2001) suggest, Penelope recognized how integral it is for teachers to make their expectations known to students, especially when engaging in cooperative activities. Additionally, through the students creating the definitions and images of the classroom standards, they are gaining a deeper understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Moreover, students are held accountable for their role in the classroom and the impact that a respectful and inclusive community can have on learning experiences (Gibbs, 2006). This is a significant finding, for by using the mutual agreements to create a positive learning space, introverted learners have the opportunity to actively participate at a level that they feel comfortable in taking part. This addresses and confirms the importance of having a strong community in order to encourage participation of all learners in a group setting, including introverts. What this highlights is the overall aspect of working together and the skills associated with doing so.

Through the experiences of the participants, it is clear that giving students the space to share their thoughts and opinions with others can only be accomplished through having a certain level of support in creating community. Without that connection, peer relationships can suffer, thus impacting the feel classroom environment.

4.1.1 Teachers believed that when the classroom structure is student centered and reflective of the diverse learning styles and preferences, the sense of community is stronger.

As the mutual agreements suggest, both students and the classroom teacher are held accountable for contributing to a positive classroom space. As such, when the agreements are not being upheld, the sense of community in the space is threatened. Moreover, this can impede on students active participation, for they do not feel safe to engage in conversations with others, and/
or students do not feel they are supported (Antil et. al., 1998; Bryk and Schneider, 2003). In the interview, one participant noted that in order to create a reflective learning space, you could have centers dedicated to a variety of interests including a music center, an art center, a reading center, and a building center, where children are given a choice in what they want to explore. Moreover, incorporating books that highlight and celebrate different cultures and countries that are reflective of the learning community bring forth the sense of inclusivity (Gibbs, 2006). As Jessica noted, “it is a very global community. There is lots of equity and diversity present in the class.” As such, it is the responsibility of the teacher to model an inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable and that they belong through considering the needs of all students.

When focusing in on Tribes and introverted learners, the physical classroom structure also plays an important role when building a community of learners. Both participants identified that having students desks in clusters or small groups increases the sense of community. When asked the question if students typically sit in their Tribes groups for daily lessons Jessica explained that,

I would not have them sit with their Tribes. I think that promotes exclusion. I would structure it so that they are sitting with a different group of children, but when it is time to meet in their Tribes groups that there are other classroom spaces for them to meet in. The idea is that seating arrangements are flexible.

Penelope added another layer to this conversation. She shared that,

Students need to have diverse interactions with their peers. I try to mix the seating arrangements once a month, unless a grouping is just not working. I think it is important for students to engage with their peers in a variety of social settings, and mixing up the groups is just one way of doing that.

Brown and Campione (2002) notes that small group learning is a pushback to the traditional model where students work independently and merely receive information. When students are able to engage in conversation with one another, they are able to recognize new perspectives,
strategies and resources that can help shape their learning. In the case of Penelope and the varying experiences of peer groups, it gives students the opportunity to practice their social skills, and to negotiate the dynamics of a multitude of groupings. As Jessica noted if students remained in their Tribes group on an ongoing basis they would not have the opportunity to interact with their peers at the same level. Although the connections in the small group might be strong, it would not necessarily translate to the whole community feel in the rest of the classroom space.

So, what does all of this mean for introverted learners? Penelope mentioned that having the small group clusters, consisting of three to four students, gave introverted learners the opportunity to socialize and engage in conversation with their peers in a less threatening way than having a cluster of desks consisting of five or more. She continued on to also note that she is sensitive to the needs of her students and in the past has had a class set of noise cancelling headphones, desk dividers and the option to move to another space in the classroom if students wanted to focus or work independently. This is supported by Belojevic, Slepcevic and Jakovljevic’s (2001) study on quiet versus noisy learning conditions and introverted and extroverted learners. The results of the study showcased that introverted learners perform better in quiet conditions in comparison to a more stimulating environment.

4.2 Teacher characterizations of introverted learners can impact classroom space and student engagement.

Before getting into conversations around the experiences of introverted learners in the classroom, it was important to gain insight into the characteristics and definitions that the participants associated with introversion. As the foundation of their understanding, both
participants described introverted students as preferring to work independently, being quiet, and not necessarily wanting to engage in group work. Although the responses were similar, Penelope noted that “introverts typically do not take on leadership roles in group work and value independent think time.” She continued on saying that introverts do not usually dominate conversations and like to keep their thoughts internal. Moreover, these responses are consistent with Martin’s (1997) description of introverted learners which included (1) preference to work alone, rather than with others; (2) reserved and quiet; (3) hesitant to speak/think carefully before speaking, (4) overstimulated/overwhelmed easily; and (5) value reflection in comparison to action. Even though the characteristics of introverted learners seem to be straightforward/well defined, research also suggests that introversion is actually on a spectrum and that the characteristics might not be so clear. For example, literature suggests that individuals can demonstrate varying levels of introversion depending on the situation and environment presented (Loomis, 1982; Cain, 2013; Jung, 1921). This conflict was found to be most prevalent when considering the language used to describe introverted students. Although both participants suggested characteristics that introverted learners had, the participants were careful to frame their responses as “typical” behaviours and not as a definitive set of criteria that all introverted learners exhibit. As such, they indicated that the language they used should not limit the behaviours, or paint introverts with the same coloured brush, but rather, recognize the differences in how individuals respond to situations. This understanding was demonstrated when they noted that so-called “typical” behaviours and preferences of introverted learners are not necessarily characteristics of all learners. For example, Penelope shared that,

Introverted learners are typically quiet and keep to themselves. They typically do not like to dominate conversations or take a leadership role, but some introverts do.
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typically like to work independently and thrive doing so. Group work and presentations can really cause anxiety, but can also be a chance for introverts to share their skills and talents with others. This is especially possible if the student feels the learning community is a supportive and safe one.

Likewise, Jessica mentioned that that introverted learners “experience fears and risk taking when it comes to whole class types of things.” She continued on saying that “fear is not necessarily a characteristic of someone who is introverted…there are many introverted people who are not fearful, but it is a characteristic of some.” This speaks to the importance of understanding that even though students may exhibit characteristics that align with one’s expectations, it is important to not let your expectations overshadow the characteristics they might show you. Even though there were common elements in the definitions of introversion as shared by the educators in the study, there is no universal definition that encompasses the varying motivations and understandings of introversion. As Cain (2013) describes, the human experience is vastly different for everyone, and for this reason, creates “widely different kinds of people” (p. 32).

Being aware of the characteristics commonly associated with introversion can be helpful in being sensitive to the needs of students. However, it should just be used as a general guideline, in order to ensure that students are receiving a variety of learning experiences and are not being limited to only one style or consideration.

Being open to multiple styles of learning was shown to be important when participants discussed the fears of introverted learners that are typically associated with large group conversations. Generally speaking, introverted learners prefer to work and reflect independently, and not engage in social components of the classroom (Mueller & Flemming, 2001). However, the Tribes model stresses the importance of having a balance of group and collaborative work in the classroom. Thus, the Tribes model demands introverted learners to take personal risks when
collaborating with peers. Tribes teachers must find a way to draw introverted students in taking these risks without letting their expectations of introverted students overbear on actual student participation.

In order to facilitate risk-taking behaviours, participants strive to set up a safe and supportive classroom space where individual ideas and thoughts are valued. When the sense of community is high in the classroom, students are more willing to take risks and fail and to learn from that failure. For example, Penelope shared that in a learning community there is a celebration of successes when students take chances:

When a student has been trying to understand a concept in math and hasn't been very successful and finally gets that moment of clarity after trying many different strategies, everyone is happy not just the student. It is not just a win for one student, it is a win for the entire class; the entire community. It is encouraging to see. I also notice that students are more empathetic to one another and more open to sharing their feelings.

As part of the discussion, this emphasizes the weight that resolving a misunderstanding can have on feelings of acceptance into the community. In relating this to a child’s socio-emotional development, it is clear that students are establishing themselves as part of the group. In the literature review, La Greca and Santogrossi (1980) expressed the influence that “positive social contacts” with peers can have on a student’s self-worth (p. 225). When introverted students take risks and are successful, it promotes feelings of value. In contrast, when introverted learners engage in risk taking experiences and fail, having a supportive community and growth mindset becomes an integral factor in maintaining positive associations.

4.2.1 Teachers believed that the needs of students should be the focus of their instructional
practice through honouring multiple learning styles and preferences.

There are many factors that come into play when considering the learning needs and preferences of students in the classroom. However, in order to consider the needs and integrate it into instructional strategies, both participants suggested that teachers should assess student’s abilities, behaviours and previous experiences with group work activities. When first introducing cooperative learning activities into the classroom, Jessica noted that you have to also assess the comfort level of students. Moreover, if students have not had exposure to different cooperative learning experiences, they might not be ready to have deeper conversations other than think, pair, share. Cullingford (1988) noted that when students are able to engage in shared learning experience such as think, pair, share, that students are better able to articulate their thoughts not only to their peers, but also to the teacher. When engaging in paired or group conversations on a given topic, we are teaching the social skills necessary to negotiate conflict, to be respectful of others and opinions, to wait for our turn to speak, and to be open to diverse perspectives and strategies. Although we encourage and support our students through establishing a safe and open space for such conversations to occur, we do not always practice what we teach. For example, Jessica mentioned that in order to ensure that we are creating meaningful spaces for student learning and engagement, we have to “look into different ways of reaching learners and how I can put myself into that learning situation”. In the literature review there were many sources that spoke to the social skills that are enacted in cooperative learning experiences. However, I did not come across research that explicitly addressed the connection between taking on alternative perspectives and cooperative learning. As Antil and colleagues (1998) suggest, using differences in experiences and abilities in group learning experiences encourages students to be open minded
and promotes the consideration of other possibilities. What I found most helpful when addressing this relationship between cooperative learning and taking on the perspective of another came from advice that Jessica gave surrounding pedagogy:

I would be very cognizant of my planning, and be very intentional about teaching and accepting back products from kids. I would also make sure that you are incorporating the multiple ways of knowing, and know your kids from a variety of lenses.

In those few sentences, Jessica highlights the importance of meaningful learning experiences, student feedback, multiple intelligences and knowing your students. The subtle phrase “variety of lenses” was an important aspect for it connects to the idea that community building is not just for the students in the classroom, but requires the classroom teacher to get involved at some level. Since classroom teachers “set up” and model what a classroom community and relationship building should look like, teachers need to be conscious of their behaviours and actions (Mueller & Fleming, 2001). This is because the student teacher relationship can have an impact on the overall feeling of the learning space. Penelope brought this idea forward when she discussed her own childhood experiences of her classroom teachers. She shared that during her time in elementary school teachers were strict and used more traditional forms of instructing. Penelope and her peers were not a community of learners, but rather, were passive recipients of information, which made her disengage from the learning experience. Penelope’s personal experiences in elementary school served as her motivation to make change in her own pedagogical habits. During the interview Penelope stressed the importance of student voice. She explained that in order to honour the many needs and voices in her classroom, she created an open space for discussion where students can shape their learning. In her classroom Penelope regularly uses feedback forms for the students to fill out and have their voice heard. Penelope’s
rationale for the forms is as follows:

Sometimes it can be hard to account for all the diverse needs in the classroom. But, you are a teacher, that is part of your job description. What I find most effective in ensuring that my students voice is being heard is to ask them directly and give input.

Penelope shared that every student in her class “jumps at the opportunity to give suggestions” that can either help them personally or as a classroom wide strategy and initiative.

4.3 Participants believed that the teaching practices involved with the Tribes learning community model promote a safe space for all learners, including introverts, to participate and engage in group work experiences.

When the sense of community is strong in a classroom and individuals feel supported and valued, students are more willing to take both academic and social risks (Antil et. al., 1998; Mueller & Flemming, 2001). During the interviews both Penelope and Jessica consistently noted that Tribes learning communities provided introverted learners in their classrooms a safe space to practice interpersonal and social skills. For example, Penelope stated that, “since students know, and are familiar with their Tribes group, they learn to grow in how to make compromises, respect diverse perspectives, and listen empathetically”. In this sense, Tribes learning communities move past academic gains, and act as an avenue for students to build peer relationships.

When looking at the framework of society, Cain (2013) notes that skills and abilities associated with extroversion are valued. As noted in the literature review, Cain (2013) describes the workplace as honouring social interaction, collaboration, active participation and leadership. In Cain’s (2013) analysis of the workplace, it leaves introverted learners at a disadvantage in making their voice known, for a supportive environment of their learning style is limited.
Although teachers can create an environment to support the preferred learning styles in the classroom, the expectations of mainstream society need to be considered. As Jessica explained, “even if you are introverted, you live in a world where you are going to have to collaborate.” This finding is significant because it highlights the necessity of exposing students to a variety of learning experiences. It not only allows students to get out of their comfort zones and explore something new, but also, gives students the chance to figure out how to navigate new experiences. Penelope noted that by giving students the tools and strategies to do so, individuals can assess what works for them and develop their own coping mechanisms if conflict or a disconnect arises. Moreover, through having a safe space, children are learning from their mistakes and adopting new ways of thinking through the possible challenges presented to them. Ultimately, as Jessica stated, “it is not like you are trying to convert them” from being introverts to extroverts. The aim of presenting multiple learning experiences is to give a space to take risks, to try new things, and to also seek comfort in one’s preferred learning style.

4.3.1 Participants identified multiple strategies that teachers can use to increase the engagement levels of introverted learners in group settings such as self-reflection, shared responsibility and student-driven pairings.

Through her observations of small group work, Penelope noted that sometimes members of the group and dominate the conversation and the assigned task. Penelope shared that when she first started teaching, she would typically hear the same voices being brought out during small group discussions. This is in line with Williams (1971) description of classroom discussions, for extroverted students typically have a higher participation levels. Even though
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Other students might join in the conversation, teachers tend to hope of extroverted behaviour when they want their students to be actively engaged in the discussion (Williams, 1971). However, when the same students are being called on, it sends the message that their voice is more meaningful and powerful than the rest of the classroom community. As a strategy to encourage participation, Penelope uses self-reflection and assessment on how much effort each student personally added to the group task, what their role was, and one thing they can improve on for next time. She found that this method is particularly helpful for introverted learners to share their thinking and track their engagement levels through working on reaching personal goals. Penelope also explained that when she does not use self-reflections, she uses shared responsibility tactics to keep students engaged. This is because as the Tribes model shows, with cooperative learning students are working together in order to ensure the success of everyone in their group. Penelope’s description of shared responsibility was as follows:

In order to make sure that everyone has a sense of ownership and responsibility to answering the question for their group, I tell students before they even begin the activity that someone in their group at random will have to share with the rest of the class. When the task is done, I allow the groups to talk for a moment to make sure everyone is on the same page. After that I call on group members to present their group’s work, and others can chime in afterwards if something was missed.

During the discussion time in the small groups before sharing with the whole class, Penelope added that you can feel the anxiety in the room. She mentioned that although the students might be anxious that they will be called on, they had those few moments to prepare and write down their thoughts and were also able to highlight the important points mentioned by their group members. This finding is significant because it holds all students accountable for their learning. Through having the shared responsibility to respond and share with the whole class, it helps to
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ensure that everyone understands what was expected of them. In this way students are faced with high expectations from their classroom teacher, all with comfort of knowing that it is a safe and supportive learning community. Penelope added that even the more reluctant and shy students are able to reach success in this expectation, for they have the opportunity to think and prepare their thoughts beforehand.

As noted, there self reflection and shared responsibility can be useful tools to ensure that group members, including introverted learners, are actively engaging in the learning. Keeping this in mind, both participants also highlighted using student-driven pairings to encourage introverted learners. When considering student-driven pairings, participants explained that observing and recognizing the friendship groups that naturally occur in the classroom can be used to guide the groups. This is in line with the literature where having a sense of trust and familiarity can empower reluctant students to participate in group discussions, since students feel safe and secure in the classroom and/or group environment (Gibbs, 1998; Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Penelope noted that “if the friendship pair is healthy, non-disruptive, and helpful”, then she would have no problem with those students working together in a group. Moreover, Jessica noted that she would be “inclined to pair them with someone they are very comfortable with.” This highlights the idea that when children are comfortable in their surroundings that they are more willing and open to participate. Both teachers spoke to the idea that friendship pairings should not always be the case, and that it is important to mix up the grouping and experiences in order to promote the diverse perspectives present within different groupings.

4.3.2 Teachers noted that above all, working with students to understand their needs as well
as being transparent about your expectations are the best approaches to inform group learning experiences.

Although the self-reflection and shared responsibility strategies worked for Penelope’s students, she mentioned that it might not be a best fit for all classroom environments. Likewise, during the interview, Jessica provided alternative strategies that she uses in her classroom instruction to encourage introverted students to participate in group work. The ongoing theme in her responses for strategies was being transparent about the expectations of teachers, students and the real world. As such, Jessica noted that it is important for the classroom teacher to work with the students to understand where the possible fears and anxieties are coming from. In this approach, it is key for students to be reminded and reassured that this is a safe learning environment. When the student understands this and they are still apprehensive to participate, Jessica suggested that you speak directly to the child and “invite them to give suggestions on how to make the classroom space safe” for their learning. An example that Jessica gave was to set the child up for success by prompting the student with the question or answer to the question that will be asked. In this way the introverted students can respond and receive positive feedback from both the teacher and their peers. As their participation level increases, Jessica noted that “you can slowly wean them off of using the safety-net.” This gradual release of responsibility is an important finding for it not only gives the introverted learner the chance to succeed in front of their peers, but also, provides an opportunity to make a contribution to the classroom community. This connects to the community agreement of the right to pass, where students have the opportunity to refrain from sharing their response with the class or others. Although it is part of the mutual agreements, Jessica mentioned that it can sometimes be used as a crutch for students
who do not want to participate. Jessica shared that if the right to pass is being used frequently, she would have a conversation with the student to get to the root of their non-participation. If a student is using right to pass frequently, then the teacher needs to assess why this is happening and make changes if necessary. Ultimately, as a member of a learning community, it requires active participation from all members in order to maintain the sense of collaboration and unity.

4.4 Teachers noted that cooperative learning strategies presented a strong foundation of learning where small group communication was an important factor for supporting introverted learners.

In order to set the tone and framework of the pedagogical considerations and choices for classroom space and introverted learners, we need to ground our general understandings of student groupings in relation to academic and social skills and the corresponding goals. To begin, when organizing cooperative learning experiences in a classroom space, it is important that students understand the required social skills needed for group interactions. Jessica explained that,

You have to teach social skills. It is not a question of assuming that they have them, but you have to directly teach social skills and put them into situations where social skills are being practiced and taught.

This relates to the initial setting up of the classroom environment and extends to the everyday practice of students. Like everything else, students need to experience how to deal with conflict, strategies to effectively collaborate and negotiate roles, and make compromises. Penelope noted that in her experience of group work, the dynamics of personalities make a huge difference in the success of the activity. Although it is important for students to experience a variety of
interactions, including difficult pairings, it is also important to keep the sense of community strong. In her classroom, Penelope focuses on the strengths of each student and the skills that they can bring and share with the group. She tries her best to mix up the groups, but also found that in some years she had some “challenging students that were not the best fit for all group types.” As a course of action, Penelope shared that she would monitor the group and keep an ear out for possible conflicts. Most of the time students were able to enact strategies such as renegotiating roles and making compromises. If the conflict was too big for the group to handle, Penelope discussed how she would ask the group if they felt comfortable sharing their challenges with the rest of the class. In this way they were able to brainstorm a list of possible strategies that might not have been previously considered. This is a significant finding for students are confronted with a real scenario where they have to use their problem solving skills to deal with a challenge. Moreover, Penelope’s action is in line with Johnson and Johnson’s (1994) description of “constructive conflict,” for students are increasing their abilities in resolving conflict that they can apply to other areas of their life. It sparks conversations about how to manage and organize group interactions and promotes both academic gains through on task behaviour and social gains through co-constructing possible strategies and interventions. When specifically addressing academic gains and cooperative learning, Jessica shared that students are “working in situations where they are able to process information more. They are working together, talking more, processing more and that is going to translate into academic achievement.” Since the group dynamics are one of a shared and interdependent learning experience, it promotes a sense of unity between group members. As Stevens and Slavin (1995) explain, when individuals are presented with a challenge in cooperative activities, they have to work together and communicate in order
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to reach the goal with success. This student-centred focus adds to the creations of a positive learning environment, for students feel as though they are valued, their voices are heard and that they are making contributions to the community. As Penelope notes, the only way to achieve maintain positive classroom relationships is “having constant and open communication, treating others with respect, validating others and learning from one another.”

When looking at the framework of the groupings, both participants believed that small group pairings were the best to meet the diverse needs of students, including introverted learners. One of the benefits of small groupings that Jessica brought forward was that introverted learners tend to have higher participation levels since they are not speaking in front of the whole group, but rather, are speaking only to a small number of their peers. Moreover, she explained that it is easier for some students to communicate and share their thoughts in a smaller group setting than it is to present their ideas to the whole class. As she continued Jessica suggested that it eliminates the fear factor associated with being in a vulnerable position, but felt that “eliminates” was too strong of a word. Jessica redefined her observation as “reducing the fear factor” that introverted learners might face in group interactions. This thought continued when the question directed participants to think about how the size of the group impacted student participation. For example, Jessica said that

I think introverts approach group work with some trepidation. I think that they approach it like: you know I am going to do this, but I don't love it, but I am going to learn the skills. And so it becomes up to the teacher I think to reassure that child that they are not going to be out on display here, you're not working, your are not talking to the entire class, that it really is a safe learning environment.

Likewise, Penelope shared that,
I find that introverts need more encouragement than other students in either group setting. They don't necessarily get on board right away and sometimes challenge you by saying that they prefer to work alone. Reminding students that this is a safe learning environment and that their thoughts and ideas are important is key. I mean, you can’t force them to participate and contribute, but I find the little reminders to be effective in letting them know I support them. I also try not to put them on the spot in small or large group settings because it causes a great deal of anxiety for introverted learners.

Both of these comments speak to the notion that the size of the group matters when it comes to the effectiveness of cooperative learning experiences. However the overarching element in both of these responses was the fact that introverted learners need the reminder and reassurance that the classroom is safe. These reminders help to lessen the anxiety felt when presented with group work, and allow the students to involve themselves in the learning. This finding is significant for as the research demonstrates, when students feel comfortable in their surroundings, they are more willing to take academic risks (Antil et.al., 1998; Watson, 1992). Although this is not a very surprising finding, it sets the tone for how teachers can approach their instructional practices.

4.5 Teachers engage in a reflective teaching practice in order to ensure that the strategies used in the classroom are supportive of the learning needs of students.

Criticism on pedagogical and instructional approaches are not limited to the classroom or school environment. During the interview, Jessica noted that there is “a lot of press right not about how schools are maybe not honouring the introverted person.” She continued on saying that,

I think the perception is that introverted learners are getting left behind but that’s actually not the point. They are missing the point. The point is to give introverted learners a safe learning environment.

When I asked Penelope to comment on this topic, she responded by saying that “teachers need to
provide a variety of experiences that favour multiple learning styles in order to teach to the abilities and strengths of the whole-child.” Taken together these responses contribute to the understanding that there are multiple ways of knowing, learning and understanding. As such, Jessica stressed the importance of students deeply understanding that within a Tribes learning community, the introverted person is honoured just as much as you are honouring other learning styles in the classroom. In order to achieve this, however, the participants analyzed their lessons and instructional strategies and reflected on whether or not the strategies they used were an accurate representation of the strengths and preferred learning styles of their students.

Jessica mentioned that in order to be an effective educator “you have to know yourself” and whether or not you are able to manage a Tribes learning community that utilizes cooperative learning experiences. This becomes particularly important if you are the “lone wolf” educator in the school using the Tribes model, or if you are meeting challenges along the way. Jessica mentioned that,

It’s one thing if you are the lone wolf and everyone is wondering and questioning and thinking about getting involved in Tribes, but if you are the lone wolf and everyone thinks that’s crazy, that is a challenge. Further to that, it is really on the same topic, is if the administration does not support Tribes.

This response is significant for it highlights the importance of having allies and support in the school community. Research often suggests that teachers ensure that students are supported, in order for them to reach success in their learning (Schroeder, 1993; Drummond & Stoddard; Myers et.al., 1998; Schmeck & Lockhart, 1983). However, having support for teachers is just as important in fostering a healthy and positive learning environment, in which the needs of students in the classroom space can be met. Moreover, this is an area that the literature did not specifically address when concerning cooperative learning activities and classroom experiences. Although
teacher support can be found in the context of professional development, having an ongoing conversation and brainstorming opportunities with fellow colleagues can be a powerful tool. In this way teachers can analyze and reflect on what went well, what didn't go well and how they can learn from those experiences moving forward. These pedagogical insights are critical for the growth of educators and revamping their instructional practices to meet the classroom demands.

Since learning can be perceived as an ongoing process, teachers engage in trial and error experiences. As a general understanding, teachers than use the responses and feedback from student’s behaviour, work and attitudes to inform their instructional and pedagogical choices in the classroom space. Penelope shared that every class is different and because of that the strategies and approaches change from year to year. She shared that,

> You have to be flexible. In the past have introduced tribes learning communities to some groups and it has been a great success throughout the entire school year. They came to me with an open mind and a desire to build community. I have also had some groups who started off strong but somehow lost their way even with interventions and community building activities. I think the key point is that students are open to the experience and that teachers are revisiting and referring back to the agreements on a regular basis.

Both Jessica and Penelope discussed the benefits of sticking with the Tribes model and seeing it through until the end. Reflecting on the strategies and activities that worked well and the challenges that came up during the collaborative work and sharing process can help teachers to gain insight of what supports are needed. Essentially, following the Tribes trail from inclusion, influence to community makes a difference in the vibe of the classroom and student space.

What I found was missing from the reflective responses of the teachers was the negative experiences of cooperative learning activities and group learning. As seen in the literature, not every grouping or activity is productive and meaningful to students (Cullingford, 1988; Mueller
& Flemming, 2001). Teachers have to undergo a trial run for many of the activities, for not every strategy works the same for each classroom. Penelope hinted at some of the challenging years she has had with students and implementing Tribes learning experiences, but she did not explicitly express the impact (if any) it had on participation levels of students.

4.6 Conclusion

The experiences and responses of the teachers interviewed were reflective of the literature and research surrounding cooperative learning, safe spaces and community in relation to introverted learners. There were many commonalities shared between Jessica and Penelope’s outlook on Tribes learning communities and the impact it has on student relationships. One strategy that was noted was that cooperative learning in the form of small groups can help to motivate introverted learners to participate, since they are not presenting to the entire class. Both teachers felt that this helps to relieve some of the anxieties and insecurities associated with group work, and provides a strong foundation of practicing the social skills of navigating conflict and group dynamics. This further adds to the conversation of group sizes and learning for multiple learning styles, for implementing small group discussions as opposed to whole group presentations are a useful tool to reach introverted learners. The small group learning experiences provide higher engagement levels for introverted learners in comparison to whole group discussions, and as such, promote a more inclusive instructional strategy that teachers can capitalize on within their practice. Moreover, in order to ensure that the strategies being used in the classroom are representative of the learning needs of students, both participants acknowledged that teachers need to engage in a reflective teaching practice. Moreover,
Participants strongly believed that in order to have a community of learners, students must uphold the mutual agreements, and that the classroom space and structure should be student-centered. In this way, the diverse needs, interests, and learning styles are honored and reflected in the classroom environment, giving students a voice and a role in their education. Overall, the participants acknowledged their role as a model and facilitator in fostering a strong community and healthy peer relationships that encourage students to take risks and grow as a learner, in exposing students to new learning as well as providing a reflective space that supports their preferred style. Thus, this furthers the conversation of the current literature for teachers need to ensure that all students are reflected in the learning experiences, but also, to push students and provide opportunities to take risks and feel challenged, but not defeated. The careful balance between understanding the learning levels and preferences of students as well as when they can be pushed to further their learning is a complex but necessary consideration that educators need to make. In relation to introverted learners, understanding that some students value having time to work independently, as well as in small group settings can help to determine the structures and dynamics at play in the classroom.

In the next chapter I will speak to the significance of the findings as a beginning teacher and for the educational community more broadly. As a Tribes-trained teacher myself, I found the strategies, experiences, and advice given to creating and maintaining a learning community to be both encouraging and helpful. Given what I have found, I will also identify areas for future research and make recommendations based on the findings presented.
5.0 Introduction to the chapter

In this chapter I will outline the implications of the findings outlined in chapter four. I begin by outlining the key findings associated with the study in order to ground the discussion in the observations and perspectives of the teachers interviewed on Tribes learning communities and introverted learners. I then organize my ideas to highlight the value that this study has in relation to the educational research community as a whole, and then, more specifically to the professional practices of educators. Moreover, I critically engage with the findings collected both from the literature and participant understandings and experiences to provide concrete examples of possible recommendations for the Tribes program, as well as for classroom instruction in building up a community of learners. Once the recommendations have been reviewed, I end the study with areas to consider for further research and provide final commentary and reflections.

5.1 Brief Overview of Key Findings

In light of the literature, it became clear that there is a connection between introverted learners and small group learning experiences when it comes to risk taking behaviours (Antil et al., 1998; Gibbs, 2006; Stevens & Slavin, 1995). However, what the literature seemed to be lacking was a focus on specific learning styles, such as introverted learners, and how they cope with group learning. Since there is a movement away from traditional teaching approaches of individual learning to a more holistic framework where students work together, share strategies and build community, it begs the question as to how teachers can encourage introverted learners to be part of the classroom learning experience where all learners are included and valued.
Based on the data analysis in chapter four, participants noted that in order to have a community of learners and positive peer relations, students must understand and uphold the Tribes mutual agreements known as attentive listening, mutual respect, right to pass, and no put downs. The teachers acknowledged that reminding students of their right to pass helped introverted learners to feel safe in the classroom space. Moreover, teachers explained that when the classroom structure is student centered and reflective of diverse learning styles and preferences, the sense of community is stronger. The study also noted that teacher characterizations of introverted learners can impact the classroom space and student engagement. As such, when teachers acknowledge that introversion is on a spectrum and that students are not all alike, students are more likely to engage in risk taking behaviour, as well as learn from failure.

Participants also noted that the needs of students should be the focus of instructional practices through honouring multiple learning styles and preferences, including the introverted learner. It was also found that having a safe classroom space and community of learners increased the possibility of introverted learners to participate in group work experiences. Moreover, participants identified that there are multiple strategies that teachers can use to increase the engagement levels of introverted learners in group settings such as self-reflection, shared responsibility and student-driven pairings. This gives students the opportunity to work with peers that they feel comfortable with, as well as give input in their own learning and goal setting though self-reflections.

The teachers in this study noted that above all, working with students to understand their needs as well as being transparent about your expectations are the best approaches to inform group learning experiences. Additionally, within the group learning experiences, small group
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communication through Tribes groups was an important factor in supporting introverted learners, for it provided a familiar learning space. Finally, teachers emphasized that engaging in a reflective teaching practice is integral to developing a classroom structure and lesson plan that is responsive to the needs of students.

5.2 Implications

Based on the findings from teacher observations of introverted learners and Tribes learning communities, many implications can be made for the educational research community, as well as for my professional practice. In this next section, this study will focus on the implications of the broader educational research community. Within this section, I will discuss the connections between the findings and the implications to Tribes model, training and philosophy as a whole. I then move to link the findings to my own professional practice, and the considerations I will be mindful of as an educator.

5.2.1 Broad: The Educational Research Community

The Tribes program, written by Jeanne Gibbs (2006) in her book entitled, *Tribes learning communities: a new way of learning and being together*, is a tool and philosophy that educators can use to build and reinforce community in their classrooms. For basic instruction, teachers can undergo a twenty-four hour training program that goes through the model as a whole and offers hands-on experiences. This is in order for educators to experience some of the community building activities and strategies noted in the resource book. Moreover, teachers might have access to training opportunities through school boards, and/or purchasing resource documents and training programs online through Tribes. Although Tribes is a great professional development
opportunity in giving teachers a general understanding of how Tribes works, and how to implement some of the strategies and activities in their classrooms, it is only a guideline. As stated on the Tribes Learning Community website, through engaging in the Tribes training teachers will learn “how to provide every student with the knowledge, skills, and resiliency to be successful in a rapidly changing world” (Tribes learning community, 2014). Although teachers are presented with some insight into how to use the model, it is based on limited training and does not mean that the needs of each student is supported through the model alone.

As evidenced throughout participant responses, ensuring the classroom space is safe and reflective of multiple learning styles and preferences is central to the success of introverted students. In relation to the Tribes model, reinforcing and reminding students of the mutual agreements, specially the right to pass, helps introverted learners to engage in group and cooperative experiences at their own pace and comfort level. Additionally, giving students the opportunity to self-reflect on their active participation and group contributions, as well as commenting on their learning, gives introverted learners the chance to build up confidence and participate in another way. In this way, the needs of students are supported in terms of being able to communicate their understandings and self-assess their contributions and work towards their own prescribed goals. Moreover, being able to write down specific areas that students feel they are strong in, as well as areas for improvement can be useful information for educators to use to inform their teaching.

Keeping the idea of the needs of introverted learners in mind, the Tribes model does not specially address how to use the Tribes model in conjunction with differentiated instruction. Although the philosophy behind the model emphasizes honouring the diverse needs of students, it
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is still up to the classroom teacher to tweak the activities and strategies to best fit their students. As such, I think it would be helpful to have further professional development around Tribes and how to build the Tribes program around both multiple intelligences and the learning preferences of students. As an implication for the Tribes program, I think a next step might be to have specific training as a follow-up to the basic training, or within the training program itself on how teachers can account for the many needs in their classrooms through the Tribes model. In this way, teachers might be better prepared for how the Tribes program can work for their students and classroom to build a sense of community, and can help to ensure the longevity of the program in terms of teachers continuing to use the model throughout the year. Through giving teachers specific strategies for using the program with multiple learners such as introverted learners, reluctant students, students with ADHD, autism, etc. teachers may better understand the versatility of using the model for community building as well as social and academic growth through cooperative learning experiences.

5.2.2 Narrow: Professional Identity Practice

In focusing on my professional identity and practice, I believe in the power that cooperative learning and honouring the mutual agreements can have on fostering positive peer relationships and building community. Throughout the discussion, both participants highlighted different strategies that they use in the classroom to help support and honour introverted students. Making sure that students are accountable for upholding the mutual agreements, and reminding introverted students of their right to pass is helpful to let students participate at their own comfort level. Another helpful strategy that teachers used was to have introverted students self-reflect on their contributions and participation levels and to set goals for themselves. Within my own
teaching practice, I would have all of my students engage in this reflective thinking and set both academic and social goals for each month.

Another key strategy was to be transparent with your pedagogical choices, and to conference with students to ensure that their needs are being met. Although teachers are trained and knowledgeable in how to differentiate instruction for a multitude of learners, gaining insight from the students themselves allows students to contribute to their learning and a platform to express how the classroom can better support them. Likewise, as an educator I think it is important to be mindful of how your view of the characteristics of students including their abilities and strengths can impact their learning experience. As such, maintaining a holistic approach to teaching can help to ensure that you as a teacher are not looking at a specific characteristic in isolation, but can see the bigger picture of the whole child. As part of ongoing assessment, a strategy to help achieve a holistic representation of a students preferences, skills and abilities might be to keep a log of not only their academic skills, but peers that work well together, reviewing the learning conditions of the day that might have impacted participation and engagement levels of students, as well as student self-reflections. Having a ticket out the door where students can take a moment to reflect on how they felt the day or lesson went can give you as a teacher insight to inform future lessons. This also gives students the opportunity to express their thoughts in a less threatening way than a teacher-student conference might present. Moreover, having a ticket out the door reflection gives all students in the classroom the chance to self-analyze and think critically about their learning preferences, styles and skills. In this way, all students are able to communicate their thinking in some capacity and provides an inclusive framework to learning, for students are not singled out for having a particular learning style over
5.3 Recommendations

Even though teachers are aware of differentiated instruction, using the Tribes learning community model and stating that the classroom is a safe space is not enough for introverted learners. As such, throughout the discussion, both participants highlighted different strategies that they use in the classroom to help support and honour introverted students. As mentioned by Jessica at many points throughout the interview, maintaining the Tribes model in the classroom can be difficult at times. As a recommendation for the Tribes program, I think it would be helpful to ensure that educators feel supported and confident in their abilities to implement the community building initiatives in their classrooms. One way they might do this would be to have a consultant from Tribes come into the school and/or classrooms to meet, check in with faculty, and reflect on the how the Tribes program is working in their classrooms. As a form of professional development, teachers can outline areas that they are unsure of, challenges that they might be facing with implementing the program model, or being consistent and following through with the program. Moreover, even though educators might be trained in Tribes, it does not mean that they are experts in the Tribes program. Having a consultant or Tribes liaison to speak with educators about strategies that might not be working in their classrooms, and vice-versa, would be an opportune moment to receive tips and strategies to improve the sense of community in the school and classroom environment. Additionally, this would also help to ensure the longevity of the Tribes program in terms of teacher use throughout the course of their everyday instruction, for there is ongoing support and resources for them to connect with in order to grow their practice to fit the diverse needs of students.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

A general understanding throughout the interviews was that educators felt that Tribes strategies were helpful in providing a safe community space in their classrooms. Even though teachers tend to come out with a positive view in regards to Tribes learning communities, it is unrealistic to assume that Tribes can bring students together without any challenges. As an area for future research, I think a next step might be to further access where teachers are experiencing challenges, tensions and/or uncertainties about the program and integrating the strategies and philosophy into the learning space. This is because when I asked participants some of the challenges they faced when introducing Tribes, or encouraging reluctant students to actively participate in the cooperative learning experiences, it was met with the notion of preserving and “sticking with the program”. Although both participants eluded to possible tensions and challenges when integrating the program in their classrooms through touching on how the Tribes program looks and feels different with each cohort of students, they did not specifically address what those tensions were, and how they overcame them. As such, gaining insight into the multiple experiences of teachers that specifically address questions that they have about the model can help to inform the elements and topics that make up the basic training.

Another area for further research based on the findings in this study would be to look at students who resist the model, both apart from and including introverted students. Taking a deeper look into the classroom conditions and characteristics of students that are more likely to resist the Tribes program might better equip teachers with strategies and tips to build an inclusive classroom space. This understanding would also help to support the Tribes program in the classroom for in order for the cooperative elements to work in building community, all students
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need to actively participate.

5.5 Concluding Comments

In chapter one this study provided an overview of how the classroom structure has changed from viewing students as passive recipients of information, to active members of a classroom community (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Gibbs, 2006; Levitt, 2002). This was furthered by outlining the increase in cooperative learning experiences, where students work and learn together through brainstorming and sharing strategies and ways of thinking. Chapter one also provided the guiding questions and the research focus of the study, which was how introverted students respond to Tribes learning communities based on teacher observations.

In chapter two, this study reviewed the relevant literature around introverted learners, safe spaces, community building, and differentiated instruction. In this discussion, it was shown that introversion is on a spectrum, and as such, introverted learners might not exhibit the same characteristics in all situations. Moreover, the research also noted that the optimal learning environments for introverted learners differ from extroverted learners in the sense that introverts tend to prefer self-reflection and extroverts are more drawn to social settings. Ultimately, the literature emphasized that cooperative learning experiences can be helpful for all students to explore, take risks, and grow in both their academic and social skills.

In chapter three, the research methodology that grounded this study was outlined, with various components such as the benefits of qualitative interviews, data intake and analysis, and ethical considerations. With using qualitative interviews as the primary data source, this study was able to get a deeper analysis of the experience of teachers in relation to using Tribes in their
practice, and how they accommodate for different learning preferences and needs, including introversion. This study utilized convenience sampling methods to recruit participants, due to the many experts and network connections presented at OISE. In terms of ethical considerations, I noted that pseudonym names would be used to protect the identity of participants, that participants do not have to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable responding to, as well as that participants have the right to withdraw from the study.

In chapter four, I discussed and analyzed the findings from the study in relation to the existing literature. Some of the major themes explored included the characteristics of a community of learners, characteristics of introverts, cooperative learning and introverted learners, strategies to encourage participation, as well as reflective teaching practices. Throughout the data analysis, participants noted that although introverted learners might be reluctant or hesitant to participate in Tribes learning communities due to the cooperative elements, that reminding them of the mutual agreements and that the classroom is a safe space help to build an inclusive environment.

In this last section, chapter five, I discussed the significance of the findings in relation to the educational research community and my own personal practice, as well as providing recommendations and areas for further research. When referencing the educational research community, I addressed that because the training in Tribes is basic, it does not necessarily address how to use the model in conjunction with differentiated instruction and the learning needs of students. As such, I noted that because teachers are faced with diverse needs in their classrooms, that having additional professional development of how to accommodate with Tribes could be included in the basic training. Likewise, when outlining the recommendations, I noted that having
an expert in Tribes come and either observe classroom use of the model and/or meeting with faculty can provide a support forum for teachers to seek advice and tips to reinforce the sense of community among students. For further areas of research, this study suggested that a deeper look into the characteristics of reluctant students could help to understand the needs of students through pinpointing different strategies to encourage active participation. Moreover, a deeper analysis into the challenges that teachers face can be helpful to refining the Tribes program.

As a whole, the aim of this research project was to address the concern that there is a need for specific and informed understandings of how teachers can support a range of learning styles preferences, including introverted learners, in a world that values and honours extroverts. Through this study, it became apparent that although establishing a safe space and reinforcing the mutual agreements were key to success, it is not enough. Students need to have a deep understanding and appreciation of the classroom agreements, as well as have the ability to apply that understanding within classroom interactions. Moreover, when the model is put in place and students are capable of using the agreements, Tribes learning communities has the potential to bring students together through social learning. As a way to facilitate opportunities for students to work cooperatively, and interact with their peers both academically and socially, Tribes strategies can be empowering for introverted students to take risks. This is because when the environment feels safe, and the sense of community is high, students are more confident to interact with their peers, make mistakes, and explore the world around them.
References


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Date:
Dear __________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying how teachers support introverted learners in Tribes learning communities 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.__________________. 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 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, via Skype, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

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

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

Sincerely,

Rebecca Stones
Researcher name: Rebecca Stones
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Phone number, email: 519-802-9292 OR rebecca.stones@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: ____________________________________________
Phone number: _________________ 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 agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

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 Protocol

**Introductory script:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research... The study aims to learn how teachers support introverted learners within Tribes learning communities... The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes... I will ask you a few questions about your experiences with using the Tribes model, challenges and benefits of using the model, typical behaviours observed of introverted learners, and how they respond to classroom learning. I want to remind you that you may choose to not answer any question that I ask and that you can withdraw from the study at any point... Do you have any questions/things you want to go over before we begin?

**General Questions:**

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What school board or organization do you work with?
3. What grade level are you currently teaching?
4. What grades have you taught in the past?
5. What is your educational background?
6. If applicable, can you tell me a bit about the school you are currently teaching in? (demographics, size, program priorities)
7. As you are aware, I am interested in hearing about your practice with Tribes. Before we get to that, can you tell me how you came to be interested in and involved with Tribes? *probe re: personal, professional, educational experiences*
8. How long have you been a Tribes trained teacher?

**Teacher Perspectives and Beliefs:**

1. In your view, what is a Tribes learning community? What are the goals? What might an observer see and hear in a classroom that has implemented a Tribes learning community?
2. Based on your experience, what are the benefits of Tribes learning communities? Why do you implement Tribes?
3. And what are some of the challenges and limitations? How do you respond to these?
4. In your opinion, how are cooperative learning and Tribes related?
5. How would you describe the significance of cooperative learning for teaching and learning?
6. Cooperative learning involves an element of communication and socialization amongst peers, despite the reality that most classrooms include some combination of students who are more and less extroverted and introverted. In your opinion, what are some characteristics of introverted learners?
8. In your opinion, what would make an ideal classroom for introverted learners compared to more extroverted learners?
   1. What do you believe are some of the challenges students who are more introverted confront in schools and in learning?
9. In your experience, how do introverted learners respond to Tribes learning communities?
10. In your experience, how do introverted learners approach group work (as a component of cooperative learning)?
   1. When you create opportunities for students to participate in group work, what are some characteristics of a good group member that you look for? What characteristics of a leader do you look for?
   2. Have you noticed a difference in the way more extroverted individuals interact with others in cooperative learning activities as compared to introverted students? What have you observed?
   3. In your view, how does this impact the success of the group or the richness of the learning?
11. In your experience, how do introverted students respond to taking on a leadership role in a Tribes learning community?

**Instructional Practices:**

12. Can you please describe for me what a Tribes learning community looks like in your classroom? Be specific as possible.
   1. How do you implement Tribes?
   2. When do you introduce Tribes and why?
   3. How is the Tribes philosophy reflected in your classroom set up?
   4. How do you account for Tribes learning community in your instructional planning and lesson design?
   5. Has there ever been a time when you chose not to implement Tribes in your classroom? Why?
13. You’ve already shared how introverted students typically respond to Tribes. Can you give me a specific example of an introverted student that you have had who exhibited reluctance to the Tribes learning community model?
   1. Who was this student? How did you know that he/she was introverted? What indicators of introversion did you observe from them?
   2. How did you know this student felt some reluctance toward participating in the Tribes learning community?
   3. What range of instructional strategies and supports did you implement to make this student feel more comfortable with Tribes?
   4. How did this student respond? Did they respond immediately, or over time did they become gradually more comfortable with the model? Why do you think they responded the way they did?
   5. As a teacher, how do you ensure that all voices are being heard in a group, and that one voice does not dominate?
14. How do you encourage reluctant introverted students to participate in group work? To take on leadership roles?
15. What strategies that you implement are most effective for eliciting meaningful participation from introverted students in Tribes learning communities?
16. What resources support you in this work?

Challenges and Next Steps:

17. What challenges have you encountered in your efforts to support introverted students in Tribes learning community? How have you responded to these challenges?
18. In your view, what are some important considerations that teachers need to make prior to enacting cooperative learning in the classroom? What advice do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to implementing cooperative learning while being responsive to students’ diverse learning style preferences and needs?