“Shakespeare is great, but Shakespeare is one voice”:

Integrating Indigenous Knowledges in the Secondary English Curriculum

By

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Abstract

At present there are a number of scholarly articles, education policies and curricula documents that promote the integration of Indigenous curricula in North American schools. Among these policies there is the Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework of 2007 which mandates the implementation of Indigenous content in every curriculum in Ontario in order to address the high dropout rates of Indigenous students. The following study focuses on the insights and experiences of two senior English teachers in the Greater Toronto Area who have experience integrating Indigenous literature in their classrooms. My findings suggest the benefits of teaching Indigenous literature in the English classroom, especially for Indigenous students. The study findings also relate challenges and solutions for teaching Indigenous literature and addresses issues surrounding teacher epistemology and positionality which can limit the scope of Indigenous education.

Key Words: Indigenous literature, Indigenous students, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sensitive education, Ontario English curriculum
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Educators in Canada encounter a large number of students of various ethnic backgrounds, religious beliefs, family dynamics and languages. Among these student populations, Indigenous peoples are presented in significant proportions because their population is much younger than any other population in Canada. A recent report stated that “the Aboriginal population (under the age of 25) makes up 46% of the total Aboriginal population in Ontario” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 34). This statistic indicates the vast number of Indigenous students who are progressing through our school system. However, progression does not characterize their overall academic success in Ontario schools. On the contrary, Indigenous student success rates are incredibly low and have been strikingly stagnant for the past decades (Battiste, 2002; Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; Kearns, 2013). In 1996, 21% of the Indigenous population earned a high school diploma and then only 23% in 2001 (OME, 2007b). The OME (2007b) attribute these low performance numbers to “a lack of understanding within school boards of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives” (p. 6).

In response to the low academic achievement of Indigenous students, the Ministry of Education (2007b) introduced The Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework. The policy, which was announced in 2007, was intended to bridge the educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder, & Methot, 2013). The document further stipulated that the policy was to improve the academic achievement of Indigenous students by the year 2016 (OME, 2007b). However, the FNMI Framework was also designed to integrate Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and histories in the Ontario curriculum for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. A fundamental purpose of the
policy was to allow all students to understand the significance of Indigenous viewpoints, cultures and experiences by diversifying the school curriculum with Indigenous content.

1.1 Articulation of the Research Problem

The OME has shown initiative toward diversifying the Ontario school curriculum by implementing policies that support the integration of Indigenous content. Kearns (2013) argues, however, that the policy is “ambitious and far-reaching” because it requires “multifaceted efforts” including funding and resources (p. 87). Nonetheless, several grants are awarded to schools in Ontario to supplement the curriculum with First Nations, Métis and Inuit education. For the 2015-2016 school year, a grant was specifically allocated to ‘Native Studies’ which funds and supports secondary courses that pertain to Indigenous education; the grant consisted of 21.2 million dollars (OME, 2015). Moreover, the Ontario English curriculum promotes courses such as ‘Contemporary Aboriginal Voices’ which is offered in all three stream levels (OME, 2007a). Thus, there is money being allocated for the integration of Indigenous education in Ontario school boards, which, alternatively means access to resources. Alternatively, some argue that schools in Ontario have not successfully integrated Indigenous education due to issues surrounding teacher and administration efforts to implement FNMI content into the curriculum. (Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns 2012; Kanu, 2007).

The presence of Indigenous students in the public schooling system is rapidly rising; “at present more than 50,000 Indigenous students attend public elementary and secondary schools in Ontario alone” (Cherubini et al., 2010, p. 334). It is extremely likely that educators in Ontario are teaching and guiding a number of Indigenous students at a time. Consequently, it is imperative to ensure that teachers are providing all students accurate, relevant and culturally-sensitive lessons that pertain to Indigenous education. Although Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns (2012) claim that
when teachers do integrate Indigenous content into their lessons they often portray Indigenous peoples in a primitive manner which may be an innocent mistake as many are given little training on how to educate students through an Indigenous lens. Senior teachers are of particular interest because of the soaring drop-out rates of Indigenous students in high school (Bazylak, 2002; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Nguyen, 2011; Sterzuk, 2008). Furthermore, secondary schools offer a number of elective courses, such as Writer’s Workshop, where the content can easily pertain to Indigenous content and subject matter.

Interestingly, the Ontario Curriculum for Secondary English (OME, 2007a) emphasizes the importance of exposing students to materials that reflect “the diversity of world cultures, including those of Aboriginal peoples” (p. 5). The updated document was released soon after the declaration of the FNMI Policy Framework (OME, 2007a) which can help explain why the curriculum places tremendous emphasis on Indigenous education. There are multiple examples that teachers can refer to when trying to integrate Indigenous perspectives, histories and cultures into their lessons. For instance, the English curriculum states that students can write an important event that occurred in “Aboriginal history for the school newspaper” (OME, 2007a, p. 48). It would be insightful to hear what Ontario, senior English teachers have to say about the revamped English curriculum as well as the FNMI Policy Framework and whether it has positively impacted their teaching experiences or are just documents that look better in print than in practice.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the practises of Ontario senior English teachers who are actively integrating Indigenous content and, ultimately, the perceived results of such practices. I will interview a small sample of these teachers about: effective resources that are
useful for teaching Indigenous perspectives, cultures and histories in senior English; teacher training, supports and barriers when integrating Indigenous lessons; and the perceived significance of teaching Indigenous content.

By sharing the practices of these teachers, educators can be better informed on how to approach and, ultimately, teach indigenous content which is a requirement under the FNMI Policy Framework of 2007 (OME, 2007b). The findings will be of particular use for senior English teachers because it will allow them to understand why teaching FNMI literature can be difficult and it may provide insight about the importance of implementing a culturally relevant pedagogy that is also culturally sensitive. The findings may also offer potential solutions that can help teachers approach and teach Indigenous literature. I also believe that the study will support educators who teach courses unrelated to English. The study findings can apply to educators who teach in the social sciences, sciences, math and history, just to name a few. Ultimately, this study aims to serve as a guiding tool for all teachers, regardless of teaching subject or grade, looking to implement a culturally sensitive pedagogy when teaching Indigenous content.

1.3 Research Questions

The central question guiding this research is as follows: how is a small sample of Ontario senior English teachers reportedly integrating Indigenous content into their lessons? Subsidiary questions that will serve to further guide the study include:

- Can you give me an example of a time that you explicitly implemented Indigenous content in the classroom?
- What training prepared these teachers to incorporate Indigenous perspectives, cultures and histories into their lesson plans?
What supports and barriers affect these teachers’ integration of Indigenous content into their lessons?

What are these teachers’ perceived significances of integrating Indigenous content in Ontario schools?

1.4 Background of the Researcher ( Reflexive Positioning Statement)

As a settler who is also member of an ethnic minority, and as a student who has solely been educated through a Eurocentric lens for the first twelve years of my educational career, I feel strongly connected to my research topic. This is because I can relate several instances where I struggled with my own identity and beliefs due to the structure of the Ontario education system. These instances almost threatened my academic success during my years as a senior student. For example in my Grade 11 English class we were assigned a fictional novel about Afghanistan. Both pupils and the teacher were convinced that what they were reading was authentic and representative of Afghan culture. Mortified with the class discussions on the oppressive and sexist culture of Afghanistan, I decided to withdraw from the class and refused to identify as an Afghan when in the classroom. Consequently, my concern is not only about Indigenous education and the lack of it in provincially funded schools. Rather, my concern is about the content that is being taught; from whose perspective are we learning this information and can we truly say that it is representative and accurate knowledge of Indigenous peoples?

My reflexive position can contribute to the research study as it allows me to see through the perspective of an Indigenous or other minority student who may be in a Eurocentric classroom precisely because I have encountered a similar issue of misrepresentation. However, I recognize that I live on land that has been appropriated and that I accrue benefits from a system that has simultaneously denied Indigenous peoples that same access to land and citizenship. As a
person of color, I recognize my marginalization is incomparable to the marginalization and colonization of Indigenous peoples. I will remain mindful of this in order to ensure that my struggles as an ethnic minority do not lead to an erasure of Indigenous struggles. Some of my experiences can help structure my interview questions as I can inquire from both the student and teacher’s standpoint. However, I must be cautious about my biases which have been influenced by my social positioning; nevertheless, I am committed to a reflexive stance as a researcher.

1.5 Preview of the Whole MTRP

This MTRP has five chapters including this introduction. The second chapter reviews literature that has already been published on the topic of integrating Indigenous content in North American schools, educating Indigenous students and the overall academic standing of Indigenous students in Canada. The third chapter illustrates my research methodology. This is a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with two Ontario, senior English teachers who intentionally integrate Indigenous content. Chapter Four shares my study findings and my analysis. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses implications based on my findings, poses further questions and provides suggestions for future directions in teaching and research.

Before I begin reviewing the literature, however, a few words about terminology are in order. The term Indigenous encompasses a number of distinctive peoples and nations. Therefore, the term Indigenous should not be understood as a single, homogenous entity as the word “provides a common denominator to capture three collective but distinct groups (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) in Canada” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 145). Much of the literature pertaining to Indigenous students in Canada tends to use the terms “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” interchangeably. Although the literature reviewed here (e.g., Gray & Beresford, 2008; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002; Kearns, 2013; Mason, 2008; Nguyen, 2011) acknowledges that
such words encapsulate various communities, cultures and identities, it still refers to First Nations, Métis or Inuit Peoples using these umbrella terms. The issue is further magnified when other nations, aside from Canada, use identical terms to describe their Indigenous population. For instance, research pertaining to Indigenous peoples in Australia and the United States also use the terms “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Lee, 2007; Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2003). Ultimately, the term extends to cover not only distinguishing communities, but it also expands on an international scale. Readers should, therefore, be cautious when identifying Indigenous peoples as a single group because “it is yet another form of racialization” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 145; see also Kitchen et al., 2010; St. Denis, 2000). For the purpose of this study, the term “Indigenous” will be used in order to describe the wide array of peoples who preceded settlers in what is now called North America. However, it should be noted that this is an umbrella term that is referring to a number of peoples, communities and even nationalities.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review literature on teachers’ attempts to integrate Indigenous education in North American schools. More specifically, I consider the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) in its effort to diversify the school curriculum by implementing policies that mandate the integration of Indigenous content in the curriculum; I will be focusing on the English curriculum. I then discuss the growing presence of Indigenous students in certain demographic areas and explore how teachers integrate Indigenous content when there is such a presence in the classroom. Finally, I will review literature on teacher practices that promote an inclusive and decolonized class atmosphere in which Indigenous education can be taken up in a culturally respectful manner.

2.1 Research on Indigenous Peoples in Canada

The following section consults literature that pertains to the growing presence of Indigenous students in Ontario schools (OME, 2007b), the success rates of Indigenous students in mainstream schools (Aquash, 2013) and the Eurocentric approach that is implemented in Ontario schools when teaching both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Lee, 2007; Marker, 2005).

2.1.1 Indigenous population in Canada

There has been a rapid increase in the Indigenous youth population of Canada (Cherubini et al., 2010; Kearns, 2013; Sterzuk, 2008). In fact, 38% of Indigenous people in Canada were reported to be “children under the age of 15 [in 2008, which is] proportionally twice as high as the rest of the Canadian population” (Nguyen, 2011, p. 234; see also Kearns, 2013). In Saskatchewan, for example, there exists a polarized populace which consists “almost exclusively
of White settlers and Indigenous peoples” (Sterzuk, 2010, p. 9; see also Bazylak, 2002). In 2010, Indigenous school-aged children represented 33% of the population in Saskatchewan and it is estimated that by 2016 that number will increase to 46.4% which is roughly half of the students there (Sterzuk, 2010). Ontario shows a similar Indigenous youth population where “the Aboriginal population (under age 25) makes up 46% of the total Aboriginal population” (OME, 2007b, p. 34). This trend will continue for some time because the birthrate “among the Aboriginal population is approximately 1.5 times higher than the Canadian average” (OME, 2007b, p. 34). Such statistical ratings suggest that there are a large number of Indigenous students streaming through Canada’s education system which, in turn, indicates the urgency of implementing a culturally relevant pedagogy for Indigenous students and enlightening non-Indigenous students about Indigenous perspectives, cultures and histories.

2.1.2 Indigenous student success rates

Compared to the general youth population, Indigenous students are lagging behind in terms of academic achievement (Bazylak, 2002; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Nguyen, 2011; Sterzuk, 2008). In Canada, during the year 2000, 37% of Indigenous students graduated from high school while 65% of the general population graduated in that same year (Bazylak, 2002). Among Indigenous adults aged 20-24 who attended public schools in the nation, 48% had not completed secondary school compared to the 26% of their “non-Aboriginal counterpart” (Nguyen, 2011 p. 234; see also Kitchen & Hodson, 2013). Across the nation, “the proportion of Aboriginal people with a high school diploma increased from 21% in 1996 to 23% in 2001” (OME, 2007, p. 35) indicating almost stagnant Indigenous student success rates. Focusing on a more narrow scope, in Saskatchewan, the Indigenous student drop-out rate peaked at 90% in 1981 and although there has been government intervention, the drop-out rate for Indigenous
students remains above 60% in the province (Bazylak, 2002; Sterzuk, 2008). These consistent and major gaps between the academic rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is understood as the detrimental result of mainstream schooling (Aquash, 2013; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Kitchen et al., 2010; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Lee, 2007; Nguyen, 2011; Sterzuk, 2008).

2.2 Setbacks of Mainstream Education in Canada

Initially, education was a colonial tool that was used by nations such as Canada, the United States and Australia to deliberately assimilate Indigenous populations into mainstream society (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Lee, 2007; Marker, 2005). What were known as residential schools in Canada and boarding schools in America were institutions used to “abolish [Native] languages and cultural ties in order to promote assimilation” (Lee, 2007, p. 196; see also Marker, 2005). Indigenous children were forced to attend residential schools that forbade them to speak in their native tongue and where “their strong cultural beliefs were dismissed as superstition” (Nguyen, 2011, p. 236). Although the residential schools of Canada were discontinued after 1980, schools in Canada continue to uphold a Eurocentric approach in education, although in a much more subtle manner (Marker, 2005).

Residential schools resulted in intergenerational trauma for the preceding generations of Indigenous students (Gary & Beresford, 2008; Marker, 2005; Wilson, 2003). The “unresolved grief” due to the “dispossession, segregation and assimilation” (Gary & Beresford, 2008, p. 205) of Indigenous peoples in Canada has created intergenerational disadvantage. Succeeding generations may express this trauma through “family violence, alcohol and drug abuse and suicide” (Gary & Beresford, 2008, p. 205; see also Bazylak, 2002). Nonetheless, intergenerational trauma can also be conveyed through the continuing mistrust and suspicion of the education system (Gary & Beresford, 2008; Higgins, Madden & Kortweg, 2013; Kanu,
2007). By denying a respectful, accommodating and holistic educational approach to contemporary generations of Indigenous students, schools in Canada only further promote “intergenerational patterns of educational disadvantage” (Gary & Beresford, 2008, p. 205). This is because the mainstream education system continues to pressure Indigenous students into assimilation by compelling them to insert themselves into mainstream society (Anderson, 2002; Kitchen et al., 2010; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Sterzuk, 2010).

There are Indigenous students who eventually conform to societal norms while often discarding their Native practises and culture. As such, there is great concern among Indigenous leaders about the “decline in knowledge of language and culture among their young” (Kitchen & Hodson, 2013, p. 149; see also Anderson, 2002; Bazylak, 2002; Kitchen et al., 2010; Sterzuk, 2010). In 1996, a mere 9% of Native children in North America spoke “an Aboriginal mother tongue” (Kitchen & Hodson, 2013, p. 149) and the number dropped further down to 7% in 2001. Indigenous leaders and scholars alike have advocated for Indigenous knowledges in the Canadian school curriculum because they believed that it would help Indigenous students “identify, represent and celebrate their languages, cultures and values” (p. 149). However, even with the implementation of the Ontario FNMI Policy Framework in 2007 which is “more sensitive to cultural needs, [it still] leaves decision-making authority in the hands of the school boards [and] not Aboriginal education authorities and communities” (p. 109). As a result, key stakeholders may be excluded from decision-making, including Indigenous parents, students, community leaders and elders.

2.2.1 Attempts to decolonize the Ontario curriculum

The FNMI Policy Framework (2007b) requires teachers in Ontario to implement Indigenous knowledges which, in theory, shows tremendous promise for the academic
achievement of Indigenous students and cultural awareness for non-Indigenous students (Chartrand, 2012; Kitchen et al., 2010; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Nguyen, 2011). However, the theory of the FNMI Policy Framework and the actual practise of implementing the policy have proven to be two completely different things.

There are factors that the OME did not entirely address when enacting the FNMI Policy Framework. Such factors include inexperienced and untrained educators, and the institutionalization of Indigenous education (Aquash, 2013; Chartrand, 2012; Higgins et al., 2013; Kitchen et al., 2010; Mason, 2008; Nguyen, 2011; Sterzuk, 2008). These elements help to perpetuate the Eurocentric method of teaching in education. For instance, Indigenous perspectives in the English curriculum are only depicted in “units or single treatments rather than integrated throughout the curriculum” (Higgins et al. 2013, p. 232). Higgins et al. (2013) found this to be a common practice of educators that were untrained in Indigenous education. Although their intentions may be good, such practises can leave a negative impact on Indigenous students as it continues to label Indigenous peoples as the homogenous ‘Other’ while also tokenizing them (Madden et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2011). Furthermore, Chartrand (2012) argues, that by hastily teaching non-Native students about a wealth of nations, peoples and perspectives through single installments, students may continue to be misinformed about the variety of Indigenous perspectives. Consider the many schools in the Winnipeg region that are beginning to embrace and teach “The Seven Grandfather Teachings” which are actually teachings that originated from the Anishinabee (Chartrand, 2012). Not only are schools homogenizing nations into a single category but they are also misleading “students into believing that all Aboriginals across Canada maintain such teachings and that they are all the same” (p. 146). However, Kitchen et al. (2010) found that educators were often pressured to transmit a “prescribed” (p. 110) curriculum to their
students which can result in the communication of inaccurate or inchoate information about Indigenous perspectives (see also Mason, 2008).

The British Columbia Ministry of Education required educators to integrate Indigenous perspectives into 35% of the classroom content in 2000 (Mason, 2008). However, in that same year the Ministry also “formally laid out all the prescribed learning outcomes (PLO’s)” (Mason, 2008, p. 136) that the educators were expected to teach for the standardized exam that accounts for 20% of the student’s final mark. The issue was then magnified when a member of the Ministry stated that “the local and cultural components” that were taught to the students were “unexaminable” and therefore will not be included in the standardized exam (p. 137). The Ministry was particularly referring to anything that was not on the PLO’s; although Indigenous history was mentioned it was strictly referring to “the general political history of First Nations Peoples in BC” (Mason, 2008, p. 136) thus severely limiting the scope of Indigenous content (Chartrand, 2012). This encouraged educators to teach Indigenous knowledges in a single unit due to time constraints and the “pressure to focus on the examinable aspects of the course” (p. 137). By predetermining certain aspects that are to be taught, which stems from a Eurocentric lens, the educational authorities can create an institutionalized field of Indigenous education (Chartrand, 2012; Mason, 2008). Moreover, standardizing Indigenous education and then implementing compact units into the curriculum leaves the notion that Indigenous knowledges is not essential to student learning (Mason, 2008).

The research presented in this section suggests that even with a growing presence of Indigenous students and the implementation of policies supporting the integration of Indigenous content there still seems to be issues surrounding the practicality behind implementing Indigenous perspectives into the classroom.
2.3 Dismantling Colonial Attitudes in the Classroom

Dismantling colonial attitudes in the classroom has proven to be a difficult task because non-Native educators “have already learned about Indigenous people from the lens of Western epistemology” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 145; see also Anderson, 2002; Aquash, 2013; Gray & Beresford, 2008; Mason, 2008; Higgins et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2011). As former students who excelled in mainstream education, it is only natural for teachers to become mainstream educators. However, these educational institutions play a major role in perpetuating “negative stereotypes and in developing a misunderstanding of Canada’s Aboriginal peoples” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 145). Although “teaching Aboriginal studies in education that is respectful and decolonizing […] is a relatively new experience in most Canadian schools” (Fitznor, 2005 as cited in Chartrand, 2012, p. 145) there is plenty of literature that proposes methods which can help to dismantle colonial attitudes in the classroom.

2.3.1 Training settler teachers in teacher education

When the OME enacted the FNMI Policy Framework they argued that “a lack of awareness among teachers of the learning styles of Aboriginal students” (Nguyen, 2011, p. 239) contributed to the poor academic success of Indigenous pupils. In response to the issue, much of the literature that I reviewed argues that it is imperative that pre-service teachers are prepared to educate both Native and non-Native students about Indigenous knowledges (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002; Kitchen et al., 2010; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Lee, 2007; Mason, 2008; Nguyen, 2011). One example, “The Indigenous Knowledge Instructor’s Program”, consists of a one-week summer retreat over the span of two summers (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002, p. 452). During the retreat, pre-service teachers practise “an Indigenous pedagogy of the land, learning through watching and doing” (p. 452). This program enabled
teacher candidates to explore Indigenous knowledges “by re-creating understandings of it with students in other contexts” (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002, p. 452).

Although much of the literature urges an Indigenous education program for pre-service teachers there is also literature that provides possible remedies to those who are already practising the profession.

Experienced teachers are asked to “start with what is local” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 153) which essentially alludes to a culturally-responsive pedagogical approach as well as a place-conscious perspective (Kitchen et al., 2010). When preparing lessons with Indigenous content, teachers must consider the school they are working at and its surrounding community (Higgins et al., 2013). Participants in Higgins et al.’s (2013) study asserted that a place-conscious perspective can help teachers to avoid using homogenous terms such as ‘Indigenous’ because they are referring to a specific group situated in that community. When using a place-conscious perspective, teachers can also use the abundant resources that are available within the community in order to tap into the “local ways [of] teaching and learning” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 154; see also Madden et al., 2013). Moreover, Madden et al. (2013) found that a place-conscious perspective can help inform a teacher’s understanding of Indigenous education while also effectively engaging their students. Ultimately, educators are encouraged to “become [aware of and] responsive to the complex demands of diverse classrooms and schools” (Kitchen et al., 2010, p. 110). Another approach includes creating “strong and healthy relationships” with Native students because the “strength of the student-teacher relationship often dictates the level of success the student achieves in school” (Bazylak, 2002, p. 145). The teacher plays a significant role in a child’s life, especially in Indigenous cultures (Bazylak, 2002). This is because “teachers surround the spiritual, emotional, physical and mental realms of the medicine wheel” (p. 136).
where the medicine wheel is a framework that organizes “life experiences, stories and lessons of participants” (p. 145).

In relation to the English curriculum and pre-service English teachers, some studies have shown that novice teachers often carry biased views about language variation (Sterzuk, 2008, 2010). These biased views tend to “affect minority-language students in settler schools in a number of ways” (Sterzuk, 2010, p. 104) such as compelling educators to identify minority-language students as deficient or even incompetent in English. In order to alleviate this issue, teachers must acknowledge that there is a socially constructed hierarchy in Canada with regards to English variation (Sterzuk, 2008, 2010). When assessing their students, they must also be mindful of the notion that different English dialects do not necessarily mean impairment (Sterzuk, 2008, 2010). Sterzuk (2008) further argues that educators can learn to avoid having such biased views on language variation if pre-service teachers were required to take a course on linguistics.

### 2.3.2 Implementing Indigenous pedagogies

Scholars have found that self-reflection is an important pedagogical strategy that teachers should begin to use in the classroom (Kitchen et al., 2010). Critical reflections help teachers, especially novice teachers, use their own experiences as well as “challenge their unexamined assumptions on learning” (Kitchen et al., 2010, p. 110; see also Chartrand, 2012). Furthermore, it encourages students to become self-aware in terms of their own development (Kitchen et al., 2010; Chartrand, 2012). In relation to critical reflection, storytelling is a “cornerstone of many Indigenous ways of teaching and learning” (Chartrand, 2012, p. 152). Storytelling can be integrated by welcoming guest speakers from local Indigenous communities like Elders and oral storytellers (Battiste, 2002; Higgins et al., 2013)
Educators should be wary of teaching through a Western lens as it commonly puts colonizer language and history in the forefront while only briefly touching upon the Indigenous perspective (Anderson, 2002; Aquash, 2013; Wilson, 2003). Even when Indigenous perspectives are presented, this is commonly done through a Eurocentric lens that identifies these perspectives as “primitive”, “obsolete” and therefore insignificant (Anderson, 2002, p. 294-295; see also Aquash, 2013; Battiste, 2002; Kearns, 2013).

Aside from educators, the literature asserts that the provincial ministries of education should begin to recognize that Indigenous content cannot be crammed into “predetermined categories” (Mason, 2008, p. 142) of the curriculum precisely because Indigenous pedagogy places great emphasis on teaching holistically and exploring connections and relations with regards to any subject (Higgins et al., 2013).

The following section will particularly focus on teaching through an Indigenous lens in the English classroom along with the complications and advantages entailed within the English curriculum.

2.4 Indigenous Education in the English Curriculum

When considering the English curriculum in Canadian school boards it is important to remember the following:

In the field of linguistics, it is generally accepted that no language or language variety is more developed than another; no language or language variety promotes better or more complex thinking than any other; there is no basis for the evaluative comparison of languages or language varieties. As such, no intellectual deficits can be attributed to speakers of minority varieties of language. (Sterzuk, 2008, p. 13)
A statistic from the Canadian Census of 2001 revealed that 80% of the Indigenous population in Canada speaks either English or French (Sterzuk, 2008). However, the English that is spoken by Indigenous peoples is, in most cases, a variation of the English that is “spoken by the majority population” (Sterzuk, 2008, p. 13) and is commonly referred to as Indigenous English (Sterzuk, 2010). Mainstream educators in Saskatchewan have been found to believe that Indigenous English is a deviant form of Standard English that prevents the Native student from “acquiring literacy skills and mastering subject material” (Sterzuk 2010, p. 103; Sterzuk, 2008). This train of thought may stem from Saskatchewan’s English curricula which places significant importance on “verb structure and vocabulary” thereby limiting the value of content knowledge (p. 104).

Nonetheless, certain provincial school boards have shown initiative as they attempt to incorporate new courses in their English curriculum which places less emphasis on elements like grammar and syntax. For instance, schools in British Columbia have implemented courses including “English First Peoples 10, 11 and 12” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015). These courses provide students with an approach that does not solely focus on teaching the structure of the language. The course also makes it easier for teachers to implement Indigenous knowledges in a holistic way as opposed to cramming it into a single unit as the course is entirely based on Indigenous perspectives, cultures and histories. Moreover, the courses “incorporate the input of Aboriginal educators” thereby giving students a more authentic representation of Indigenous content (BCME, 2015, p. 3). Initiatives such as this are likely to happen in the English curriculum because it is viewed as a decent starting point for teachers who are implementing Indigenous content (Ottman & Pritchard, 2010). This is because “[s]torytelling is a very important part of the educational process” in Indigenous culture (Ottman & Pritchard, 2010,
Educators can refer to vast amounts of texts and orated stories that are expressed through an Indigenous lens and, thus, provide students with Indigenous perspectives (Shipp, 2013, p. 27).

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review, I reviewed research related to the Indigenous youth of Canada and their academic achievements in the public school system. I explored literature that pertains to teacher practise when implementing Indigenous knowledges to their lessons and the effect that the Eurocentric approach can have on the Indigenous student population. I also considered literature that proposes possible solutions and remedies to help decolonize the classroom and teaching practises.

By understanding how teachers are currently integrating Indigenous knowledges in mainstream schools in Ontario, we can determine what needs to be done to ensure that it is being accomplished in a culturally sensitive manner. This, in return, can raise cultural awareness among non-Native students, thus following the requirements of the FNMI Policy Framework, while also creating a culturally sensitive space for Indigenous students in Ontario schools.

This study approaches the issue of teacher practice in relation to Indigenous content using semi-structured interviews with two senior English teachers in Ontario. The research focuses on how teachers implement Indigenous content into the classroom, the practises they use to promote Aboriginal education as well as how they reflect on their own performance when teaching Indigenous content. With their insights and experiences, I hope to provide a greater understanding of how to effectively and respectfully teach Indigenous content to both non-Indigenous and Indigenous students.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the research methodology. I will begin by discussing the research approach and its procedures before elaborating on the instruments of data collection. I will also relate key information about the participant recruitment method and will then proceed to explain the data analysis procedures that will be taken. I continue by reviewing the ethical considerations that are relevant to my methodology and study. Relatedly, I will discuss the limitations as well as the advantages that the research methodology poses. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the important methodological decisions that were made and the basis for such decisions given the purpose and nature of the study.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

The study was conducted using a qualitative research approach that was based on a review of the literature that was pertinent to the research as well as semi-structured interviews with two senior-level English teachers. Campbell (1999) differentiates quantitative and qualitative research approaches when she asserts that quantitative research “focuses on precise and objective measurements that use numerical and statistical analysis to support or refute a hypothesis” whereas qualitative research “collects open-ended, emerging data that is then used to develop themes” (p. 3). I was not looking to confirm a hypothesis or to draw generalizations from a larger population; instead I was exploring the complexities of implementing Indigenous content into the Ontario senior English curriculum thus making the qualitative approach more suitable. Ultimately, the purpose of my study was to “answer questions about the ‘what’, ‘how’ or ‘why’ of implementing Indigenous knowledges into English classrooms rather than “how many” teachers or lessons are dedicated to incorporating Indigenous content (Gunaydin & McCusker, 2015, p. 537).
The rationale behind implementing a qualitative approach also had much to do with the nature of my research questions as they could be compartmentalized into rigid queries that had predetermined answers. The study required open-ended inquiries as it permitted respondents “to be open and spontaneous and to speak about the issue in question using language and ideas of their own” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 6).

Jackson II, Drummond & Camara (2007) support this idea when they argue that qualitative researchers employ the ‘humans as instruments’ approach as their focus “turns to understanding human beings’ richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences” (p. 22). The approach is commonly identified as “thick-descriptive” due to the “richness and detail [of] the discussion” (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 23). Through this design, I was able to gather insightful data surrounding my complex and multifaceted research questions because it permitted the participants to offer detailed replies as opposed to “forced choice responses” which can often appear in quantitative research studies that use methods like the closed survey (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 23).

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is exploratory in nature thereby permitting the researcher to delve into the “distinctive features of situations and events, and upon the beliefs of individuals or sub-cultures” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 5). My study relied heavily upon the reflections of senior English teachers as well as their perceptions of Indigenous education. Therefore, the respondents’ answers had to be open-ended as opposed to restricted and fixed as it would provide me with data that resonated with their unique experiences and beliefs.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Qualitative studies can rely upon several different methods of data including that collected through interviews, observations, document analysis and the analysis of online data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For the purpose of this study I solely implemented the semi-structured, open-ended interview as it is the preferred method in qualitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This is because it allows “for more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes for both the interviewer and respondent” (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 25). Through this approach I was able to listen to the interviewee and welcome their insights as opposed to imposing my understanding of the issue onto them (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Essentially, the interviews allowed me to compose a “flexible checklist of questions” that permitted my respondents to freely express their perceptions, beliefs and stance on the integration of Indigenous content into the senior English classroom (Borisoff & Chesebro, 2007, p. 9).

The central question guiding this study related to how Ontario senior-level English teachers were implementing Indigenous content into their lessons. Consequently, much of the interview questions stemmed from this central inquiry. I divided the interview protocol (located in Appendix B) into five categories, beginning with structured, closed questions related to the participant’s background. This was then followed by a section that was concerned with the training the participant was provided with in order to implement Indigenous knowledges. The third section was comprised of questions that inquired about the supports and barriers the participant encountered when integrating Indigenous knowledges in their lessons followed by a section that reached a more personal level as it was concerned with the participant’s perspective about Indigenous education and why it should be integrated into the English curriculum. The
final section posed questions about the next steps that should be taken to address the issue. Examples of questions include:

- At any point in your teaching career were you provided with training that would aid you in integrating Indigenous perspectives, culture and history into your classroom?
- What were some of the barriers you encountered when you implemented your first lesson that pertained to Indigenous knowledges?
- After the FNMI Policy Framework was implemented in 2007, did you feel a stronger sense of urgency to incorporate Indigenous elements into your lessons? Why or why not?

3.3 Participants

In this section I describe the sampling criteria that I created for the participant recruitment process. I then discuss the potential paths I considered for scoping out teacher participants. There is also a section that briefly relates the individual biographies of each participant.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

Qualitative research “typically involves purposeful sampling” because such sampling can “enhance [the] understanding of the information-rich case” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 248). The specific purposeful method that I used is known as criterion sampling as it searches for participants that fulfill preconceived criteria formulated by the researcher (Sandelowski, 2000). The participants adhered to the sampling criteria while also possessing critical commonalities that were suited to the purpose of this study. The criteria were as follows:

1. Teachers will have taught senior English classes in Ontario schools.
2. Teachers will have integrated Indigenous content into past English lessons.
3. Teachers will have been employed in an Ontario school board prior to the installment of the FNMI Framework Policy in 2007 (OME, 2007b).

4. Teachers will be working in the Greater Toronto Area.

Due to the humanistic and interactive nature of the qualitative approach (Campbell, 2014) it is common for the recruitment process to be limited to a few participants which is why I only interviewed two teachers (Jackson II, Drummond & Camara, 2007). In order to address the central purpose of the study I ensured that the teachers have taught English classes and that they have implemented Indigenous content in some of their English lessons. I also wanted to understand the degree of urgency that the participants felt to integrate Indigenous content before and after the installment of the FNMI Policy Framework, which was implemented in 2007 (OME, 2007b). This is precisely why I interviewed teachers that taught prior to the year 2007. In order to sustain a geographical scope, I interviewed teachers in the Greater Toronto Area.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

Through random sampling, researchers are able to select individuals from a population where every member has an equal chance of being chosen (Sandelowski, 2000). However, this method of sampling is ineffective in qualitative studies because “some informants are 'richer' than others and these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding for the researcher” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Therefore, I refrained from using random sampling when selecting my participants so that I could gather rich data from my interviews. Instead, I considered three broad choices that are commonly used in qualitative studies when seeking participants for my study; these approaches include convenience sampling, purposeful sampling and theoretical sampling (Marshall, 1996; Sandelowski, 2000).
In the convenience sample the participants are easily accessible (Marshall, 1996). This method requires little time, effort and money in comparison to the other two approaches (Christensen & Johnson, 2013; Marshall, 1996). However, the data that is gathered from such samples may lack “intellectual credibility” and offer “poor quality” at the price of convenience (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). In contrast, the purposeful sample is an approach where the researcher “actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Through the knowledge of literature pertinent to the study and through a list of sampling criteria, the researcher is able to discern between participants who can contribute a wealth of informative data to their study and those who cannot (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Finally, the theoretical sampling method is a qualitative design that creates theories based on the emerging data and then selects a “new sample to examine and elaborate on this theory” (Marshall, 1996, p. 523).

I used a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling due to the parameters of my Masters of Teaching Research Project. The sampling process was purposeful because I sought participants that satisfied the predetermined sampling criteria that I have listed. Nonetheless, as a former secondary student that had solely attended schools in the Greater Toronto Area I also used convenience sampling by scouting senior-level English teachers that I had who have also implemented Indigenous content in their lessons. I also attended conferences regarding Indigenous education which were often held at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. I attempted to network and locate teacher participants in those settings.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

Kate (pseudonym) is an in-service teacher who is currently employed in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). She is also the assistant curriculum leader of literacy in schoolwide initiatives which is a program that addresses the literacy needs of students within that
particular school. Kate has taught a variety of courses including media studies, history, English, and family studies; she has also served as a teacher librarian. Kate has reported practices of integrating Indigenous education in all courses, particularly in the English classroom.

The second participant, Ayesha (pseudonym), has been employed in the TDSB since 2005. She supervises a number of clubs including Historical Society and the Gay-Straight Alliance club. Ayesha is a huge proponent of an education that is primarily based on social justice issues and ensuring that marginalized voices are a part of the curriculum. Both, Kate and Ayesha have taught in the TDSB prior to the declaration of the FNMI Policy Framework.

3.4 Data Analysis

The central aim of data analysis is to “make sense of the data collected and to highlight the important messages, features or findings” (Burnham, 2013, p. 75). In terms of qualitative research, data analysis is based on coding and the development of overarching themes found within the collected information (Burnham, 2013). I gathered my data through semi-structured interviews; therefore, I employed the coding strategy to understand and relate my findings. The fundamental purpose of the coding design is to assign “salient” or “summative” attributes to selected segments of the gathered data (Saldaña, 2008, p. 3). This helps the researcher summarize their findings while also identifying key themes within the data.

The identification of themes is a process in which the researcher carefully reads and re-reads the information that they have gathered in order to find patterns which then become “categories for analysis” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). In reporting their findings, qualitative researchers often support these themes with excerpts from the raw data that they collected during their interviews (Saldaña, 2008). Through the use of effective coding, the themes identified by the researcher remain credible because their interpretation remains “directly linked to the words of the participants” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). After I
performed the semi-structured interviews with Kate and Ayesha I used coding and, subsequently, theme identification. During theme identification I merged overlapping themes found in the separate transcripts. Afterward I analyzed the themes discovered among the data. This process allowed me to organize and effectively analyze my data without falsely interpreting the information my participants provided me with.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Jackson II, Drummond & Camara (2007) remind researchers that it is their utmost responsibility to approach each study with “ethical diligence” (p. 27). Qualitative researchers need to be very mindful of ethical procedures when performing interviews especially because they are working with individuals who directly impact the study. Consequently, they must adhere to the ethical principles of research including privacy and anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent (Flick, 2009). Researchers should also establish rapport with their participants in order to gain their trust which can, in return, help to enhance the data collected (Lichtman, 2010).

Researchers must ensure that their participants’ privacy is not evaded and that their information is not revealed in the study in order to protect their identity (Lichtman, 2010). I refrained from using identifying information about the teachers or the schools they work in and I employed pseudonyms in place of their names within my study. Furthermore, I avoided using lengthy verbatim quotes from my participants as it can potentially be traced back to them through the internet and multimedia sites (Lichtman, 2010). Flick (2009) also advises researchers to store their data including audio clips and written transcripts in a secure and locked container so that no one has access to it other than the researcher. As a precaution, I will ensure that the--password protected and safely secured--data is destroyed five years after the completion of the
study. Intrinsically tied to privacy is confidentiality; qualitative researchers often gather personal and sensitive information about their respondents due to the open-ended nature of interviews (Flick, 2009).

As an ethical researcher I am obliged to enlighten respondents of the purpose of my study so that they are informed and willing participants as opposed to oblivious research subjects. Before proceeding with the interview, I asked that they sign the consent form which contained an explanation of the study and notified the participants that I would be recording the interview. I was aware that the study could take unexpected twists and turns, therefore, the participant could never be completely informed much like the researcher themselves (Lichtman, 2010). However, I tried to explain as much about my study as I possibly could. I also made it very clear that they could withdraw from the study without feeling penalized or that there would be consequences (Flick, 2009; Lichtman, 2010). I was aware that the nature of my study could potentially make my respondents feel vulnerable as I inquired about their teaching practices and personal perspectives. Hence I reminded Kate and Ayesha that they could refuse to respond to any question that I posed. This, in return, enhanced the rapport that I had with my participants.

Lichtman (2010) advises researchers to discern the difference between establishing rapport with their participants and creating “fake friendships” (p. 56). Researchers should not position themselves as a friend because it can be deceptive as it may encourage participants to “disclose more information than they want to” (p. 56). Rather than creating this notion of friendship, I gained rapport by thoroughly informing the participants of my study. Moreover, I maintained a steady dialogue, about the study, with them prior to the interview. Also, I began the interviews by posing demographic questions and questions related to their teaching career in order to gain rapport and to ease them into the fundamental purpose of my study.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Qualitative approaches are often responsive to local conditions and situations (Christensen & Johnson, 2013). However, this can prove to be a limitation as it is difficult for the researcher to draw generalizations from groups aside from the participants being interviewed (Christensen & Johnson, 2013). I was able to identify thematic strands from the data I collected but I cannot apply these themes to a larger population especially because the sample study was limited to two participants. Furthermore, the methodological constraints of the study prevented me from observing classrooms where Indigenous content is implemented or speaking with students and parents. Nonetheless, unlike in quantitative research, I was able to pose questions that did not have predetermined answers to the participants that I was able to interview (Anderson, 2010). I was also able to explore the research questions in depth because I was present during the data gathering and was therefore able to guide the interview and ask for clarification when needed. Although it is important to note that this can also be a limitation of qualitative research as the researcher’s presence may affect the participants’ answers (Anderson, 2010). The senior English teachers who I interviewed may have felt too uncomfortable or embarrassed to disclose errors that they made when attempting to integrate Indigenous content into their lessons. Consequently, they may have refrained from relating such instances directly to me which could be problematic for the data collection process.

After the interviews were performed there were other limitations that the qualitative research posed. The process of transcribing, reading, re-reading, coding and identifying themes was extremely time consuming (Anderson, 2010; Christensen & Johnson, 2013). Although the process was lengthier than quantitative data analysis, qualitative research can be more powerful because it reveals data based on human experiences as opposed to simply disclosing numbers.
(Anderson, 2010). Upon sharing personal accounts about integrating Indigenous content, these teachers’ lived experiences and accounts were acknowledged as well as validated.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the research methodology by beginning with the research approach. I also discussed the instruments I utilized for data collection which was limited to semi-structured interviews and a review of the literature pertinent to my study. I continued by briefly discussing the sampling criteria of my teacher participants and the various sampling methods that I used to establish a study sample including purposeful and convenience sampling. This chapter also disclosed important information about the designs I employed to analyze the data once it was gathered; I particularly focused on coding and identifying thematic strands from the data. I also considered and discussed the ethical procedures and protocol when implementing a qualitative approach, especially for interviews and the participants involved. Finally, I made sure to mention and elaborate on the potential limitations as well as strengths of employing a qualitative approach for this particular study. For the next chapter, I report the findings of the data analysis.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter One, I articulated the research context and problem; thereafter, I defined the purpose of the study which is to explore how senior-level English teachers in Ontario are reportedly integrating Indigenous content into their lessons. I then proposed my research questions which focus on the supports, barriers and challenges educators encountered when implementing Indigenous content in senior English. In Chapter Two, I examined literature that discussed educators’ attempts to integrate Indigenous content into the classroom, while also surveying literature that pertained to the growing presence of Indigenous students in Ontario schools. Chapter Three defined my research methodology as a qualitative study where I recruited participants through a combination of purposeful and convenient sampling. The recruited participants, Kate and Ayesha, are senior English teachers who are employed in the Greater Toronto Area. They have been teaching before and after the implementation of the FNMI Policy Framework in 2007 and have reported practices of integrating Indigenous content in their English classrooms.

The following chapter discusses the findings that emerged while analyzing the data collected from two separate, semi-structured qualitative interviews held with high school English teachers in Toronto. The findings are organized into three main themes:

i) Invigorating English through the Integration of Indigenous Content

ii) Challenges and Strategies for Teaching Indigenous Content

iii) Addressing Epistemology and Positionality Limitations

Each unique theme will individually explore the data analyzed. I will, initially, provide an overview of the theme and then elaborate through the use of excerpts and quotations from the
data collected. Within each section, I will also relate how my analyzed data support, challenge or deter from previous findings about the integration of Indigenous content in the English classroom. I will conclude the chapter by summarizing the central findings in my research study.

4.1 Invigorating English through the Integration of Indigenous Content

During the interviews, Kate and Ayesha overwhelmingly supported the integration of Indigenous content into their lessons because they believe that it enhances the English curriculum while also supporting Indigenous students. Both respondents found that FNMI inclusion promoted a culturally responsive pedagogy while simultaneously deterring them from employing a Eurocentric teaching approach. Moreover, they have found that Indigenous-based lessons support Indigenous students and address their achievement gaps in Ontario schools. In their view, this all contributes to an invigorated English curriculum that is more representative and inclusive of the students who they are teaching.

Early in the interview, Kate revealed that there was a high population of Indigenous students attending the high school where she teaches. Kate further asserted: “because we have such a large population of students that identify as First Nations, we are collectively very aware that…we need to be culturally relevant to these students”. She responded to the dynamic of her school composition by implementing Indigenous content because she finds that it “speaks to a large number of [her] students”. Ayesha echoed this sentiment when she claimed that it is crucial for educators to incorporate “diverse content and [employ] a culturally responsive pedagogy” because it allows teachers to “access student knowledge” about the given topic. Although Ayesha did not mention the number of Indigenous students in her school, she recognized the importance of educating students about Indigenous peoples and their “long and rich history and culture that existed years before European colonialism”. Ayesha finds it particularly important because she wants her students to realize that the settlers of Canada are residing on land that
belongs to Indigenous peoples. Therefore, she finds that it is important to “recognize, acknowledge and appreciate” their history and culture. Both respondents also reported integrating Indigenous content in order to establish an English curriculum that contained a diverse array of texts written by authors from various ethnicities and backgrounds.

Kate eloquently illustrated the disadvantage of teaching through a Eurocentric lens when she declared; “Shakespeare is great, but Shakespeare is one voice”. She did not discount literature that stems from Western culture but instead articulated the significance of teaching a variety of texts in the English classroom. Similarly, Ayesha believes that students should be exposed to literature that shares “different ideas and different perspectives” as it provides students with a more holistic learning experience. Interestingly, Kate understands English as an effective curriculum that can deter teachers from using a Eurocentric approach because it is skills-based.

English is so wonderful I mean we have a skills based curriculum so I can decide to teach whatever content allows me to address those skills. So it is really wonderful that we can do that. We can change our texts, we can offer lots of choice, we can change to a level appropriate, make it more challenging, so I think it is really wonderful. It is much easier in English to incorporate anything to do with Indigenous education and culturally relevant texts.

Kate recognizes the flexibility of the English curriculum because it does not compel her to teach specific content, thereby giving her the opportunity to teach literature that pertains to different peoples and cultures. Ayesha affirmed the effectiveness of a skills-based curriculum as it “gives [her] the chance to integrate a diverse set of texts including Indigenous-authored texts”. Ayesha expanded on the significance of a flexible English curriculum when she maintained, “you are not
required to teach one specific book, there’s wiggle room…because the curriculum expectations allows it”. It did not take long for both participants to list novels, anthologies and plays that they had or have considered using in their classrooms which are based on Indigenous content and written by Indigenous authors. Their selections ranged from a play about a young First Nations teenager struggling with an identity crisis, named “Toronto at Dreamer’s Rock” by Drew Hayden Taylor to Through Black Spruce, a novel written by Joseph Boyden, which is about familial relations and social issues that the Indigenous community in Ontario endures. These two examples indicate the vast number of Indigenous texts that do exist and that can be used in the English classroom. Ayesha and Kate further maintained that such literature can help Indigenous youth excel in school because they are rightfully reflected in the English curriculum.

Kate was formerly a Student Success teacher which is a role where educators advocate for students who are at risk in terms of their academic achievement. During her time as a Student Success teacher, Kate recognized the disproportionately large number of Indigenous students who were susceptible to being labeled ‘at-risk’. Kate recalled, “I do remember as a Student Success teacher spending a lot of time talking about how do we address this? I mean it was definitely about Indigenous youth”. Consequently, she encouraged her colleagues to use Indigenous content in order to engage their Indigenous students and thus increase academic achievement. Kate recommended this because she learned, from personal experience, the effectiveness of integrating Indigenous content in the curriculum, especially the English curriculum. She argued that in such cases Indigenous students were “wonderfully receptive” and were excited to “share their personal experiences of their families” when lessons pertained to Indigenous knowledges. Ayesha, too, discussed the integration of “anti-colonial and Indigenous
resources” with colleagues because she finds that it increases agency and self-efficacy for Indigenous youth when they are “appropriately reflected in what is being taught”.

The participants’ responses mirror the literature that discussed the implementation of Indigenous content in the classroom. Much like Kate’s observations in her high school, the literature also related that Indigenous students are lagging behind in terms of academic achievement (Bazylak, 2002; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Nguyen, 2011; Sterzuk, 2008). There is a major concern for Indigenous students in Ontario schools which, ultimately, resulted in the FNMI Policy Framework; a policy that mandates the implementation of Indigenous content across subject curriculums (OME, 2007b). Kate and Ayesha support the policy’s goals as they have prompted colleagues to incorporate Indigenous content into their lessons in order to respond to these achievement gaps, among other reasons. Furthermore, Kate and Ayesha speak to the research literature when they use a culturally relevant pedagogy in their classrooms. Chartrand (2012) urges teachers to “start with what is local” (p. 153) when planning lessons. He alludes to a place-conscious perspective when he mentions the importance of considering the school that educators are working at as well as the school’s surrounding community. Madden et al. (2013) reported similar findings during their interviews with Indigenous community members. Their participants asserted that it was crucial for educators to be aware of the community that they are teaching in as well as to seek support and guidance from Indigenous members of that community (2013).

4.2 Challenges and Strategies for Teaching Indigenous Content

Respondents reported similar challenges when implementing FNMI content. Such challenges included teacher discomfort while planning and delivering lessons, resource limitations and a lack of teacher training, however, both participants were quick to offer
strategies or ideas that could help educators overcome the challenges that the participants have previously encountered. Their volition to offer solutions to such challenges presents the task of integrating Indigenous content into the classroom as possible and perhaps even desirable because there are proposed methods to overcome challenges that teachers may encounter.

Kate vocalized her concern about educating students on matters in which she has minimal expertise or experience. She asserted that although she is “not the keeper of all this [Indigenous] knowledge” she was still eager to integrate it into her lessons. Her apprehensions stemmed from the fear of further ‘othering’ Indigenous peoples. As Kate explained,

You are talking about people who have been historically marginalized. I think most people are especially aware that you know that’s not something we want to have continued and so we want to ensure that we are not stepping on anyone's toes or approaching this in a way that isn’t you know, respectful to Indigenous Peoples. That is the challenge, like how do we do that?

As discussed earlier, Kate realizes the significance of a culturally relevant pedagogy. Nonetheless, she was also mindful of teaching the content in a culturally sensitive manner. Ayesha expanded on the notion of culturally sensitive education when she asserted that she, too, tries to refrain from “culturally fetishizing Indigenous cultures”. She then mentioned a strategy that she employs when teaching Indigenous content: infusing Indigenous-based lessons throughout the curriculum instead of providing single, isolated lessons about Indigenous peoples. That way, she is not tokenizing the culture or providing partial knowledge about a multi-dimensional subject.

Although Ayesha provided a strategy for avoiding cultural fetishization when delivering FNMI lessons, she identified another challenge that presents itself. Ayesha asserted, “I haven’t
been able to find much resource support…I kind of been relying on my own knowledge and things that I have read”. Ayesha wants to ensure she is providing her students with a variety of Indigenous perspectives in order to avoid further othering Indigenous peoples. However, she exasperatingly claimed that she had not been provided with an adequate amount of resources to provide a holistic teaching approach based on Indigenous perspectives. Kate expanded on the problem when she reminded me of the likely possibility of teaching “multiple sections of a class, so [that] there might be four sections of Grade 10 English”. As a result, it is extremely difficult to teach four sections Indigenous content when there are a limited number of Indigenous-authored texts available. The issue is further magnified when certain schools simply do not have Indigenous resources or materials. Kate mentioned a school that she formerly taught at which did not provide or even have Indigenous-based resources. Kate explained, “You can't teach a play by a First Nations writer if the play doesn’t exist in your school. And can you get it? Maybe, if there's money”. However, Kate has also come up with ways to address resource limitations due to school budgets: photocopying, and purchasing anthologies not single-author books. “We actually just purchased some books that are anthologies but we were only able to get three copies which is great because we can make use of some of the texts that are in there”. By purchasing anthologies, Kate can ensure that she is using a wide variety of Indigenous perspectives while also being able to distribute it to the class through the use of photocopies.

Along with resource limitations, Kate and Ayesha also reported a lack of teacher training during their teacher education programs. As Ayesha asserted, “I was not provided with training that could aid me with integrating Indigenous content in my classroom”. Kate responded similarly when she mentioned that she was not provided with such training, “not in teacher's college specifically that [she] remember[s]”. This can help explain why both Kate and Ayesha
refrained from integrating Indigenous content during their initial years as a permanent teacher. Both respondents felt as though they did not want to take risks as novice teachers, especially because they were still trying to figure out their teaching philosophy, practices and passions. Kate used an interesting analogy when she related her experience as a novice teacher; she understood herself as to being a duck. She felt as though she was “paddling and keeping [her] head above water all the time because there [was] just so much and so… [she] sort of fell back on things [she knew]”. Kate raised a striking point when she claimed that she relied on things she knew during her initial years of teaching. It seems as though Kate would have been more likely to integrate Indigenous content if she felt as though she was more knowledgeable about the topic. Therefore, pre-service training programs that contained Indigenous education may have helped accelerate the process of integrating Indigenous content in the classroom for both respondents. Luckily, Kate and Ayesha both proposed a solution to the issue when they discussed the significance of Professional Development activities and Additional Qualification courses. Kate discussed the multiple PD opportunities she took advantage of throughout her teaching career which provided her with ideas and even background knowledge for integrating Indigenous content and discussing restorative justice. Along with Kate, Ayesha also maintained that a single course is not enough; educators should be provided with PD seminars and workshops that enable them to continue integrating Indigenous education in a respectful and engaging manner.

Shipp (2013) provides his readers with a substantial list of Indigenous texts and oral stories that are available in English and urges English teachers to consult this resource list. However, he neglects to acknowledge or address the detrimental issue of resourcing such texts for educators in Toronto. Both Kate and Ayesha mentioned the insignificant amount of Indigenous-based resources that are available to them. Although the respondents have come up
with strategies to overcome this challenge, study findings do not thoroughly discuss the issue behind teachers’ access to Indigenous texts for their students. Furthermore, the literature places tremendous emphasis on pre-service training programs for teacher candidates and novice educators (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002; Kitchen et al., 2010; Kitchen & Hodson, 2013; Lee, 2007; Mason, 2008; Nguyen, 2011). However, it provides few options for senior teachers which include implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy (Chartrand, 2012). In contrast, my findings suggest other forms of training for senior educators such as AQ courses and PD sessions. Ultimately, Kate and Ayesha proposed teacher training opportunities that could benefit senior educators who graduated from pre-service teacher programs which may or may not have offered Indigenous Education courses. Aside from these divergences between my findings and other literature, there was a common link between the two in this section. Ayesha mentioned the importance of dispersing Indigenous content throughout the curriculum which is strongly supported by the literature. Madden et al. (2013) found that cramming Indigenous content into a single installment was ineffective as it often tokenized Indigenous cultures, communities and histories and, thus, further othered Indigenous peoples. Teaching Indigenous content in isolated lessons also leaves the impression that Indigenous knowledge is not as relevant as other subjects in the curriculum. Hence, Ayesha’s strategy of weaving Indigenous content throughout the curriculum in order to avoid cultural fetishization is affirmed in the reviewed literature.

4.3 Addressing Epistemology and Positionality Limitations

Kate and Ayesha acknowledged that they were not epistemological authorities on certain topics that they were teaching. Furthermore, they were aware of the limitations that their positionality posed; therefore, they employed a number of teacher practices which allowed them
to address the epistemology and positionality tension when teaching Indigenous content. Both respondents have or have felt the desire to organize school trips, invite guest speakers such as Elders into the classroom and collaborate with experts in the matters of Indigenous education and knowledges. These practices, together, reportedly create a pedagogy that is not confined to a single epistemology or positionality biases.

According to my participants, students were extremely engaged when they were able to put what they learned into practice. After providing comprehensive, Indigenous-based lessons, both respondents organized school trips in order to consolidate the students’ learning experience. Ayesha organized a field trip that required her students to perform a mini-ethnographic study. She asserted that the purpose of the study was to determine how “Indigenous culture and people are represented in museum spaces”. The trip was meant to consolidate her lessons that were based on the stereotypical representation of Indigenous peoples in Western media and literature. She found that the trip was successful on many accounts especially because students were provided with background knowledge prior to the excursion which then permitted them to perform ethnographical studies of their own in a fun and efficient manner. Ayesha stated; “we were outside of the traditional, archetype classroom and learning in a fun and experiential way about something that is really important”. Consequently, the field trip to the museum was Ayesha’s way of educating students about the relevance of Indigenous-based content. The method in which she does this is effective because students are able to put what they learned into practice as well as actively use their critical thinking skills.

Kate, too, has taken her students on field trips to the Royal Ontario Museum so that they can examine and explore the history of Indigenous Peoples. Kate recalled one school trip that she organized with her colleagues when she stated, “we took a field trip to the ROM a few years ago
to sort of explore Indigenous Peoples in Ontario through the collection they have at the ROM”. Interestingly, although both Kate and Ayesha planned excursions to the museum, they had completely different learning goals. Ayesha organized the trip so that students can analyze stereotypical representations of Indigenous Peoples, while Kate used the trip as a way to exhibit the history of Indigenous Peoples in Ontario. Ayesha’s trip to the museum was more critical whereas Kate’s trip leaned more toward an observational approach. Regardless of the learning goals, both participants used elements of a holistic pedagogy as they created experiential learning opportunities for their students rather than strictly sticking to a theoretical approach. Kate credited the success of this practice to the idea that students need to see the connection between reality and what is being taught in the classroom. Kate claimed “if it is something interesting and relevant and if it is made relevant…students are wonderfully receptive”. Ayesha and Kate further integrated a holistic pedagogy by educating their students through different perspectives and voices.

Ayesha attempted to integrate multiple perspectives into her classroom when teaching Indigenous content by addressing a number of Indigenous-authored texts. She has even procured her own database of Indigenous resources over the years. Ayesha asserted, “I have created a fairly extensive list of online Indigenous resources that I often refer to”. Comparably, Kate also refers to a database when teaching Indigenous content. However, her source is a central office from the Toronto District School Board which connects educators to “various groups of people or organizations that are willing to work with students”. Kate especially values this source because she has formerly used it to welcome guest speakers who are Indigenous Elders into the classroom. Kate asserted:
So in the past we've had guest speakers come in, we've had Elders actually come in and speak to the students and that really gives them the opportunity to ask questions that I have no ability to answer and from the appropriate individuals to discuss these things.

It is important to note that Kate uses these guests, who are experienced in Indigenous knowledges, as a way to alleviate her own discomfort when educating students about Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, through the passage it is clear that Kate is keen on having Indigenous Elders participate and be a part of the conversation when discussing Indigenous content in her classroom. Although Ayesha did not mention inviting Elders into the classroom, it seems as though she would have if she was aware of this TDSB resource. In fact, Ayesha often declared her willingness to invite individuals who have extensive Indigenous knowledges into the classroom so that students can learn the content from a different standpoint.

During the interview, both Kate and Ayesha were asked to offer recommendations that could help and encourage other teachers to implement Indigenous content into their lessons. Interestingly, both respondents mentioned the dire need of a ‘leader’ or ‘expert’ in Indigenous knowledges within their schools. Kate elaborated on this idea:

**Kate:** Hmm…okay so in an ideal world, we would have someone in our building that would be like some kind of leader to help implement that.

**Karima:** Yeah…

**Kate:** I don’t know if they would be a curriculum leader or some kind of role within the school to help integrate that.

**Karima:** And would you, again, in an ideal world, would it be an Indigenous person…specifically in terms of integrating Indigenous content?
Kate: Um I mean I guess it depends. I think it probably would be because I think that person would have experience. But you would want someone who is educated, who has the background. And that doesn’t mean to say someone who is not an Indigenous person who has studied at university couldn’t be that person. I think it would depend on the individual. But I think if you are talking about Indigenous peoples, who historically have not been able to get their voices heard, I think that would be an important piece. I think it should be someone that is part of that community.

Kate recognizes the importance of having members of the Indigenous community take part in the decision-making process when implementing Indigenous knowledges in her school. Additionally, through this passage, it is evident that Kate understands Indigenous education as an important pillar of student learning because she recommended a curriculum leader who could facilitate Indigenous education in schools. Ayesha affirmed this idea when she talked about inviting experts in Indigenous education in order to ensure that she is teaching the content through a holistic lens. Therefore, both respondents find that by instilling curriculum leaders who facilitate Indigenous education, students will be able to learn from yet another perspective, more significantly an Indigenous perspective.

Kate echoed the literature reviewed when she mentioned the importance of finding a member of the Indigenous community who can potentially be an Indigenous education facilitator. She is attempting to avoid educating students through a Eurocentric lens by offering a standpoint that is more representative of Indigenous communities (Anderson, 2002; Aquash, 2013; Wilson, 2003). Also, unlike the FNMI Framework Policy, Kate would like to have Indigenous members of the community or Indigenous education authorities contribute to the
decision-making process when implementing Indigenous content at her school (Kitchen & Hodson, 2010).

Aside from recommendations, both teachers also employed a very significant teaching practice, which is discussed at length in the literature that pertains to Indigenous education. Haig-Brown and Dannenmann (2002) support the Indigenous pedagogical approach of “learning through watching and doing” (p. 452) when they discuss teacher training programs. Haig-Brown and Dannenmann elaborate on the Indigenous Knowledge Instructor’s Program at York University which requires teacher candidates to go on a one-week summer retreat over the span of two years. This is done in order for teacher candidates to put their learning into practice which is a common way of acquiring knowledge in Indigenous cultures. Strikingly enough, both Ayesha and Kate have taken this practice that is recommended for teacher candidates and translated it into a teaching strategy for their own students when taking them on informative school trips.

4.4 Conclusion

During the analysis process, three central themes emerged. The themes include the notion that the integration of Indigenous content enhances the English curriculum. This argument stems from the idea that the implementation of Indigenous content encourages educators to use a culturally relevant pedagogy, deters them from teaching through a Eurocentric lens and it potentially addresses the achievement gap of Indigenous youth. Another finding that emerged is the challenges that arise when planning or delivering Indigenous lessons including resource and training restraints as well as teacher discomfort. However, the data also revealed strategies that can be used when educators encounter such challenges. For instance, using anthologies instead of texts and taking advantage of PD sessions as well as AQ courses. Furthermore, teachers can
alleviate apprehension when implementing Indigenous education by ensuring that they are using a variety of texts that have different perspectives and by inviting guest speakers such as community Elders. Finally, when integrating Indigenous education teachers can address their epistemological and positionality limitations through certain practices, as the data shows, this can be done through informative school trips, inviting guest speakers and establishing a curriculum leader that facilitates the integration of Indigenous education in the classroom.

I had initially approached this paper with a very critical mindset due to my own personal experiences of being further othered and marginalized when teachers attempted to integrate a culturally relevant pedagogy. However, I have learned that there are educators who are sincerely trying to engage in and teach cultural texts in a culturally sensitive manner amid all the restraints and limitations. I also realize that there are successful stories and teacher practices when integrating Indigenous content, as my findings have clearly exhibited.

In the next chapter, I will expand on the analyzed data while also discussing the broad and narrow implications of these findings. I will pay particular attention to the issues surrounding limited pre-service training for the integration of Indigenous content and the rigidness of prescribed curriculums. I will conclude by offering recommendations and notes for potential areas of further research.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of educators who attempt to integrate Indigenous content in senior English classrooms. The following chapter will further analyze key research findings that emerged while also relating the significance of the study to the educational landscape of culturally relevant pedagogy. I will then elaborate on implications which pertain to the educational community, including policymakers and teacher education programs, as well as the implications for my own professional identity and practice. Thereafter, I will offer recommendations based on my findings for the educational community. I will end the chapter by proposing areas for future research and by providing a comprehensive conclusion that sums up the central findings of the study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

In this study, senior English teachers reported that the infusion of Indigenous content enhanced the English curriculum. Respondents believed that by integrating Indigenous subjects it deterred them from teaching through a Eurocentric lens while also ensuring a culturally relevant pedagogy. Moreover, participants felt as though Indigenous content could address the achievement gap among Indigenous youth as the curriculum contains information and knowledge that they can relate to. This finding is of tremendous interest because it provides education researchers with study findings that further address the low academic achievement of Indigenous youth in Ontario which continues to be a predominant issue. The findings also allow educators to identify the benefits of integrating Indigenous content. Such findings can encourage those educators who are hesitant to implement Indigenous knowledges to reconsider and
revaluate their reluctance. In relation to teacher hesitation, the study also revealed challenges educators encountered when planning and delivering Indigenous content.

Participants in this study identified prominent challenges that arose when trying to implement Indigenous knowledges. The challenges included resource restraints, lack of teacher training and teacher discomfort. However, the research findings also conveyed potential solutions to these challenges. In terms of resource restraints, Kate recommended using anthologies as opposed to novels so as to ensure a variety of Indigenous perspectives at a minimal cost. Kate capitalized on this idea when she asserted that photocopies could further decrease expenses as the teacher can make copies of selected entries in the anthologies for the students. Educators can also take advantage of Professional Development sessions and Additional Qualification courses in order to compensate for the limited training they may have received in education institutions. The most prevalent challenge for both respondents was teacher discomfort. Nonetheless, they resorted to certain practices in order to alleviate some of their uneasiness. For instance, Kate invited Elders to the classroom so that students can learn from an alternative perspective and another voice. These findings are significant for educators as it identifies the challenges of integrating Indigenous knowledges but also explores solutions that the participants used in order to counter these challenges. The findings can possibly translate to a guide that researchers can expand on and that educators can consider when incorporating Indigenous elements into their lessons.

A final theme that emerged from this study was the increased potential to implement a holistic and multi-perspective pedagogy when incorporating Indigenous content. As the data indicates, this can be done through informative school trips, welcoming guest speakers and establishing a curriculum leader that facilitates the integration of Indigenous content in the
English classroom. This theme contributes to the educational landscape of a culturally relevant pedagogy as it proposes an alternative to the Eurocentric teaching approach and instead promotes an education through a holistic lens and multi-perspective pedagogy.

5.2 Implications

The following section is concerned with the implications that arose from the study findings and analyses. A broad implication that arose in my study was that the effective implementation of Indigenous content in Ontario classrooms heavily relied upon structures and systems rather than at a micro-level such as teachers in the classroom. The following section will relate implications that pertain to policymakers, more specifically, the Ontario Ministry of Education and teacher education programs in Canada. I will then relate implications with regards to my own experiences and teacher practice.

5.2.1 Broad: The educational community

Although the focus of my study was based on teacher perceptions and experiences, many of the implications are directed toward institutions as opposed to secondary school educators. For instance, both participants in my study agreed that integrating Indigenous content was often easier in the English classroom because the curriculum was skills-based. The implication that arose from this finding is that teachers are more successful and inclined to integrate Indigenous knowledges when they are not expected to follow a curriculum that is content-specific. Although they made an effort to integrate Indigenous knowledges in other courses such as history and philosophy, it seemed as though the English classroom was where Indigenous knowledges was best represented and relayed. This may be because the course requirements were flexible and less prescribed. Instead, they are able to select the content that is being taught so long as they are meeting the skills-based requirements.
Another implication that arose from the study findings is specifically directed toward education institutions. Ayesha and Kate maintained that they did not incorporate Indigenous content during their early years of teaching because they preferred to teach students about topics that they were exposed to during their teacher education programs and were, therefore, more knowledgeable about. In fact, both participants in this study had no training on or education about Indigenous knowledges during their teacher education programs. The implication of this finding is that some novice educators may be less likely to integrate Indigenous content into their lessons because education institutions offer little to no training on the integration of Indigenous knowledges in the classroom.

5.2.2 Narrow: My professional identity and practice

My social positioning was both advantageous and unfavourable because it created a strong emotional connection to my research study. Due to personal experiences in secondary school, I was skeptical when it came to measuring an educator’s ability to integrate a culturally relevant pedagogy in a culturally sensitive manner. This, in return, became a strong bias that I had to be mindful of throughout the study. Alternatively, my social positioning was also advantageous because it allowed me to see through the perspective of a minority student who may be in a Eurocentric classroom precisely because I have encountered a similar issue of misrepresentation. Nonetheless, it is important to note that although I may not be equally implicated in settler-colonialism as a White, European settler, I still accrue benefits from a system that has denied Indigenous peoples that same access to land and citizenship.

Upon completing the qualitative study, I have come to realize that there are educators that put forth tremendous effort to integrate Indigenous content in a culturally sensitive manner. Both participants realized that they were teaching their students about communities that have been historically marginalized and underrepresented which compelled them to be mindful during the
lesson planning process and lesson delivery. An implication that surfaced from the study is the importance of teacher self-awareness and positionality. This, in return, can help educators avoid depicting minority cultures in an insensitive manner because they are aware of their own social positioning and predispositions. Through this study, I have become more conscious of my social positioning and I have been practising reflexivity throughout the process. I have also begun to inform myself of Indigenous knowledges through diligent research and studying. I intend to continue seeking out information and knowledge that pertains to Indigenous peoples while also understanding my role and social positioning in relation to these communities. Another implication that arose for me, as a researcher, is the importance of having an emotional connection to your study as it is a strong motivating factor. It is crucial to be mindful of biases and predispositions that you may carry with you as the researcher. Therefore, if I were to continue this study I would ensure that my perceptions and biases are kept in check in order to avoid pressing my own opinions on the data collected. This also translates to teacher practice as I need to be mindful of my perceptions and biases when I implement a culturally relevant pedagogy and am educating students about other minority groups.

5.3 Recommendations

In relation to my findings and the implications of this study, I subsequently propose the following recommendations for educational communities, particularly the OME and education institutions.

Ayesha and Kate reportedly fared better in teaching their students about Indigenous content when the curriculum was less prescribed. An important recommendation for policymakers, particularly the OME, would be to reconsider the rigid and content-specific structure of other course curriculums. The OME should make an effort to create curricula that are
more fluid and flexible in order to ensure that educators are integrating Indigenous content in a meaningful way. For instance, the history curriculum requires teachers to educate students about residential schools. Although this is an important piece of history to recognize, students should also be exposed to pre-contact history or history that pertains to Indigenous peoples prior to European contact. This is because by teaching students solely about events that occurred after European contact, such as residential schools, the curriculum continues to perpetuate an education through a Eurocentric lens and thus silences Indigenous perspectives.

Kate eloquently expressed the hectic lifestyle of a novice teacher when she likened new teachers to ducks. She claimed that novice teachers are expected to be composed, poised and prepared much like a duck above water. Nonetheless, underwater they are flapping their palmate at a very rapid pace. Ultimately, it is very difficult for newly assigned educators to integrate Indigenous content, especially when they do not feel as though they are prepared to do so. Teacher education programs need to make a clear revision to their program requirements if they have not yet incorporated a course or courses on integrating Indigenous perspectives into the classroom. Dedicating a unit or lesson on the integration of Indigenous content is not enough. On the contrary, such practices serve to further tokenize and marginalize Indigenous communities due to minimal exposure to the content. In order to effectively integrate Indigenous content in the classroom, pre-service teachers need to be provided with skills and knowledge that adhere to Indigenous education through an extensive course(s) in education institutions.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Quite often, teachers are the foundational source of data when researching topics related to education. However, I believe it is critical to have a student perspective when discussing the integration of Indigenous knowledges in the school curriculum as they are the individuals that are learning the content. Furthermore, I have, personally, observed class discussions among
students that indicate a resistance to Indigenous perspectives and knowledges. This is an alarming factor to consider when prompting teachers to integrate Indigenous education into their lessons and needs to be further investigated. Some inquiries to consider would include why students may resist the integration of Indigenous knowledges and how they would like to learn about minority groups in the classroom. Alternatively, researchers can also explore the experiences of Indigenous students when teachers integrate Indigenous education. Such studies can provide a better understanding of how these minority students are interpreting and reacting to a culturally responsive pedagogy. Their perspectives will also support or negate the effectiveness of teacher practise as opposed to hearing about the teachers’ thoughts, assumptions and hopes when integrating a culturally relevant pedagogy that pertains to Indigenous education.

Another discussion point that was raised in the study and that should be further addressed is methods to improve the low academic achievement of Indigenous students in Ontario schools. There is plenty of research concerning at-risk students that are from Indigenous communities. There has even been a policy released by the OME to address the achievement gaps by requiring Ontario teachers to incorporate Indigenous knowledges in the curriculum, regardless of course or discipline (OME, 2007b). Although the document was released 10 years prior to this study, I have found very few reports that discuss the outcomes or influence of the policy. Granted, this study does not speak to the policy directly, however, it does confirm the ideas stipulated in the document such as the importance of teaching students through an Indigenous lens. Future researchers need to identify the extent to which it is integrated in Ontario classrooms and determine whether the policy is practical instead of just theoretical.

5.5 Concluding Comments

I entered my current educational institution with a skeptical mindset because of my own experiences of being further ‘Othered’ and marginalized in school when educators attempted to
integrate a culturally relevant pedagogy. Consequently, I initially approached the Master of Teaching Research Project with certain presumptions and expectations of the study findings and, ultimately, the final product. However, through my research, data collection and analyses I realize that there are more culturally sensitive ways to educate students about minority peoples, particularly Indigenous Peoples. An anti-oppressive pedagogy is within reach for educators, however as the research indicates, it is not an easy task. Through this study, I am hopeful that educators and researchers alike realize, receive and reflect on the advantages of having Indigenous content weaved throughout the curriculum. More significantly, I hope that educators understand that a culturally relevant pedagogy cannot stand alone; it needs to be paired with a culturally sensitive approach. Lessons about Indigenous Peoples or any other minority group must not be Eurocentric or conducive to the further marginalization of minorities.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

[UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION]

Date:

Dear ____________________________,

My name is Karima Ahmad and I am a student in the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the integration of Indigenous content in the English curriculum in senior classrooms in Ontario. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have the experience of teaching English classes that were comprised of lessons based on Indigenous content. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one roughly 60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper and informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded.

The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation.

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

Sincerely,

Karima Ahmad
Consent Form

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

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

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research study. As you know, my name is Karima Ahmad and I am a Master’s student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. A part of the Masters of Teaching program requires teacher candidates to perform a study. The central purpose of my study is to understand how a small sample of senior-level English teachers integrates Indigenous content into their lessons. I am performing this research in hopes of understanding how these lessons are being implemented at schools in Ontario before and after the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Framework Policy was released in 2007. This interview should take approximately 60 to 75 minutes and is comprised of roughly 21 questions. The questions are divided into five categories beginning with a section that pertains to your educational career followed by a section that is concerned with Indigenous education training. The third section is comprised of questions about the supports and barriers you encountered when implementing Indigenous-based lessons. We will then discuss your perspective about Indigenous education being implemented in Ontario schools and finally we will talk about next steps that should be taken to address the issue. Please keep in mind that you can refuse to answer any question and/or stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin? Would you mind reading and signing this consent form before we proceed with the interview [hand participant consent form]?

TAPE ON

To begin can you state your name for the recording?
Section A – Background Information

1. When did you start teaching in Ontario?
2. What grades and subjects do you currently teach?
3. Which subjects have you previously taught?
4. Along with your role as a teacher, do you perform any other roles in your school (e.g. department head, coach, club supervisor)?
5. Did you attend elementary or secondary school in Ontario?
   (a) (If applicable) As a former elementary/secondary student, do you recall any lessons from any of your classes that were based on Indigenous content or issues? If so, what were they like?
6. Would you mind describing your personal relationship to the category ‘Indigenous’?

Section B – Supports and Barriers for the Integration of Indigenous Knowledge

7. Can you give me an example of a time that you explicitly integrated Indigenous content into an English lesson?
   (a) How did you prepare the lesson and activities at hand?
   (b) What curriculum or other resources, if any, did you use to prepare the lesson?
   (c) Did you encounter any challenges when preparing or implementing the lesson? If so, what were they?
8. What kinds of support systems are currently available to you with regards to incorporating Indigenous content into your English lessons?
   (a) (If applicable) Do these supports seem sufficient to you? Why or why not?
9. In your school, do you have access to Indigenous literature?
(a) If so, can the literature also be supplied to students (e.g. novels, poems, textbooks)?

10. When preparing these lessons, what elements of Indigenous education would you say you place emphasis on?

   (a) Historical experiences
   (b) Some of the various Indigenous cultures
   (c) Understanding certain concepts through an Indigenous lens

11. What do you find most challenging about integrating Indigenous education into your class?

   (a) Lack of resources
   (b) Administrative/Colleague support
   (c) Limited time
   (d) Comfort in teaching Indigenous content

Section C – Training Acquired to Teach Indigenous content

12. At any point in your teaching career were you provided with training that could aid you with integrating Indigenous content into your classroom?

   (a) (If yes) What kinds of training were you provided with?
   (b) (If no) Do you believe it could have been conducive to your planning when you incorporated Indigenous content into your lessons? Please elaborate.

13. Are you familiar with the Ontario FNMI Framework Policy?

   (a) If yes, after the Policy was implemented in 2007, did your school provide you with supports that could enhance lessons based on Indigenous content?

      i. (If yes) What kinds of resources or supports were you provided with?
ii. *(If no) Did your school acknowledge and discuss the policy with teachers and staff?*

14. Have you ever discussed ways to integrate Indigenous education into English lessons with other teachers and colleagues?
   
   (a) If so, in what context and was it helpful to your teaching through an Indigenous lens?

15. As an English teacher do you believe including Indigenous-authored texts (e.g. books or short stories) is sufficient to effectively incorporate Indigenous content into your lessons?
   
   Why or why not?

**Section D – Perceptions and Beliefs**

16. What factors inform your choice to integrate Indigenous perspectives, histories and cultures in your English classes?
   
   (a) Raise cultural awareness
   
   (b) Diversify lessons
   
   (c) Culturally responsive pedagogy

17. Within your teachable subjects which course is it easiest to implement Indigenous content into and why?
   
   (a) Do you agree that all subjects should contain Indigenous content in some of their lessons? Why or why not?

18. Do you incorporate Indigenous content into your lessons more often now as compared to when you began your teaching career? Please elaborate on why that may be the case.
Section E- Next Steps

19. What kinds of support systems and resources would you like to see in your school that would help teachers integrate Indigenous content into their classrooms?

20. Certain Bachelor of Education programs require teacher candidates to enrol in a course that pertains to Indigenous education; what do you think of this requirement?

21. As a teacher candidate that is looking to implement Indigenous content into my own English lessons, what advice do you have for me before entering the profession?

Closing Script:

I would like to take this moment to sincerely thank you for your time and considered responses. I particularly appreciate your willingness to talk openly about your personal lesson planning experiences as well as the advice you have given me about integrating Indigenous education in a class of my own someday. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have for me at this time.