Decolonizing Knowledge about Indigenous Education: Perspectives from Elementary French Immersion Teachers

By

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A research paper submitted in conformity with the requirements For the degree of Master of Teaching Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

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Abstract

Rooted in the implementation of residential schools, Indigenous education has had various meanings and integration strategies over time and still remains a political, cultural, and controversial topic. While the Ministry of Education of Ontario has made Indigenous education a priority, the literature shows little research within the context of French Immersion programs. This qualitative research examines the perspectives of three French Immersion teachers on Indigenous education, and on the factors and strategies influencing the way they integrate Indigenous perspectives in their practice. Following an anti-oppressive framework, this research challenges the concept of Indigenous education and offers a critical approach for educators to integrate Indigenous perspectives in current and relevant ways. One of the main findings echoed the concept of decolonizing the classroom and revealed the need for teachers to move beyond Eurocentric stereotypes about Indigenous people and engage in more authentic discussions. For the integration of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into French Immersion classrooms, participants’ recommendations include the incorporation of traditional Indigenous worldviews as an effective and relevant source of knowledge. Finally, by reflecting on their own positionality on Indigenous education, the participants expressed a need for teachers to critically engage their students in understanding the intricate relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canada.

Key Words: Indigenous Education, French Immersion, Elementary classrooms, Ontario, Decolonizing the classroom
Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this research without the support I received from teachers and advisors at OISE: Susan McNab, Hilary Inwood, and Victorina Baxan. Thank you for helping me find my participants and for your advice and guidance on how to make progress and complete my research. Thank you to the course collaborative Teaching Assistant, Amir Kalan, for opening my eyes and helping me find the political voice of this research study.

I would also like to thank all my peers, colleagues, and friends from cohort PJ#231! This two-year research was an emotional rollercoaster and your immense support was much needed and appreciated.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my parents and my life partner for being there every step of the way. I would not have completed this research without your unending love, reassurance and encouragement – you are my roots.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

I would like to start by acknowledging the land where this research has been conducted. The University of Toronto is located on “the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, and most recently, the territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. The territory was the subject of the *Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant*, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes” (Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2016, p.7). The *Chiefs of Ontario* website (2015) reminds us that “the land is the founding source of our identity and culture. Great responsibilities to protect and preserve the land have been bestowed upon us by the Creator, and are captured in each Nations Law”. If land is often considered sacred for many Indigenous communities, interconnected with all living things, the Western world tends to narrow land to a specific space and time. Throughout this research, and my two years at OISE, I came to understand the deep relationship between land and Indigenous cultures, but unlike the Western perspective where land is associated with geographic place, Indigenous knowledge taught me that land is sacred, part of the natural world, part of creation. Zinga and Styres (2011) illustrate this idea of “Land, in this context is not a geographically fixed space; rather, she is a spiritually infused place that is grounded in interconnected and interdependent relationships, and cultural positioning” (p. 63). Goulet and Goulet (2014) write “Learning on the land becomes a process of healing as students connect to their past, image their future, and situate themselves in the present” (p. 190). Land is in the present, is speaking from the past and for the future. Green or grey, the land has a story to tell us, we just really need to pay attention, to look and to listen.
In the Canadian context, the notion of land is thus politically charged and I could not avoid this aspect in this research. In the words of Grand Chief Phil Fontaine, survivor of the Residential Schools System, “the first step in healing is disclosure” (Hanah, 1992) and I think it is time to talk about Indigenous people as part, as founders, of Canadian’s history. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report was published in 2015. It is a recollection of hundred, thousands, of testimonies from residential schools’ survivors. It is a start in recognizing the wrongdoing, the atrocity done to Indigenous children and communities across Canada and a testimony for hope and actions for the future, “The truth-seeking dimension of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is to establish the wrong that was done in suppressing history, culture, and identity of First Nations people, Métis, and Inuit” (Frideres, 2011 p. 74). It is recognizing that this is cultural genocide. It is acknowledging that I live on Indigenous land and that the educational system I want to work in also operates on sized land, and is based on Western, colonial ideologies.

If land is the founding source of our identity and culture, it is also linked to our language and our heritage. Language in Canada, referring to the 1867’s Dominion of Canada, occupies a very interesting place and history has shown that it’s a powerful, sometime dangerous, political issue. Mady (2013) explains that “in identifying official language bilingualism as a defining trait of the Canadian identity (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2006), the Canadian federal government has subsequently prioritised English and French language skills as a national priority” (p. 55). In education, each province regulates and implements its policies and services. Since the 1960’s, English-speaking public school boards across Ontario offer French as a second language programs as an option for parents and students to celebrate their bilingual Canadian identity. In the French as a Second Language Ontario Curriculum (OME, 2013), one of the main
strengths of learning another language is to “develop their [students] awareness of how language and culture interconnect, helping them appreciate and respect the diversity of Canadian and global societies” (p. 7). In Ontario, French Immersion teachers, where instructions are either 100% in French or 50% French and English, have to find a way to celebrate language and cultural diversity, making learning relevant to students but also respectful of all people, living on this land, or any land in the world. As such, this research aims at understanding how Indigenous education is explored and integrated in French Immersion classrooms. Kubota and Lin (2009) remind us “as second language practitioners, we should engage in daily critical reflections of how our ideas of race influence what we teach, how we teach it, and how we understand our students” (p. 17). As a result, I believe French Immersion classrooms could offer an interesting place to start the dialogue about Indigenous communities in Canada.

Although Indigenous communities have been living on this land before we even called it Canada, the term Indigenous education seems to have more recently emerged in the literature (Kanu, 2007, Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir & Muir, 2010, Nardozi, Restoule, Broad, Steele & James, 2014), and Ontario policies. In recent years, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) has developed educational curricula to better incorporate Indigenous knowledge in elementary and secondary school’s classrooms and policies (2007, 2010) that make Indigenous education a key priority for the province. However, the concept of Indigenous education remains complex and confusing for many teachers (Kanu, 2007, Nardozi, Restoule, Broad, Steele & James, 2014, Toulouse, 2008, Hunter, 2015). So what does it means and how do we go about it? Does it mean that teachers have to know Indigenous content, history, and rituals? Are resources, if any, the same in both English and French programs? Or are there ways, strategies, resources and perspectives that we should adopt? St. Denis (2007) argues that the education system fails
Indigenous youth because it focuses on the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause. According to this author, “We need to offer both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal teachers and administrators opportunities to learn more about racism and how it effects the ideology of and belief in the superiority of whiteness, shapes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of society” (p. 1085). Consequently, I believe that teaching Indigenous education has to be more than following a textbook manual or implementing a particular strategy; rather, it is about having authentic discussions about Canada’s history, reflecting on past and present relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities across the country.

Teaching Indigenous education may be better understood under the lens of multicultural education as it seeks to “draw on the knowledge, perspectives, and voices of the actual communities being studied” (Au, 2009, p. 248). As part of our Canadian culture, history and identity, teaching Indigenous knowledge is learning more about people, about yourself, myself, and about my and your relationship with others in the world. It requires teachers and administrators to willingly look deeper into Indigenous stories and to assume their own positionality and understanding of how the relations between Indigenous peoples and settlers came to be and how they still impact all of us today. Teaching Indigenous education is about truth and reconciliation, justice, power, and respect. In light of a cultural framework generated by the living teachings of the Ojibwe people, “Respect (in Ojibwe terms) means knowing that we are sacred and that we have a place in this world” (OME, 2008, p. 1). Inspired by an anti-racist approach, culturally relevant pedagogy, and a multicultural education framework, this research aimed at exploring how French Immersion teachers investigate their own positionality and relationship towards teaching Indigenous education in their classrooms.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to explore how three French Immersion elementary teachers integrate Indigenous education into mainstream classrooms. All three teachers were part of the Toronto District School Board and were actively involved in teaching Indigenous education at the time of the study. A more detailed presentation of the participants is offered in chapter 3. Furthermore, it is important to note that as part of the public school system in Toronto, all three educators taught in a diverse environment, with students from different backgrounds and languages. Through this research, I explored what these teachers know and understand about Indigenous education, what strategies they used to implement Indigenous perspectives into their work, and what challenges they faced in their teaching. An exploration of these questions in the context of the French Immersion classroom aimed to provide new insight, strategies, and resources accessible to current and future teachers to discuss Indigenous education in their everyday practice.

1.2 Research Questions

With the recent emergence of government policies to integrate Indigenous education into the classroom, and the complexity of learning a second language in school, my research proposed to answer the following main question: How do French Immersion elementary teachers integrate Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in their classroom? Through the shared stories of the three teachers interviewed for this study, I investigated how they incorporated Indigenous education in their teaching practice in a way that is relevant and inclusive for all students. To articulate possible strategies, the following sub-questions helped answer the main question: What do French Immersion teachers know and understand about Indigenous education? What
strategies do they use to implement Indigenous perspectives in their work? What challenges do they face in their teaching?

Relying on the interpretation of my participants’ stories and testimonies, this research revealed factors and strategies on how to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into the classroom, in a current and relevant way. As a non-Indigenous educator, I feel this study can be an inspiration for current and future educators to be empowered by the participants’ experiences and resources and to be more confident about teaching Indigenous education in mainstream elementary classrooms and French Immersion programs.

1.3 Background of the Researcher

The topic of Indigenous education is one that I find both personally and academically interesting. My previous academic and life experiences have played a major role in my passion for cultures and languages. Born in France, I spent twelve years in Montreal before moving to Toronto in 2015 to join the Master of Teaching program. I define myself as a Caucasian woman, of French heritage, and an immigrant.

In Canada, Indigenous peoples have been subjected to various stereotypical images throughout history. Several years ago, during my undergraduate studies, I remember being intrigued by the documentary Nanook of the North (Flaherty, 1922), picturing the life of a family in Arctic Canada. Half realistic and half fictional (docudrama), this documentary stuck with me because at the time I was fascinated to discover how Inuit peoples lived, so remote from other civilizations, in such extreme cold conditions. But I never really questioned the authenticity of what I was seeing. I naively thought that was how Inuit people lived and I found myself intrigued by these peoples, living such a different lifestyle than myself in a remote part of Canada. I saw them ice fishing and hunting, building igloos, all dressed in heavy fur coats. In some way, I
idealized Inuit peoples based on this documentary, looking at them from that distant past lens, without thinking about the stereotypical images it conveyed. Or without questioning how they were actually living today. Four Arrows (2013) expresses his concerns regarding how non-Aboriginal teachers will integrate and teach Indigenous knowledge in the classroom. As he points out “Aboriginal nations rightfully have concerns about non-Indian intellectuals writing about or non-Indian teachers teaching Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and values. What knowledge is to be presented? Will it just be more personal, invented or white-washed anthropology?” (p. 75). Therefore I can see why Indigenous scholars are concerned about non-Indigenous educators to teach Indigenous knowledge and the risks for people like us, like me, white Westerners, to blindly portray Indigenous peoples and cultures as frozen in time, as the exotic others. I feel that there is a real danger in continuing to portray Indigenous history as frozen in time, for it perpetuates the stereotypical idea that Indigenous peoples in Canada are from a distant past, picturing frozen scenes like in a Greek mythology. It is as if they do not exist anymore. However, I also believe that non-Aboriginal teachers can start a dialogue on Indigenous peoples and cultures in Canada in order to work towards reconciliation.

I did my B.A. in anthropology and I can say that in fact, early-day anthropology legitimized the ideology of race and contributed to the division of human civilization into superior and inferior races. Ultimately, Indigenous cultures were often deemed inferior to the Western and ‘civilized’ men. The exotic others, as anthropologists often call them, civilizations living in remote areas of the world, intrigued researchers for their cultural habits and beliefs, their rituals and ways of life. As part of my undergraduate work in anthropology, which led me to India for four months, I conducted ethnography-like research on the topic of women, embroidery, and empowerment. I spent my time among Gujarati girls and women who all
engaged in a new school program designed to preserve the traditional art of their communities, mainly embroidery. As the project-director explained to me once “when we say ‘preservation of the traditional art’ it’s not that we want the old design to be done and done, but the fact that it’s completely composed by the artisans, that’s the aspect of the tradition we want to preserve” (Lesongeur, 2009, p.53). One of my findings that was not anticipated before I conducted the research was that education can be very empowering. This finding was revealed by the stories shared by my fours interviewees, and deeply affected the way I look at education. Education as empowerment was shared by those strong girls, in a country where you are born penalized by your gender and a cast system. As one girl emotionally shared:

> Our girls in the village do not go out. I am a little bit afraid of my father, he would not hit me or anything but I have to obey. I am happy here (in the school), I can play and run, do some activities. … I think good designs will take us forward and give us some shining, a name. … Now I can think of going somewhere, maybe go for an award or something. In KRV (the school), we are able to express, to explain, to take our embroidery elsewhere” (Lesongeur, 2009, p. 62)

And even though it has been many years already, these stories stayed with me and brought me here to become a teacher. Potts and Brown’s (2005) research on anti-oppressive theories and approaches explains that, “research can be a powerful tool for social change” (p. 260). This quote reflects the purpose of this study for Indigenous education, in the broader context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) that has been a wakeup call for many Canadians.

> Too many Canadians still do not know the history of Aboriginal peoples’ contributions to Canada, or understand that by virtue of the historical and modern Treaties negotiated by our government, we are all Treaty people. History plays an important role in
reconciliation; to build for the future, Canadians must look to, and learn from, the past. (p. 114).

Furthermore, as Potts and Brown (2005) suggest, “choosing to be an anti-oppressive researcher means choosing to do research that challenges the status quo in its processes as well as its outcomes” (p. 260). Indeed, as a researcher and a teacher-candidate, I share their belief that Anti-oppressive researchers have the challenge of continually reflecting, critiquing, challenging, and supporting their own and others’ efforts in the process of research and knowledge production to transform the enterprise of research, social work, and ultimately the world in which we live (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 260).

Reflecting back on the events in my life, I believe that education is a necessary tool for social change and empowerment. In the words of Paolo Freire (1970), “Education as the practice of freedom - as opposed to education as the practice of domination - denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from men” (p. 81). In Freire’s (1970) view:

The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it” (p. 80).

With that in mind, I feel it is important for non-Aboriginal educators to embrace Indigenous education, as part of the Canadian identity; it is our history. As such it is time to integrate this history, knowledge and perspectives into the classroom. Indigenous history should not only be taught in schools with a high Aboriginal population, in the same way we do not only
teach Holocaust history to Jewish students. Being both French and Canadian, I see my dual citizenship as an asset in my personal and professional life. I believe that as educators we must connect with, and know, who we are, before teaching and connecting with students. Solomon and Daniel (2007) argue that “Canadian teachers continue to be overwhelmingly White, female, and middle-class” (p. 168). Many of these teachers then do not fully comprehend the historical contexts of racism and discrimination in Canada, and “engage in a discourse of denial, defensiveness, ignorance, and hostility, and demonstrate a variety of ‘counter-knowledge strategies’ to avoid critical interrogation of the racial norms and beliefs from which they earn White privilege” (p. 163). St. Denis (2010) explores the professional knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal teachers in Canada and addresses the need or hope for non-Aboriginal teachers to be allies. From her findings, St. Denis (2010) points out:

Allies are people who are learners and not just teachers; they are individuals who get to know children and families. It’s not just “another September” and we file another group through the room and they’ll leave, and then “next September” comes. Instead these teachers can actually tell you about each of those kids. They are people who themselves listen, ask questions and listen some more. They’ll challenge themselves and challenge you as well” (p. 52)

Thus, I believe there is a crucial need for teachers to honestly apply self-reflection and acknowledgement of how our personal identity and positionality will affect our teaching. As an immigrant, naturalized Canadian, and a French Caucasian female, I share a double ethnicity that can bring new insight to questions of identity, culture and language in my future practice as a teacher. Being aware of my mixed culture and identity, and applying it to the theoretical concept
of culturally relevant pedagogy, I hope to learn more on how to become an ally in teaching Indigenous education in a French Immersion context.

1.4 Overview

In chapter 1 I situate the context of Indigenous education within Canada, its relation to the land and politics. This chapter includes a brief introduction to French Immersion programs in Ontario and how I think they can become a great place to start a dialogue on Indigenous education. Chapter 1 also introduces the purpose of this study and main questions, as well as the personal background of the researcher to better situate the theatrical framework developed for this research. Chapter 2 presents relevant literature on French Immersion programs in Ontario and of Indigenous education. Chapter 2 discusses the complexity and challenges behind Indigenous education and possible strategies to better incorporate it into the classroom. Concepts of multicultural education, anti-racist approach, and culturally responsive pedagogy will guide us throughout this reflection. Chapter 3 provides the methodology used in this study, including information about the teacher participants, the interview process used as a data collection instrument, as well as the detailed research questions. Chapter 4 presents the findings revealed by the interviews. Chapter 5 proposes an analysis of my findings and suggests implications and recommendations for future practice before my concluding comments. References and a list of appendixes follow.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In the previous chapter, I suggested that French Immersion classrooms could be a positive place to start a dialogue about Indigenous peoples and cultures. In fact, in the French as a Second Language Ontario Curriculum (OME, 2013), one of the main strengths of learning another language is to “develop their [students] awareness of how language and culture interconnect, helping them appreciate and respect the diversity of Canadian and global societies” (p. 7). Part and founding actors of Canada’s history, Indigenous peoples and communities have suffered many injustice, from loss of land to loss of identity, and the educational system was no exception. In recent years, the government of Ontario has made Indigenous education a key priority. Teachers are encouraged to bring Indigenous education in classrooms, and strategies of Indigenous pedagogy have also been introduced as a tool for teacher candidates.

But what is Indigenous education and what kind of strategies are being implemented? As teacher candidates, we are introduced to multiple resources, from classroom management and cooperative learning activities, to assessment tools and accommodating all intelligences. However, when it comes to Indigenous education, teacher candidates tend to struggle to understand what it means, as there are no textbooks on how to teach. And even with textbooks and guides, would this be the best way to integrating Indigenous education in mainstream classrooms? To go even further, how can French Immersion teachers integrate Indigenous education into their classroom when students are learning a new language?

In this chapter, I first present relevant literature on French as a second language programs in Ontario; how they came to be and the political lens they still have. I then discuss the concept of Indigenous education as it is presented by official documents and policies in Ontario but also
by teachers in their everyday practice. One way of integrating Indigenous education into French Immersion classrooms will be discussed through the process of decolonizing the classroom and the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy at the end of this chapter.

2.1 French as a Second Language in Ontario: An Overview

The complexity of teaching and accessing French as Second Language programs reflect the complexity of Canada’s historical past in regards to language, religion, and national identity. We can say that the presence of French-speaking people in Ontario (Franco-Ontarians) date from the 1600’s with the arrival of European settlers in what we now call Canada. In 1917, “The Upper Canada School Act and the Adolphus Egerton Ryerson’s School Act (1846) gave French equal status with English, German and Gaelic” (Barber & Sylvestre, 2006), but French language education remained a delicate and conflictual issue in Ontario up to the 1980’s. As a matter of fact, before the recognition of English and French as official languages, “from 1912 to 1929, in the era of Regulation 17, teaching in the French language was banned in the province of Ontario” (Hayday, 2001, p. 51). Noël (2012) explains how important this Regulation was for French-speaking people in Ontario at a time when schools, like church, were functioning as a protector of culture, values, beliefs, and identity. As he explains, “From the perspective of the French Canadian communities of Ontario, Regulation 17 could not be allowed to stand. This was a major assault on their rights as a minority; their very survival as a community was at stake” (p. 75). Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne issued an official apology for Regulation 17 in February 2016.

After the Second World War, the Ontario regulations on language and education were revived by the creation of the Royal Commission on Education in Ontario (Hope Commission) in
1945 that recommends “that French-language instruction be limited to the first six years of elementary school” (Barber & Sylvestre, 2006).

Hayday (2001) maintains that “Over the course of the 1960’s, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (RCBB) began to explore ways of alleviating some of the tensions that existed between Canada’s two dominant language communities” (p. 51). As a result, French immersion programs were officially implemented across the country in the 60’s at the time when The Official Languages Act of 1969 defined English and French as Canada’s two official languages. The Act was designed to ensure respect and equality of status, rights and privileges for both English and French peoples across the country. Mady and Black (2012) state that “In Canada, however, the impact of second language education is mitigated by the provinces and territories who hold constitutional jurisdiction over education” (p. 498). In the 1970’s French as a Second Language programs became a monetary issue as well with the implementation of the Bilingualism in Education Program. In Ontario, “the province established a minimum of 20 minutes per day of French-language instruction as the benchmark for school boards to receive funding under the “French as a second language (FSL) component of the BEP” (Hayday, 2001, p. 57), and the enrollment in French programs boomed.

In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms transformed the schooling system for French-speakers outside of Québec “giving rise to a generation of children, called "Section 23 kids," educated in French language schools where population numbers warrant” (Foot, 2013). And the 1990’s French Language Services Act offers an official and legal recognition of the French language as “an historic and honoured language in Ontario and recognized by the Constitution as an official language in Canada” (Government of Ontario, 2015).
2.2 French Immersion Programs in Ontario

Nowadays, there are over 425 French-language schools in Ontario, where French is the dominant language spoken, and English-speaking public school boards across the province offer French as a second language programs. According to the Toronto District School Board (2010):

French Immersion is one of several French as a Second Language program options available in elementary and secondary schools across the TDSB. It offers 100% French instruction from Senior Kindergarten to Grade 5. In the middle school years, Grades 6, 7, and 8, the Early French Immersion program is a half day program. Fifty percent (50%) of the day is in French and 50% of the day is in English. (p. 13)

French Immersion programs welcome students from all backgrounds, and various first-language learners. It seems that parents who enrol their children in French Immersion programs are satisfied with their choice, and “96% of Allophone students believed that official-language bilingualism would have a positive effect on future employment” (Canadian Parents for French, 2010, p.8). In 2013, the Ministry of Education published an educational framework for teachers to help students reach their full potential in learning French as a second language. In its introduction, however, we can still sense the political lens, reminiscent of a long conflictual history:

In an era of increasing globalization, it is critical to heighten students’ awareness that English–French bilingualism is an economic and cultural asset both within Canada and beyond. In many countries around the world, as well as in Ontario’s multilingual communities, it is taken for granted that students will learn more than one language, and often more than two. (OME, p.3)
Learning French as a second language, as part of a bilingualism ideal, seems to be presented an asset for the youth to celebrate their full Canadian citizenship and identity. It resonates with the broader multicultural lens instigated by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau with his 1971 declaration of multiculturalism as an official government policy “to preserve the cultural freedom of all individuals and provide recognition of the cultural contributions of diverse ethnic groups to Canadian society” (Library and Archives Canada, 2016). And again, in the French as a Second Language Ontario Curriculum (OME, 2013), one of the main strengths of learning another language is to “develop their [students] awareness of how language and culture interconnect, helping them appreciate and respect the diversity of Canadian and global societies” (p. 7).

Is it possible for French Immersion teachers to celebrate diversity in their teaching by bringing multi-languages, multi-perspectives, and cross-curriculum inferences in the classroom? Indeed some authors addressed the importance of bringing plurilingualism to education, including to French as a Second Language programs (Cummins, 2014, Mady, 2013, Pirbhai-Ilich, 2010, Moore & Gajo, 2009). Moore and Gajo (2009) point out:

The focus on the individual as the locus and actor of contact has encouraged a shift of terminology from multilingualism (the study of societal contact) to plurilingualism (the study of individual’s repertoires and agency in several languages). \{…\} This sociodidactic perspective on language contact in and outside the classroom maps out new interdisciplinary contours and invests a new political paradigm in language education that emphasises the social, cultural and political dimensions of language education. (p.138)

This sociolinguistic vision of language is particularly interesting in the context of this research since it gives agency to the learner who becomes an actor rather than a simple user of
language. The revised French as a second language curriculum (OME, 2013) puts an emphasis on authentic oral communication as a key message in learning French as a second language. “In order to learn French, therefore, students need to see themselves as social actors communicating for real purposes” (p. 9). Vocabulary, language conventions and grammar are defined as pillars in learning French in Ontario, making sociolinguistic and cultural aspects of the second language relevant to students. This relatively new focus on oral communication and cultural knowledge resonates with the critical pedagogies and critical multicultural approaches as discussed by Kubota and Lin (2009). Based on the belief that language is both cultural and political, the authors argue that critical pedagogies and critical multicultural education “explicitly engage teachers and students in dialogues on relations of power with regard to race, gender, class, and other social categories” (p. 12). Teaching and learning a second language is no longer done in an empty shell, but rather encompasses all aspects of language, including notions of power and politics. As such, using a critical pedagogy and critical multicultural lens in this research, might provide new insights on how French as a second language can be taught in relations to Indigenous education, another political topic, within the particular cultural and sociopolitical context of Ontario. As the authors remind us “as second language practitioners, we should engage in daily critical reflections of how our ideas of race influence what we teach, how we teach it, and how we understand our students” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 17).

If the goals of French as a Second Language program is to “learn about Canada and to appreciate and acknowledge the interconnectedness and interdependence of the global community” (OME, 2013, p. 6), how can it ensure that all Canadians’ cultures, identities and perspectives are represented in French Immersion classrooms? How can we integrate Indigenous education in a relevant manner for all students? And do we have the necessary tools and
resources to do so? I had trouble finding adequate literature to support this last question and I hope this research, with the help of my participants, answered some of the questions regarding the necessary tool for French Immersion to integrate Indigenous education in their classroom. But before I describe the research in more detail, it is important to have a deeper look at what Indigenous education means in the Canadian context.

2.3 Indigenous Education: An Overview

As the issues we face today concerning Indigenous education are deeply rooted in history, one needs to look at the past to better apprehend the present. However, I feel it is important to clarify some of the terminology I used in this study. ‘Aboriginal education’ refers to the term employed by the Ministry of education as it is currently implemented in the Canadian school system. Throughout provincial documents, teachers will come across terms like ‘Aboriginal content, perspectives, and pedagogy’ as guidelines to incorporate into the classroom. The same term is also used by some authors I quote throughout this research. However, the term ‘Aboriginal’ has been controversial and often disliked by many Indigenous communities throughout the country. As a result, I chose to avoid the term ‘Aboriginal’ and refer to ‘Indigenous education/people/cultures/communities’ or First Nations, Métis and Inuit people (FNMI) instead.

In most textbooks, Canada’s history begins with the arrival of Europeans, when documents and travel tales serve as proofs of a tangible past. Oral and other forms of living testimonies, like art and wampum belts, were never given any legitimate credit. First contact between Indigenous peoples and those of European ancestry in Canada occurred in the 16th century, and interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have been tense, often violent, ever since, and in almost all cases detrimental for Indigenous people. Education is no
exception, and it is important to note that since the 1867 Constitution Act, the education of First Nations and other Indigenous communities, has been treated as a federal responsibility, hence acknowledging all children in Canada a right to education.

### 2.3.1 The Indian Act and residential schools

In A Treaty Right to Education, Sheila Carr (2001) discussed the several agreements and treaties between the Crown and the First Nations people concerning education and how the federal government has failed “to fulfil its constitutional and treaty responsibility for First Nations education” (p. 133). As the author points out:

The Indian Act, which came into force in 1876, consolidated previous colonial legislation and imposed Euro-Canadian social organization and cultural values, or English common law on First Nations. Subsequent amendments to the Indian Act formalized educational practices of the dominant society in order to civilize…protect and cherish this helpless Race. (Carr, 2001, p. 127)

Sadly, with the publication of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015) report we now can see how Canada has failed Indigenous education. In their powerful introduction, the commissioners talk about cultural genocide when it comes to what Canada has done to Indigenous people. “Canada separated children from their parents, sending them to residential schools. This was done not to educate them, but primarily to break their link to their culture and identity” (TRC, pp. 5-6). The Indian Residential School system was implemented from the 1870’s and 1880’s to the 1960’s, the last school closed doors in 1996. This is not a story from the past. This is not an old tale or a Greek myth, it is real and intergenerational repercussions are still happening. Ultimately, residential schools were in place to transform and assimilate Indigenous children. Between 1863 and 1996, many Indigenous
children were sent to residential schools, an educational system “based on the assumption that
European civilization and Christian religions were superior to Aboriginal culture, which was
seen at the time as being savage and brutal” (TRC, p. 7). The federal government has estimated
that at least 150,000 Indigenous children and youth went to Indian Residential Schools where
abuse, neglect and forced labor were common practices.

I did not know about the Residential Schools System before joining OISE, in 2015. The
previous Prime Minister S. Harper, did officially apologize in 2008. Critics said at the time that
his robot-like message had no real sense of the racial and colonial ideology behind the school
system, nor any real thoughts about future actions. A Yiddish proverb (Chrisjohn & Wasacase,
2009) says that “a half-truth is a whole lie” (p. 225). Half the truth because the dark side of
Canada’s history is not just about residential schools, it is about suffering, pain, genocide,
respect, justice, land rights, sovereignty, about Indigenous communities, language and identities.
Even with the TRC report and the federal government’s public apologies, the residential school
system has left deep physical and emotional scars that have created long lasting effects on
Indigenous people’s perception of education. Furthermore, the Eurocentric and racist ideologies
that led to the creation of residential schools may still be very present in our educational system
today.

2.3.2 Revised curriculum and colonial heritage

The Ministry of Education recently changed the Ontario curriculum to integrate
Indigenous education, pedagogy, and knowledge, throughout the grades and various teachable
subjects. The Social Studies, History, and Geography curriculum per OME (2013) it is a:

Program [that] provides students with opportunities to learn about how people from every
walk of life contribute to society. There are numerous opportunities to break through
stereotypes and to learn about various religious, social, and ethnocultural groups, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, and their distinct traditions. (p. 46)

As teacher candidates, we are introduced to multiple resources and strategies for good teaching, but what do we mean when we talk about Indigenous education? How can we break out stereotypes about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People? In her research, Zurzolo (2010) finds that “for example, teachers found the phrase “Aboriginal perspectives” unclear and that “these teachers applied their understandings to the pedagogy and content of their classroom” (p. 282). Moreover, there seems to be a misconception about how to teach Indigenous education. In 2013, the People for Education, a registered charity working to support public education, published a report stating that “there is a misconception that “many schools appear to assume that they only need to offer Aboriginal education if they have a large number of Aboriginal students” (People for Education, 2013, p. 4). This later misconception needs more investigation, since I believe that Indigenous education, as part of Canada’s cultural and historical identity, should be incorporated in all schools, with or without students who identify as Indigenous.

One simplistic way of incorporating Indigenous education in the classroom is to include Indigenous topics in the curriculum. In Ontario, this approach is enacted with specific expectations that focus on Indigenous content in the social studies, history, and geography curriculum (OME, 2013). However, questions have been raised about what strategies and best practices teachers can implement in their classrooms to reach out to all students, including ones of Indigenous heritage. Many authors argue that teachers lack general knowledge about Aboriginal people and culture (Dion, Johnstone, & Rice, 2010, Kanu, 2007, Toulouse, 2008, Cherubi, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010, Nardozi, Restoule, Broad, Steel, & James, 2014). In their research, Nardozi, Restoule, Broad, Steele and James (2014) explore the
relationships between OISE teacher candidates and Indigenous content. They argue that “many teacher candidates enter our program ignorant of their social privilege and the existence of White supremacy” (p. 111). This statement resonates with Solomon and Daniels’ (2007) realization that: “Canadian teachers continue to be overwhelmingly White, female, and middle-class” (p. 168). Many of these teachers then do not fully comprehend the historical contexts of racism and discrimination in Canada, and “engage in a discourse of denial, defensiveness, ignorance, and hostility, and demonstrate a variety of ‘counter-knowledge strategies’ to avoid critical interrogation of the racial norms and beliefs from which they earn White privilege” (p. 163). Toulouse (2008) explains that “Aboriginal students require a learning environment that honours who they are and where they have come from” (p.1). Kanu (2007) analyzes the relations between the academic success of Aboriginal students in Manitoba and curriculum content, and her findings show that teachers both lack resources and time to adapt materials for students, and cannot always include Indigenous content other than what is provided in textbooks. But as Kanu (2007) points out:

The drawback, however, to include only what is given in the school textbook/curriculum is that such material typically represents what King (2001) called marginalized knowledge, a form of curriculum transformation that can include “selected ‘multicultural’ curriculum content that simultaneously distorts both the historical and social reality people actually experienced. (p.27)

Dion, Johnstone, and Rice (2010) document the work of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEP) in understanding the challenges faced by Aboriginal students in the city of Toronto. The report reveals five main barriers to Indigenous education:

A. The colonial legacy and its implications for students, families, and communities;
B. A lack of knowledge, understanding, and support on the part of the school staff;
C. School and Board policies that conflict with Aboriginal needs;
D. Curriculum expectations that create the impression that there is little room for the integration of Aboriginal content; and
E. Racism (p. 29)

Educators have a responsibility to reflect on how their own values, perspectives and life experiences and on how this might influence their everyday teaching practice with the integration of Indigenous perspectives in the classroom, including in French Immersion programs. There is a crucial need for teachers to honestly apply self-reflection and acknowledgement of how their personal identity and positionality will affect their teaching. Aikenhead and Michell (2011) emphasize the recognition of Indigenous knowledge as an important and legitimate source of understanding. They quote an Indigenous student about what is most important in learning, “you don’t take a class; you take a teacher” (p. 132), a strong statement reaffirming that teachers are integral to what students learn and that knowledge is never neutral but rather always political.

Dion, Johnstone, and Rice (2010) also analyze curriculum expectations and Indigenous content and point out that “students continue to tell stories of having to sit in class and listen to their teacher’s present Aboriginal people as Romantic Mythical people of the past” (p. 31). Within a culturally relevant pedagogy framework, the role of education is to prepare “students to be citizens who have empathy and respect within our increasingly diverse communities” (OME, 2008, p.2), it is the role of the teacher to honour Indigenous peoples’ culture, world view, and knowledge throughout the curriculum. As Hunter (2015) points out, “at the broadest scale, Aboriginal education can be described as a teaching approach that exists in
harmony with Aboriginal students’ cultural practices and lived experiences” (p. 17). And I would add that this harmony can and should be extended to all students’ cultural values and lived experiences. By acknowledging that every student in the classroom is unique, and by acknowledging their own positionality and life experiences, teachers would have a better chance to integrate Indigenous perspectives that are both inclusive and culturally relevant.

2.4 Indigenous Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Between Authenticity and Banalization

Popular in American Education since the 90’s, the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy tends to utilize the students culture, language, and identity as a vehicle for learning. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) referred to Bartolome (1994) to argue for “a humanizing pedagogy that respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice” (p. 173). She suggests that in a culturally relevant classroom, there is a sense of equity between students and the teacher, and that knowledge is emergent and shared by both, as part of a community. Young’s (2010) study suggests that there is still a gap between how educators think about culturally relevant pedagogy in theory and in practice. Unlike Ladson-Billings argument that “academic achievement and cultural competence can be merged” (1995, p. 160), Young’s findings revealed that “in defining culturally relevant pedagogy, none of the participants made any reference to academic success” (2010, p. 252). This divergence can be explained in two ways. The first might be that twenty years after Ladson-Billings’ publication, the school system has changed, there is more students per classroom and that teachers simply do not have enough time to do it all. Or, we could argue that the notion of success is coined with Eurocentric ways of life and has a different interpretation from Indigenous ways of living.
Per OME (2008), “It [education] means preparing students to be citizens who have empathy and respect within our increasingly diverse communities” (p.2), a strong statement in which success in education means forging “a civil and compassionate society (that) has, at its core, both respect and empathy” (p.20). If we follow this principle, and if we agree that teacher-students relations are inclusive and part of a broader learning community, we can then suggest that teachers should project respect and empathy as well. In her research, Toulouse (2008) explore the relationship between Indigenous students’ self-esteem and educational attainment. In practice, she shared four strategies that can be applied by teachers in their classrooms:

- Aboriginal cultures are celebrated throughout the school program;
- The library has a broad range of Aboriginal books and resources;
- Teachers are encouraged to incorporate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples throughout the curriculum;
- The Aboriginal territory, on which the school is located, is acknowledged at the door (a welcoming in an Aboriginal language) (p.2).

Although practical, these strategies could however prove counterproductive if applied without content, context, and a conscious effort for authentic dialogue by educators. Indeed, some authors (Kirkness, 1998; St. Denis, 2007; Battiste & Henderson, 2009) believe that cultural revitalization of Indigenous cultures and knowledge can in turn “minimize and discourage analysis of how historical and contemporary practices of racial inequality limit the aspirations of Aboriginal people” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1080). An example of this cultural representation banalization can be illustrated with current changes in the greeting messages in some schools. Since September 2016, most public schools in the Toronto District School Board started to include Indigenous land recognition during their morning messages. Although this can be seen as
a positive start towards understanding past and present relationships to the land and to
Indigenous people, without content and context to why this message is shared and why it is
important to recognize the land we are all standing on, the message can be pretty void and
powerless. Indigenous communities should be part of any class discussion, regardless of the
academic subject or the language it is taught in, for “becoming more familiar with Aboriginal
worldviews helps teachers build cultural continuity into both the content and instructional
approaches of all subject areas” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 2).

To integrate Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum, Elders have often been preferred
as they “may serve as authoritative sources in the development of an enhanced science
curriculum and for a cross-cultural science lessons and units” (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011, p.
123). Inviting experts, elders and community members to the classroom to share experiences,
knowledges and stories are ways to see education as inclusive and holistic, hoping to offer a
vision closer from an Indigenous perspective as “embedded in complex systems of knowing,
inclusive of their own suppositions about knowledge and being” (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 11).
Elders are valued for their knowledge and storytelling, which often play a central spiritual part in
Indigenous cultures. As narrative testimonies of past and current cultural, emotional, social, and
political issues, storytelling is in fact a powerful medium for educators and students to explore
Indigenous perspectives and stories in the larger Canadian context.

And it seems that narrative, if “present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history,
tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items,
and conversation” (Barthes, 1988, p. 251), can be explored in any language, and French
Immersion classrooms should not be excluded. As previously discussed, the revised French as a
second language curriculum (OME, 2013) emphasizes authentic oral communication so that
students see themselves as social actors. To help students in becoming social actors of their own learning, teachers have to give them the necessary space to hear their voices, to pay attention to their interests, and to support their wonders. Echoing a culturally relevant pedagogy, a guided inquiry approach “places students ‘questions, ideas and observations at the centre of the learning experience” (OME, 2013, p.2). Kuhlthau’s (2010) adds that, “Guided Inquiry equips students with abilities and competencies to meet the challenges of an uncertain, changing world” (p. 18), an approach that could be beneficial in learning about Indigenous communities and history in Canada. Furthermore, as part of a critical multicultural approach to Indigenous education, I think that both teachers and students could engage in dialogues about power and race. Critical pedagogies “provide analytical tools in examining ideas of race, racialization, and racism” (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 12), another approach that would certainly benefit when talking about Indigenous education.

2.5 Decolonizing the Classroom

As suggested by Dion, Johnstone, and Rice (2010) racism is one of the main barriers in teaching Indigenous education because educators and administrators tend not to think about or discuss the underlying causes of Indigenous people’s portray and treatment throughout Canada’s history. Battiste and Henderson (2009) recognize the growing importance of bringing Indigenous knowledge into the classrooms as both a form of empowerment for Indigenous communities and a counterpart of Eurocentric worldviews. Consequently, they describe decolonizing educational practices as:

A process that includes raising and legitimizing the collective voices and experiences of Aboriginal people in the curriculum, exposing the injustices in colonial history and
deconstructing the past by critically examining the social, political, economic, and historical reasons for silencing Aboriginal voices (past and present). (p. 14)

To understand this decolonization process is to go beyond stereotypical ideas about Indigenous people and what it means in Canada, it is to recognize Eurocentric White dominant privileges and biases in the educational system, and it is to acknowledge the presence and contribution of Indigenous communities in the construction of Canada throughout history. In the words of Grand Chief Phil Fontaine, survivor of the Residential Schools System, “the first step in healing is disclosure” (Hanah, 1992) and I believe it is time to talk about Indigenous people as part, as founders, of Canadian’s history.

The notion of disclosure resonates with the idea that students have to make sense of what they are learning. In the context of French Immersion, there is a need for all learners of a second or third language to understand the purpose of their learning. One way could be by making connections, to help situate students and teachers in relationship with Indigenous people and communities. Goulet and Goulet (2014) talk about Weechisseechigemitowin (alliances for common action) to explain that: “to draw Indigenous students into learning, effective teachers strive to integrate Indigenous content across the different areas of the curriculum, giving the students material to which they can relate when they recognize themselves and their people in the content” (p. 165). Ultimately, Indigenous education could really become an inspirational eye opening, offering a space for dialogue in the classroom, recognizing the intricate relationship between people and the natural world, as “for Indigenous peoples, all things are alive. Nothing dies. All things are in a continuous process of transformation” (Trépanier & Creighton-Kelly, 2011, p. 24). In light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (2015), talking about Indigenous education, knowledge and communities is a start towards with transformative
process, a first step in recognizing the wrong, the atrocity done to Indigenous children and communities across Canada and a testimony for hope and actions for the future. Dialogue is necessary to move beyond years of silence and ignorance and there is no doubt that: “expanding public dialogue and action on reconciliation beyond residential schools will be critical in the coming years” (TRC, 2015, p. 114).

2.6 Conclusion

An analysis of the literature revealed that French Immersion programs and Indigenous education are both highly politically charged within the Canadian context. With recent changes in the French as a second language curriculum (OME, 2013), putting an emphasis on authentic oral communication, I suggested that French Immersion classrooms could become a positive place to engage teachers and students in learning and talking about Indigenous peoples and communities. Seeing students as social actors of their learning and focusing on learning a new language for purpose seemed to be two key elements of integrating Indigenous education into French Immersion classrooms.

However, the literature did not offer a lot of insights on how French Immersion teachers in Ontario actually integrate Indigenous perspectives in their classroom and I hope this research offer some new knowledge. Again, teaching about Indigenous education is relatively new in Ontario and as the literature revealed there is still a lot of misconceptions on the subject. Laramee (2008) explains that:

Embedded within the discourse of Aboriginal education are at least three conceptually distinct sets of meaning: 1) the education of Aboriginal students, 2) education that is about Aboriginal worldviews, cultures and experiences, and 3) educational purposes and practices that reflect Aboriginal values and aspirations. (p. 57)
As I explained in this chapter, I believe that Indigenous education is more than teaching to Aboriginal students. If I first thought that teaching Indigenous education could be found in manuals and textbooks, the literature review suggested that the modern educational system may still hide Eurocentric worldviews portraying counterproductive stereotypical images of Indigenous communities. Consequently, it is important that Indigenous education is approached with respect and self-reflection by educators in mainstream classrooms. Throughout this study, my understanding of Indigenous education focuses on integrating Indigenous perspectives and worldviews throughout the curriculum and what are the strategies to do so in French Immersion classrooms.

This research aimed at understanding how three French Immersion teachers apprehend Indigenous education with their elementary students. By presenting the voices of these teachers, this study offers a new testimony on what Indigenous education is and how Indigenous perspectives are integrated in French Immersion classroom’s discussions in a way that is respectful and relevant for all students. I will now turn to the research methodology used in this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter, I first review the general methodological approach used in this study. I then present the research questions of this research before detailing the procedures and recruitment of the participants. As part of the reflexivity process encoded by the qualitative approach, I conclude by discussing the potential limitations as well as the strengths of this study.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

Following Tracy (2010) and her concept of crystallization, this study is a collection and analysis of “multiple data, researcher viewpoints, theoretical frames, and methods of analysis [to] allow different facets of problems to be explored” (p. 843). To address the central questions of this research I chose to conduct a qualitative study as it “involves an interpretative, naturalistic approach to the world” (Creswell, 2013, p. 44). By doing so, I was able to focus on the participants’ stories and meanings, as well as my own interpretation of their narratives.

In gathering and analyzing my data, I tried to follow Creswell’s (2013) guidelines as close as possible. As a result, I started my qualitative inquiry by examining and compiling the available literature underlying the research question: How do French Immersion teachers integrate Indigenous education into the classroom? I reviewed articles, books and governmental policies to gain a better understanding about French Immersion programs in Ontario and Indigenous education. Furthermore, concepts of multicultural education, anti-racist approach, and culturally responsive pedagogy were explored throughout this research. As next steps, I conducted semi-structured interviews with three French Immersion teachers to get their perspectives and insights on the research questions. Their testimonies formed a narrative that allowed me, the researcher, to “analyze not only meanings and motives, but also how those
meanings and motives connect to the way people structure their experience” (Schram, 2006, p. 105). Indigenous scholars Healey and Tagak (2014) explain the importance of story and storytelling in the context of research as “it allows respondents to share personal experiences without breaking cultural rules related to confidentiality, gossip or humility” (p. 6). Therefore, I have selected a qualitative approach hoping to create some narrative space in which participants could share their stories and create new knowledge.

### 3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview guide required by the Master of Teaching Research Project (Appendix B). Within the guidelines found in both *General Interview Guide Approach* and the *Standardized Open Ended Interviews* (Turner, 2010), the data collection used for this study allowed “the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up” (p. 756). At the same time, this approach offered the possibility of developing open-ended questions “allowing the participants to fully express their viewpoints and experiences” (p. 756). In turn, semi-structured interviews acted as a guide for the researcher, but also allowed flexibility in interpreting the participants’ answers and experiences.

The interview questions emerged from the literature review and followed three thematic guidelines: teaching in French Immersion, integrating Indigenous education, and approaching culturally responsive pedagogy and decolonizing the classrooms as possible resources. Each of my three participants has been interviewed once, for a period of 60 minutes, using the same interview protocol (See Appendix B). After the general background questions, I oriented the questions in ways to give the participants a chance to express their experiences and opinions. However, the interview questions were here only as guidelines to shape the conversation, and it’s
“over the course of the conversation, (that) knowledge and experiences are shared in a common space” (Healey & Tagak, 2014, p. 7). The full list of interview questions is located in Appendix B. All three interviews have been audio recorded and later transcribed.

### 3.3 Participants

I interviewed three teachers for this study. Teachers were selected based on three criteria. First, they needed to be teaching in elementary schools in Toronto, within the Toronto District School Board. Participants needed to be currently teaching in French Immersion or had previously taught in French Immersion. Lastly, the teachers needed to be actively engaged in integrating Indigenous education and perspectives into the classroom.

#### 3.3.1 Sampling criteria

I chose to interview elementary teachers because I was enrolled in the primary/junior (PJ) teacher education program and I felt that it would connect well with my own experiences and my future practice. For the first criterion, I also wanted to target junior grades 5 and 6. First I assumed that French Immersion students in higher grades would have stronger vocabulary to communicate in French. Also because the revised curriculum (OME, 2013) in social studies, history, and geography, includes new expectations in Indigenous education for grades 5 and 6. Out of my three participants, two fulfilled this requirement, and the third one was a grade 3 teacher. However, I still considered that teacher to have valuable knowledge and insights to share for the purpose of this study.

#### 3.3.2. Sampling procedures

In preparation for this study, I emailed a number of my OISE instructors to ask if they could recommend teachers who fulfilled my criteria and introduce my topic of research to their colleagues and peers.
3.3.3. Participant biography

The first teacher is a Caucasian woman who was teaching grade 3 French Immersion at the time of the study. She had been teaching for more than twenty years, fourteen in Toronto, and several years in Ecuador as well. In Toronto, she has always taught in French Immersion, but French was not her mother-tongue. I will refer to her using the pseudonym Lily.

My second participant was a Caucasian male who was teaching a solid grade 6 in a public elementary school in Toronto. He had been a teacher at the same school for seven years, since he graduated from the Master of Teaching program at OISE. He grew up learning French as a second language, and he taught both French Immersion and core French. Throughout this study, I will use the pseudonym Paul.

The third teacher interviewed for this research was a Caucasian male who was teaching grade 6 students in an elementary public school in Toronto. He had been teaching in the Toronto District School Board for five years, and taught grades 3, 4, and split classes. He worked in English as a second language (ESL) education for several years. French was not his mother tongue, but he went to French Immersion as a child and had exposure to French in Québec for several years. I will refer to him with the pseudonym Mike.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis might present some challenges for the qualitative researcher. As Wolcott (1994) cleverly puts it:

Because qualitative data gathering is conducted through such everyday techniques as participant observation and interviewing, it is comforting to employ a term like analysis to suggest that in what we do with data we are able to wrest them from their humble origins and transform them into something grand enough to pass for science. (pp. 23-24)
That being said, this study followed a data analysis process that embraced various instruments of data collection and hoped to highlight new themes of discussion after interpretation. Creswell (2013) explains that in qualitative research, data analysis “consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or discussion” (p. 180).

All three interviews have been audio-recorded and later transcribed. I decided to share the transcription with every participant to engage them in the process, allowing them to comment, add or modify their testimonies. ‘Members reflection’ is one of Tracy’s (2010) eight criteria of qualitative quality as it “allows for sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study’s findings, and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration” (p. 844).

I have read all three transcriptions several times in order to find common themes and possible connections to my research questions. Here, as suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003), “the terms “theme” and “expression” more naturally connote the fundamental concepts we are trying to describe” (p.87). After the first reading, I started to take notes, on my “hard-copy printouts” (Saldana, 2009), of my initial thoughts and impressions about what was being shared. This old-fashioned ways of “manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that give more control over and ownership of the work” (Saldana, 2009, p. 22). The second cycle of coding was done on my computer as I organized my codes into broader themes connected to the central questions of this research. As Healey and Tagak (2014) summarize it:

The recordings of interviews or conversations are listened to and transcripts are re-read to ensure that transcription is verbatim and to fill in any missing words. After a period of time immersed in the words and stories, ideas may start to form or crystalize (p. 8).
From this process, three main themes emerged and they will be discussed in the following chapter.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

All participants received the Informed Consent Letter as established by the Master of Teaching Program (See Appendix A) to sign before the interview as consent for their participation in the study and the recording of their testimonies. This letter presented an overview of the purpose of study and addressed ethical implications and expectations of participation. It was also made clear that participation was on a voluntary basis, and that participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point in time. I also informed my participants that they were not required to answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable with and that they would have a chance to review the transcription as well.

Participants were informed that audio-recording of their interviews would be secured on a password-protected laptop and destroyed after transcriptions. I also informed my participants that they would remain anonymous throughout the study and that no school names nor students’ names would be shared. Although there was no foreseeable risks for the participants to engage in this research, I explained to all three teachers that the information shared during this study would potentially inform my future practice and the practice of others in relation to teaching Indigenous education in French Immersion programs.

3.6 Methodological Strengths and Limitations

Although my sample size was small, it reflected the selection criteria and was appropriate for the goal of this research. Working within the limitations of the Master of Teaching Research Project, including constraints of time and the choice of participants, excluded the possibility of collecting data from direct observation or from teacher-students connections and interactions.
during class. By contrast to the ethnographical framework, this study could not conduct thick description, or “in-depth illustration that explicates culturally situation meanings and abundant concrete details” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Being able to observe and take notes of French Immersion teachers’ behaviours while teaching Indigenous education could have contributed to a deeper understanding of their “tacit knowledge”, as it “transcends the immediate surface of speech, texts, or discursive materials” (p. 843).

As Creswell (2013) suggests “we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between research and the participants in a study” (p. 48). In following a qualitative research approach, this study aimed to give French Immersion teachers a voice as they reflect on their own strategies to incorporate Indigenous education in practice.

Young’s (2010) data analysis reveals that for a qualitative research to be valuable and of quality, it has to be emergent as it tends to generate a new meaning and offer a new perspective on a given situation, context or concept. Thus in her conclusion, Young makes it clear that we, as educators, need to challenge what we learn in theory and what is implemented, shared and understood when put into practice.

3.7 Conclusion

In this research, I drew on culturally responsive pedagogy and multicultural education as frameworks to help better understand how French Immersion teachers integrate Indigenous education into their classroom. In the next chapter, findings that emerged from the data are presented. Using a qualitative approach, I looked for codes, keywords and themes that “respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of (students) teachers as an integral part of educational practice” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 173).
Combining my participants’ testimonies with my own reflection and interpretation, chapter 4 proposes some possible strategies and insights for French Immersion teachers on how to integrate Indigenous education in respectful way and relevant for all students.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of this research was to explore how French Immersion elementary teachers integrate Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms. As I expressed in previous chapters, Indigenous education is a concern that goes beyond a particular strategy that teachers can simply add-on to the curriculum. Indigenous education, and integrating Indigenous perspectives, is important for reviving and reclaiming Canada’s lost and hidden history and for starting a dialogue towards healing and reconciliation, in “establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (TRC, 2015, p113). French Immersion classrooms could be a good place to start establishing and nourishing this dialogue towards reconciliation, since the revised French as second language curriculum (OME, 2013) focuses on authentic oral communication, embedded in cultural contexts.

This study aimed to answer the following main question: How do French Immersion elementary teachers integrate Indigenous perspectives into their classrooms? While interpreting the data, a number of research sub-questions guided the analysis: What do French Immersion teachers know and understand about Indigenous education? What strategies do they use to implement Indigenous perspectives in their work? What challenges do they face in their teaching?

This chapter presents the findings from three interviews conducted with French Immersion elementary teachers on their understanding of Indigenous education and ways of integrating Indigenous perspectives. Although each teacher had a personal story and a unique point of view on how to define Indigenous education, all three participants revealed connecting
threads of integrating Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in French Immersion classrooms. Consequently, the themes that will guide the discussion are as follow: (1) critical components for teaching about Indigenous worldviews and knowledge, (2) strategies to integrating Indigenous perspectives into French Immersion classrooms, and (3) factors affecting the integration of Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion classrooms. Each main theme will have sub-themes to facilitate the reading of these findings in relation with concepts from prior research on this topic, examined in Chapter 2.

4.1 Teacher’s Philosophy: A Critical Component for Teaching about Indigenous Worldviews and Knowledges

Within a culturally relevant pedagogy framework, findings from this research showed that one of the most important strategy in teaching Indigenous education is in fact the teacher’s own positionality and philosophy. If the role of education is to prepare “students to be citizens who have empathy and respect within our increasingly diverse communities” (OME, 2008, p.2), it is the role of the teacher to honour Indigenous peoples’ culture, worldview, and knowledge throughout the curriculum. This following first section presents the participants’ points of view on how to integrate Indigenous worldviews and perspectives, and offers an exploration of an inquiry-based approach, teachers’ own positionality, and a reflection around the concept of decolonizing the classroom.

4.1.1 An inquiry-based approach

The data seemed to portray an encouraging vision about teaching Indigenous knowledge, focusing less on books and more on active inquiry skills. Mike described himself as an inquiry teacher. He shared that his teaching philosophy was “not so much about covering a history book or a math book cover to cover, but rather to draw on them to get a conversation started.” Paul’s
testimony resonated with the inquiry-based approach as his students generated some topics of discussion, according to their interests and questions. Inquiry-based learning has been defined as “an approach to teaching and learning that places students ‘questions, ideas and observations at the centre of the learning experience” (OME, 2013, p.2). This approach was illustrated by Paul when he explained that over the year, his “students wanted to learn more about the murder and missing of Aboriginal women in Canada.” This was not part of the curriculum per se, but the students were curious and asking questions. Paul decided to help them in their learning. He advised them about the tools to research the issue, supported them in their research, and most importantly, provided them a safe place in the classroom to explore the issue they were interested in. In both Paul and Mike’s cases, the teacher seems to take the role of a facilitator and the teacher-students relationship is based on equity and inclusivity.

For her grade 3 class, Lily was also practicing inquiry-based learning, to “encourage the development of research skills such as finding key information from a variety of sources instead of simply memorizing facts or information”. As she noted, “The teacher was no longer the tenant of all information and students’ interests and wonders should be part of the teaching experience”. Answers from my three participants echoed Kuhlthau’s (2010) definition of what she called guided inquiry as a “way to meet the many requirements of the curriculum through engaging, motivating and challenging learning” (p. 19). This balanced power-dynamics between students and the teacher, where knowledge is emergent and shared, was also coined as a culturally relevant pedagogy that “respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 173).

Following an inquiry-based approach to learning and a culturally relevant pedagogy suggests that it is the teachers’ responsibility and willingness to establish a “classroom culture in
which ideas triumph as “central currency” and class members come together on a regular basis to discuss each other’s learning” (OME, 2013, p. 2). As a result, teachers have to be flexible since they cannot predict students’ wonders or answers; they might come back with more questions. When talking about Indigenous communities, and their past and present history, topics of discussion such as the Indian Residential School system in Canada, the Aboriginal missing women, or Attawapiskat crisis, can be painful, confusing, or challenging. As such, this approach to teaching and learning implied that teachers reflected on their own values, perspectives and life experiences about Indigenous knowledge in order to be ready to assist students in their wondering and learning.

### 4.1.2 Teachers’ positionality

Data from this research showed that another critical component of teaching about Indigenous knowledge was for teachers to recognize their own cultural biases and positionality. For the three teachers interviewed in this study, “teacher capacity (defined here as teacher knowledge, attitude, and personal and instructional style)” appeared as a strong indicator of success in teaching Indigenous knowledge (Kanu, 2007, p. 37). Their testimonies illustrated how their own positionality influenced their everyday teaching practice in regards to the integration of Indigenous perspectives in the French Immersion classrooms.

Paul shared a story from his childhood that illustrated how culture could impact someone’s worldview and how it is important for educators to realize the stigma these experiences could display through teaching. Growing up in Italy, Paul played ‘cowboys and Indians’ with his brother without questioning why the older brother was always the cowboy or what being Indian really meant in this scenario. Paul’s childhood story seemed to resonate with Dion, Johnstone, and Rice (2010) as they warned us about representing “Aboriginal people as
Romantic Mythical people of the past” (p. 31). Paul’s reflection on his early teaching experience also echoed this dangerous reality, as he described teaching Thomas King’s *The Inconvenient Indian* for three years. According to Paul, this story is as culturally distant as playing ‘cowboys and Indians’. As he noted, “It is a dead story, but really comfortable story to teach, almost like an archeological adventure that you would take your grade 6 students on to”. For Lily, my other participant, there was also a need to bring Indigenous education “closer to home”, in relationship with what it means to live in Canada, and in Ontario. As part of our Canadian culture, history and identity, teaching Indigenous knowledge is also “developing a deeper understanding of your own culture” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 2). As Lily explained, she wanted to share with her students that “there were many different groups and communities of Aboriginal people living across Ontario, and that it was important to acknowledge that they were sitting on Aboriginal land”.

In Chapter 2, I presented existing research on the topic of Indigenous education and some of the challenges in integrating it in mainstream classrooms, including teachers’ lack of knowledge on the subject. In Ontario, The Social Studies, History, and Geography curriculum “program provides students with opportunities to learn about how people from every walk of life contribute to society. There are numerous opportunities to break through stereotypes and to learn about various religious, social, and ethnocultural groups, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, and their distinct traditions” (OME, 2013, p. 46). However, questions have been raised about strategies and best practices that teachers implement in their classrooms to reach out to all students. For some teachers, the term Indigenous education seem unclear, and others “assume that they only need to offer Aboriginal education if they have a large number of Aboriginal students” (People for Education, 2013, p.4). However, data from my three
participants revealed that there was a need to approach Indigenous education as part of everyday class discussions, as part of Canada history and in a way that challenge stereotypes and status quo.

4.1.3 Decolonizing the classroom

All three teachers emphasized a need to be more critical about our own Canadian history and their testimonies offered a real intake on how to integrate Indigenous perspectives in the classroom, within a French Immersion context. In Chapter 2, decolonizing educational practices has been described as:

A process that includes raising and legitimizing the collective voices and experiences of Aboriginal people in the curriculum, exposing the injustices in colonial history and deconstructing the past by critically examining the social, political, economic, and historical reasons for silencing Aboriginal voices (past and present). (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p. 14)

Lily was committed to make her teaching reflect different perspectives and different voices. What was important for her students to understand, as Lily pointed out, was the fact that everyone has a unique experience and “it is not because you live in Canada that everybody has the same voice or the same cultural belief”. Lily seemed very aware of her own positionality, as being part of “the dominant culture” and she was committed not to put her own voice, her own culture, at the front of the stage in her teachings.

Mike explored the concept of multicultural education by making an important distinction about multiculturalism. According to him, it would be misleading to talk about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) people as part of Canada’s multiculturalism. As the original inhabitants of this land, “FNMI people remind us of our presence here on a territory which is not only
rightfully ours under dominant histories.” Mike was also aware of the privileged position he occupied within society, “as being a white male in this country” and wanted his students to think critically about Canada, going beyond cultural differences and stereotypical ideas about what Indigenous meant in this country. Teachers undertaking decolonization need to go beyond the Eurocentric dominant stories and history, so that students “develop an understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, learning that Aboriginal people did not simply or in reality disappear after Canada was explored and settled by waves of immigrants” (Dion, Johnston & Rice, 2010, p. 13).

Paul’s data reflected the approach of decolonizing the classroom. As he explained, “part of decolonizing the classroom, and that goes with culturally relevant pedagogy as well, is the need for teachers to get passed the dominant culture”. Paul’s teaching philosophy offered a great example about how Indigenous communities could be part of class discussions and Canadian history. As he clarified, “it is important for teachers to engage in Indigenous education to confront students with certain ideologies about race and culture within the Canadian context”. In a similar manner, St. Denis (2007) emphasized the importance for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators to “work together to uncover and understand racism and the normalizing and naturalizing of white supremacy continue unabated in our schools and communities” (p. 1088). Paul’s reflection seemed to support the decolonizing the classroom framework. According to him:

Talking about First Nations and how communities were treated throughout history is about addressing all chapters of history. It is not just about residential schools, but also looking at migrant workers and looking at how people lost their citizenships. It is looking at people in Africville, an African-Canadian community located in Halifax.
Furthermore, as Paul reflected on Indigenous education he stated:

> It is also about examining darker pages of the Canadian history that speak to the fact that it is not just about the colonization of First Nations by Europeans, it is about the whole Eurocentric worldview that have consequences for everything and everyone who did not reflect that identity and heritage.

Within his classroom, Paul noticed that most students would be disturbed by such historical truths as they are not used to picture Canada as having a dark history. Lily agreed that the relationships between Aboriginal people and Europeans have often been discussed in a vacuum, distant from culture, presenting a rather narrow vision of who Indigenous communities are, the role they played in building Canada, and what it means today.

When talking about the Indigenous Knowledge movement, Battiste and Henderson (2009) reinforced that “it has inspired a decolonization of knowledge and people searching for change in a postcolonial civilization and being dedicated to change. It has assisted human consciousness to restore, renew, and revitalize our connections to place and peoples” (p. 9). This notion of change was also acknowledged by Mike as he saw his teaching role as an ally and the integration of Indigenous education in its social and political aspects. As he explained, “history has a tendency to always eliminate history, to hide the darker pages, to destroy the evidence”. According to him, Indigenous education and Indigenous communities are not cultural artefacts from the past, and it is important to teach about the political aspects embedded in those issues. He added that “Indigenous education is not about feeling guilty but about understanding that change is important and it is critical to support this type of change in education”. Ultimately, Mike wanted his students to recognize that everyone has a different experience and that although Indigenous and non-Indigenous people share a common history, this might not be under equal
and respectful terms. As educators, he maintained that teachers could be better advocates and allies towards reconciliation and understanding and respect. In light of a cultural framework generated by the living teachings of the Ojibwe people, “Respect (in Ojibwe terms) means knowing that we are sacred and that we have a place in this world” (OME, 2008, p. 1). Stories from the participants revealed that Indigenous education is about giving students the tools “to know themselves in relationship” with Aboriginal peoples. (People for Education, 2013, p. 4). It is about dialogue and truth, sharing Canada’s history from multiple perspectives, questioning the dominant culture and stereotypes. It is admitting the wrong that has been done in order to move forward. Moreover, findings from this research show that Indigenous worldviews could provide authentic sources of knowledge to integrate into French Immersion classrooms.

4.2 Orality and Indigenous Knowledge as a Way to Integrating Indigenous Perspectives into French Immersion Classrooms

When asked to reflect on their own strategies to integrate Indigenous perspectives in French, the participants shared the importance of bringing a certain awareness about Indigenous communities in Canada, in the most honest and authentic way.

4.2.1 Learning about Indigenous knowledge through authentic life stories

With her grade 3 students, Lily was looking into how Aboriginal communities were living, their community structures, their beliefs, and their economy. In particular, Lily discussed with her students the ways Indigenous children used to dress, what they ate, and what type of cultural ways of life they had. Although she was not sure about the age-appropriateness for talking about certain aspects of Canada’s lost and hidden history, like the idea of shame for how Indigenous communities were often treaties by settlers and commissionaires, Lily was committed to teach Indigenous education in her class. According to her, “this is the vision of education
following the Truth and Reconciliation Report published in 2015 and the changes it created as part of its call to actions”. An opinion that resonated with the TRC (2015) recommendations including the request to “make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students” (p.7).

The revised French as a second language curriculum (OME, 2013) put an emphasis on authentic oral communication as a key message in learning French as a second language. As the document pointed out, “In order to learn French, therefore, students need to see themselves as social actors communicating for real purposes” (p. 9). Vocabulary, language conventions and grammar are defined as pillars in learning French in Ontario, and as a social product, language needs to be embedded in sociolinguistic and cultural aspects in order to be authentic, meaningful, and relevant to students. This determination to bring authentic discussions about Indigenous peoples in a French Immersion context is echoed by Mike. Mike was determined to teach Indigenous knowledge to his students as he believed that:

There is a way to communicate information at all levels in an appropriate way. No subject can be avoided as long as they are appropriately introduced to students depending on their grade level. Even if talking about the Residential Schools System in Canada is painful, it is a conversation to have with students.

For him, integrating Indigenous perspectives in the classroom was a way to start working towards reconciliation and preparing students to learn more about Canada’s history, every year learning a little bit more. Both Lily and Mike’s testimonies resonated with Kubota and Lin’s (2009) research. As they wrote, “As second language practitioners, we should engage in daily critical reflections of how our ideas of race influence what we teach, how we teach it, and how
we understand our students” (p. 17). One of the main strengths of learning another language is to “develop their [students] awareness of how language and culture interconnect, helping them appreciate and respect the diversity of Canadian and global societies” (OME, 2013, p. 7).

Age-appropriate topics of discussion may become challenging in integrating Indigenous perspectives into French Immersion classrooms, but my participants found ways to share and engage students in authentic and relevant discussions. One participant in particular, Paul, shared a great example of how Indigenous worldviews could be integrating in French Immersion classrooms, which is discussed next.

4.2.2 Decoding Indigenous courts métrages as an alternative way to introduce Indigenous worldviews in French Immersion classrooms

Paul was asked to test-drive a pilot unit in French and First Nation cultures, where students worked with three court métrages (animated short films) and decoded their messages. This unit was part of a larger project, including 16 other schools in Toronto, designed to bring accessible entry points to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) cultures for both the English and French stream. As Paul explained about the project:

We were initially just looking at the core of the story and how you’re relating to the story on a purely observable level. And then expanding the perception of these stories towards how would this originally have been meaningful to a First Nation culture, and what messages in their oral tradition are being transmitted through the retelling of the story. This exercise was particularly interesting and meaningful since “First Nations peoples' stories are shared with the expectation that the listeners will make their own meaning, that they will be challenged to learn something from the stories” (Kanu, 2002, p. 107). What Paul was doing in his classroom followed the same principle, since his students are asked to make
connections with the message they decode from the original First Nation stories. Paul told me that the process has several layers of listening and decoding. After training the ear to better hear and understand messages shared in these stories, students found several recurring themes and were able to conceptualize why those stories were created. In the end, his students realized that these stories had purpose, and were used the same way they used science to describe and explain natural phenomena. For Paul, it was a major understanding about Indigenous perspectives on the world and “the kids were absolutely delighted about the fact that there were alternative ways to look at natural phenomena, and that you could create a story to explain it to yourself”.

As Paul and his students revealed, Indigenous stories are here to help understand the world around us, to make sense of new and unknown phenomena, and to teach and share knowledge from a generation to the next. Paul’s testimony resonated with findings from the literature suggesting that, “becoming more familiar with Aboriginal worldviews helps teachers build cultural continuity into both the content and instructional approaches of all subject areas” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 2). Indeed, Paul concluded by sharing that First Nation stories, just as Indigenous education, are not only from the past, they can teach us about the world today, and that it is important to always bring back the students to current times, to local and global issues, to make the learning meaningful and relevant. What was important for Paul was that his students explored First Nation stories to find their purpose and to ask themselves how the stories may be relevant today. Paul believed that First Nation stories can inform other cultures and the whole Canadian society about the world, and can offer an incredible amount of the wisdom for students to get inspired.

Data from the participants revealed that focusing on authentic discussions and referring to Indigenous worldviews and knowledge could be effective strategies to integrating Indigenous
perspectives into French Immersion classrooms. However, there are many factors still affecting the ways teachers can access some resources and best integrate these resources.

4.3 Factors Affecting the Integration of Indigenous Perspectives in French Immersion Classrooms

Data from Paul and Mike revealed a discrepancy between the supports they could find within the Toronto District School Board. Both participants referred to cultural presenters, or board-approved First Nation community members, as potential barriers in teaching Indigenous education.

4.3.1 Board-vetoed cultural presenters

Paul explained that the Toronto District School Board has a pool of pre-vetoed people who can come in the classroom to talk about First Nation communities, perspectives and knowledge. He found the process rather long, constraining and a little bit preposterous because it acted like a roadblock, another step to slow down the process of integrating Indigenous knowledge and people in the classroom. Mike also noted that a cultural presenter was someone of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit background, who needed to be approved by the board to come in the classroom to speak about Ojibwe Anishinaabe culture. He further stated that the presenters were being paid for their time for their presentation.

What the analysis process revealed about cultural presenters was not anticipated from previous readings. From the literature, Aikenhead and Michell (2011) referred to elders as “authoritative sources in the development of an enhanced science curriculum and for a cross-cultural science lessons and units” (p. 123). Similarly, Goulet and Goulet (2014) suggested that elders can “address issues of colonization and racism in their teaching, creating an awareness of our shared history from an Indigenous perspective in a way that validate Indigenous students
while being sensitive to Euro-Canadian students” (p. 192). As such, elders have been described as pillars to bring accurate and living stories in the classroom. As revealed by the two of the teachers in this study, cultural presenters might cause more limitations than support. If Paul found the process constraining, Mike also mentioned that the cost associated with such support could limit its access unless you found an alternative solution. As he put it, “Board-approved cultural presenters are setting their own pricing. But if they’re charging a full day for $400 or $500, that becomes unaffordable.” Although Paul mentioned student safety as a potential reason for having the board’s approval for who could come into the classroom, he seemed rather upset by this process. As Paul stated, “there are no better person to speak about First Nation issues than a person of First Nation origin”. The fact that there is a list of approved people to talk about these issues did not make complete sense to him, as he questioned the reasons behind such regulation. According to Paul, “Indigenous people have a story to share, it is their story, and we should not have to go through a list of people allowed to share these stories. They should be more easily accessible to all”.

These two teachers questioned the authenticity of the stories shared by board-approved cultural presenters, and they both expressed that First Nation presenters should be an accessible resource for teachers who might feel insecure or not as knowledgeable about teaching Indigenous education. However, Mike’s perspective revealed an interesting take on the issue. More specifically, he elaborated on what ‘culturally’ meant:

As part of our own Canadian history, I do not want to speak culturally about Indigenous people. I would never try to lead a ceremony-like lesson or try to interpret and recreate Indigenous art. Instead, I will, very openly, speak about Indigenous education socially, economically, politically.
From Mike’s point of view, there was an important distinction between teaching about Indigenous peoples from a Canadian sociopolitical cultural context and trying to teach Indigenous cultures. He believed that part of the Indigenous knowledge, spiritual traditions should not be explored by a teacher, especially a non-Indigenous teacher, who does not have the knowledge and spiritual values and beliefs to talk about them. According to Mike, “doing a dream catcher during an art lesson for Indigenous week, for instance, might not be the best way to teach and share Indigenous knowledge”. Part of the challenge to integrate Indigenous perspectives may come from educators themselves, as Mike’s story revealed. Mike shared that some teachers did not realize how inappropriate some cultural and stereotypical references can be. He explained that a few days after cultural presenters visited the school to teach a lesson, some teachers referred to having a powwow as they were simply seating in circle. What bothered Mike was the appropriation of a cultural traditional dance and ceremonial ritual by teachers who, according to him, did not realize it could be offensive and inappropriate for Indigenous people.

The pre-approved cultural presenters might represent a challenge for teachers who want to bring native Indigenous experts in the classroom as they require time and money. They also raised the questions of authentic teaching strategies and teachers’ positionality when it came to integrating Indigenous knowledge into the curriculum.

4.3.2 Reaching out to friends from Indigenous communities

While the cultural presenters available from the TDSB can be seen as roadblocks in teaching Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous people often remain the best people who can talk about their experiences and perspectives.
As Mike explained, the Aboriginal department in the TBSD has a great deal of resources and best practice to inspire teachers. If Mike relied on this resource, it was also because he knew some of the people in the department, a level of connection based on trust as he suggested. Both Paul and Mike often turned to their personal friends within Indigenous communities to find the support they were looking for. For example, Mike shared that he has an Anishinaabe friend who comes into his classroom once a year, for half of a day. Unlike the cultural presenters available from the board, Mike did not need to charge the students for his friend’s time. Although Mike admitted paying him for his time, he felt more comfortable with a friend who he knew and trusted to come and share Indigenous knowledge with the students.

Similarly, Paul was fortunate to have a friend in British Columbia, who was a First Nation bead artist and an electrician working in Fort Murray. Paul used Skype to bring his friend into the classroom so she could share personal life stories and experiences. For Paul, having a friend he could reach out to and to let students hear these personal first-hand stories and experiences, was a privilege:

> It also opens up dialogue and reflection about questions of identity and what Indigenous means in the Canadian context. For example, she would say that identity is more than being from a certain place in time or from a particular group of people.

According to Paul this type of real-life relationship with Indigenous peoples was essential in teaching Indigenous education as it gave a sense of proximity and authenticity for students to connect and relate with their own lives.

The findings discussed above reflect a dichotomy of opinion between school boards and staff members when it comes to Indigenous education. For the teachers interviewed for this study, integrating Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion classrooms included authentic
dialogue and finding support within Indigenous communities themselves, a support system based on relationships and trust. It was also about being resourceful to engage students in interactive and relevant learning experiences.

4.3.3 Teacher attitudes and teacher resourcefulness

Paul explained that to get students interested in learning more technical vocabulary in French, he would rely on cellphones, iPad or Skype; technology that they knew how to operate in their first language. His testimony reflected findings from the literature where learning a language was modelled through interaction and teachers and students are encouraged to “use French both inside the classroom and, when feasible, beyond it” (OME, 2013, p. 9). At the time of the interview, Paul’s class also had a twin classroom in Orleans (France), so that students could connect with French students overseas and share their courts métrages projects and discussion animation, all using French. Learning concrete vocabulary to talk about animation and having the possibility to share this new-learnt information with students from France, was certainly a major learning stimulus for Paul’s students.

For Mike and Paul, both Grade 6 teachers, the French Immersion program offered a certain advantage in bringing accurate and current resources in the classroom. Indeed, according to the Toronto District School Board (2010), “in the middle school years, Grades 6, 7, and 8, the Early French Immersion program is a half day program. Fifty percent (50%) of the day is in French and 50% of the day is in English” (p. 13). Mike expressed it well when he said: “I do not find it difficult to find resources because in French immersion, 50% of an instructional day comes in French and 50% comes in English. And so my ability to go back and forth is fine”.

Like Mike, many authors (Cummins, 2014; Mady, 2013; Pirbhai-Illich, 2010; Moore & Gajo, 2009) have suggested the need to bring bilingualism and multi-literacies in French as a
second language programs to foster multi-perspectives and cross-curriculum inferences in the classroom. This sentiment is echoed by Paul and his work on First Nations courts métrages (animated short films). If understanding the messages behind those stories was not particularly challenging for his students, they needed to rely on English vocabulary to understanding and share the technical concepts involved in making animated shorts. To help his students, Paul relied on brief documentaries about animation, in English, so they could first understand the concept, before showing similar documentaries in French. For Paul it was important for his students “to make liaisons between English and French words to describe and manipulate animation techniques. More than just learning new words, they had to make sense in relation to what they were doing with the First Nation animated shorts”.

Because both Paul and Mike relied on bilingualism to engage and connect students with learning French as a second language, the question about the availability of resources did not appear as central as expected in our research. If the teachers did not find direct resources in French, they would use English materials to introduce new concepts or topics of discussion. However, the three teachers interviewed seemed to have a different opinion concerning resources on Indigenous education in French Immersion classrooms.

For Mike, there was no shortage of resources anymore, if it was true in the past, he believed that “French Immersion teachers can no longer use this as an excuse”. But if the lack of resources available in French did not seem to be an issue in teaching Indigenous knowledge, two teachers mentioned finding appropriate and accurate resources challenging. Lily, explained that her challenge often came from finding language-appropriate resources for her grade 3 students. According to her, it was still “very challenging to find accurate resources, especially books in French that are grade level appropriate”. She told us that she would often rely on technology,
using the school’s iPads to find more appropriate resources about the topic, even if it was in English.

Another issue was raised by Lily and Paul, as they both mentioned money could be problematic when it came to finding the right resources. Lily shared that in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), “most of the schools have a budget for French programs”. The schools will work with several available publisher houses so that teachers can find or order a number of relevant books in French. But as she pointed out, “If there is a lot more resources out there, the schools manage the budget for that and every school will have a different approach and priority”. Since there is no general guidelines on how to manage this budget, each school can choose how to distribute the funds. Hence, as Lily stated, “It is often not clear what amount is dedicated to buying French resources, and even less about resources in French about Indigenous education. This frustration was also expressed by Paul who often had to buy his own resources to better accommodate his students’ needs. According to him, “The challenge is to find the money to actually develop a proper library where I would have a cross-section of fiction and non-fiction books that are in French and that are current and that really entice the kids into reading”.

In chapter 2 we discussed the potential lack of knowledge, time and “Aboriginal learning resources for students” as potential barriers to integrate Indigenous education in classrooms. (Kanu, 2007, p. 33), but the data from this study revealed otherwise.

Although Paul and Lily shared some challenges when it came to finding grade-level appropriate resources in teaching about Indigenous knowledge in French, all three teachers maintained that there were alternatives to these barriers. Technology and the use of English have been cited as examples so that students can learn about Indigenous communities in an engaging and authentic way. Mike also noted that “resources can actually be found anywhere, as long as
teachers are open-minded and interested”. He referred to public motions and news articles about residential schools and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report for teachers to get inspired to bring Indigenous issues on the classroom. In turn, the data from this research showed that more than a question of resources, integrating Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion classrooms also depended on the teacher’s attitude. These findings echoed with the argument that “you don’t take a class; you take a teacher” (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011, p. 132).

Although board-vetoed cultural presenters and funds may act as barriers in integrating Indigenous perspectives, the participants shared similar points of views on how to challenge those barriers. By reaching out to friends from Indigenous communities, by moving beyond French textbooks using bilingual resources and technology, data from this study stressed the importance of teachers’ personal attitudes and philosophies to find relevant ways to integrate Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion classrooms.

4.4 Conclusion

From the data analysis, it became clear that Indigenous education was more than a type of education; it was about Canada, about people and our relationships to one another, and it was about learning opportunities that allowed students “to know themselves in relationship with Aboriginal peoples” (People for Education, 2013, p. 4).

I found that there were several critical components for teaching about Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. The data from this research illustrated that an inquiry-based approach could help students become actively engaged with their learning experience and knowledge. The participants’ responses also revealed that teachers’ own positionality and philosophy will impact how they teach Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms. Furthermore, tied with the concept of decolonizing the classroom, the research participants acknowledged the
importance of opening the dialogue about Indigenous communities, as part as broader
discussions about Canada’s history, past and present. They should be embedded in current and
meaningful ways, so that students can position themselves in relation with Indigenous people and
history.

Secondly, findings emphasized the importance of Indigenous worldviews as a source of
inspiration. By learning about Indigenous communities though authentic discussions and life
stories and decoding Indigenous short films, the participants shared insightful strategies to
integrating Indigenous perspectives into French Immersion Classrooms.

Finally, I found that among the factors affecting the integration of Indigenous
perspectives in French Immersion classrooms, teacher attitudes and resourcefulness were key. If
resources were available and funded by the TDSB, data from this research suggested that
teachers should also reach out to friends and members of the Indigenous communities. Personal
interest, bilingualism, and technology have also been introduced as effective strategies to
integrate Indigenous worldviews and perspectives into French Immersion classrooms.

Ultimately, the participants stories aligned with Battiste and Henderson’s (2009) idea of
decolonization of knowledge in order “to restore, renew, and revitalize our connections to place
and peoples” (p. 9). The research participants clarified the concept of Indigenous education and
decomposed possible strategies to integrate Indigenous perspectives in relevant, engaging, and
truthful ways leading towards reconciliation.

Based on the findings and discussions explored above, the following chapter presents
possible implications for future teaching practice. Furthermore, I discuss tentative
recommendations for teaching Indigenous education in French Immersion classrooms and
suggest areas of further research.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction to the Chapter

My research focused on the integration of Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion elementary classrooms. To articulate possible strategies, the following sub-questions have guided this research: What do French Immersion teachers know and understand about Indigenous education? What strategies do they use to implement Indigenous perspectives in their work? What challenges do they face in their teaching? In this chapter, an overview of the key findings will be explored and implications of these findings will be discussed; first in relation to the educational community, and then in regard to my own professional practice. Next, I present recommendations for major stakeholders of the educational community for integrating Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion classrooms. Finally, I highlight aspects and areas of further research that I believe would be beneficial for the educational community.

5.1 Overview of the Key Findings

From the data analysis, three themes emerged:

1. Teacher’s philosophy: A critical component for teaching about Indigenous worldviews and knowledges

2. Orality and Indigenous Knowledge as a way to integrating Indigenous perspectives into French Immersion classrooms

3. Factors affecting the integration of Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion classrooms

I will review key findings from this research, reflecting on the above three main themes, sub-themes, and in connection with the literature.
One key finding was that teachers’ positionality and teaching philosophy is a critical component for teaching about Indigenous worldviews and knowledge. As suggested by the literature (Dion, Johnstone, and Rice, 2010), there is still a risk to talk about Indigenous peoples as distant cultures from the past, not grounded in modern days stories and history. However, the three participants agreed on the importance of bringing Indigenous perspectives closer to home, embedded in every day class discussion and throughout the curriculum. Their teaching philosophies resonated with the literature, for “becoming more familiar with Aboriginal worldviews helps teachers build cultural continuity into both the content and instructional approaches of all subject areas” (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 2). Reflecting on their own positionality and philosophy, the participants also discussed the need for teachers to go beyond Eurocentric stereotypes for more authentic and truthful discussions about Indigenous people. Paul, Lily, and Mike concurred with the concept of decolonizing the classroom (Battiste & Henderson, 2009) and of undertaking a decolonization process (Dion, Johnstone, & Rice, 2010; St. Denis, 2007, 2010). Data echoed with the literature suggesting that integrating Indigenous perspectives is about “exposing the injustices in colonial history and deconstructing the past by critically examining the social, political, economic, and historical reasons for silencing Aboriginal voices (past and present)” (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p. 14). This first theme is important for current and future educators who need appropriate tools and support from the Ministry of Education and from Indigenous communities to learn more about Indigenous people in Canada and the complex historical, cultural, and political relationships between Indigenous people and Canada.

Another important finding was that Indigenous worldviews and knowledge can be relevant and effective strategies to integrate Indigenous perspectives into French Immersion
classrooms. Orality is a central element of storytelling for many Indigenous communities. The pilot unit in French and First Nation cultures, tested by Paul at the time of the interview, was designed to bring accessible entry points to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) cultures for both the English and French streams. Paul’s students spent time listening and decoding several animated short filmed, in French, portraying Indigenous stories and worldviews. The three participants expressed the importance of authentic oral dialogue and discussions about Indigenous communities. This focus on orality echoed the revised French as a second language curriculum (OME, 2013) key message on authentic oral communication in learning French as a second language. Deconstructing and decoding Indigenous stories to help students better understand both past and present was revealed as an alternative strategy in integrating Indigenous perspectives into French Immersion classrooms.

One significant discrepancy was found in the factors affecting the integration of Indigenous perspectives. In the literature, I found that the term Indigenous education was somewhat unclear and confusing, defined as a type of education designed for Indigenous students, a way of teaching that reflects Indigenous values and aspirations, or a type of education that is about Indigenous worldviews and perspectives. And as I previously mentioned, I believe Indigenous education should be best understood as the latter, where Indigenous perspectives, values and knowledges are shared in everyday discussions. From the literature, lack of funds and resources have been suggested as a potential barrier to integrating Indigenous knowledge.

Relying only on textbooks to teach about Indigenous people, history or values is problematic since Canada’s history is rooted in a colonial system. When most books present the birth of Canada, as a country, with the arrival and settlement of Europeans, it omits the cultural, social and political legacy of Indigenous people prior to first contact. Findings show however
that it is possible to move beyond textbooks, using both French and English languages, everyday media, and technology as tools to support discussions about Indigenous people and worldviews in French Immersion classrooms. Participants explained that referring to English language was often useful to help students connect to the topic of discussion and to support their learning of new vocabulary in French. And although questions of funds and the age-appropriateness of French resources have been raised by two of my participants, all suggested that the lack of resource should no longer be perceived as an issue, as long as teachers were committed to teaching Indigenous knowledge, resources can be found in many places and in various forms.

Another interesting finding and discrepancy was found with the board-vetoed cultural presenters available from school boards (in this case within the TDSB). From the literature, Elders have been suggested to be positive source of knowledge. As guardian of oral traditions and culture, Indigenous community members and Elders appear valuable partners for teachers. However, none of my participants talked about Elders, rather they suggested that having a guest in the classroom was not always easy or beneficial. Both Paul and Mike introduced the notion of board-vetoed cultural presenters as potential barriers, as opposed to reaching out to friends and members from Indigenous communities as alternative resources. Cultural presenters were identified as people from First Nations, Métis and Inuit background who are approved by the board to come teach a lesson in the classroom. Questions of time constraints, cost and the authentic of knowledge shared have been raised by two of my participants, and it would be interesting to conduct further research as I suggest below.

5.2 Implications

Based on these findings, implications for the wider educational community relate to the way Indigenous education is defined and Indigenous perspectives are integrated in French
Immersion classrooms. From my personal professional perspective, the implications identify with the way I will better integrate Indigenous worldviews in future practice, within the French Immersion context.

### 5.2.1 The educational community

Firstly, because of the importance of authentic dialogue suggested by my participants, the findings of this study concurred with the French as a second language curriculum emphasis on “oral communication – listening and speaking – (is) as paramount for second-language acquisition” (OME, 2013, p. 9). Discussing relevant, engaging, and inquiry-based topics, sharing knowledge with a twin class in France or with members of Indigenous communities, and finding meaningful connections in this new learning appeared as key components for teaching about Indigenous people and knowledge. The participants revealed various ways of integrating Indigenous worldviews and perspectives in French Immersion classrooms, by focusing on authentic oral discussions and by bringing traditional Indigenous worldviews as an effective and relevant source of knowledge. Again, distancing ourselves from books and written words to bring more room for orality, and non-literate sources of knowledge, could be the way for educators to decolonize the current view of education and to create safe spaces for identity negotiations between Indigenous people and Canada.

Secondly, teachers’ positionality and personal teaching philosophy affect the way Indigenous education is apprehended within the French Immersion context. Paul, Lily, and Mike, talked about Indigenous education with passion and commitment in their voices. The findings suggested that teachers should be aware of their own past experiences, knowledge and biases regarding Indigenous communities in Canada, as it can, and will, affect their teaching practice. As an emergent concept, from both the literature and the three participants, decolonizing the
classrooms was introduced as a way for teachers to move beyond the dominant culture stereotypes. In Paul’s words “it is important for teachers to engage in Indigenous education to confront students with certain ideologies about race and culture within the Canadian context”.

These findings resonated with and challenged research literature studying the integration of Indigenous perspectives in mainstream classrooms. If many teachers still “engage in a discourse of denial, defensiveness, ignorance, and hostility (…) to avoid critical interrogation of the racial norms and beliefs from which they earn White privilege” (Solomon & Daniel, 2007, p.163), our participants appeared confident in integrating Indigenous perspectives in a critical way. The findings of this research revealed that it is important for educators to reflect on their own positionality as it impacts their teaching practice. In integrating Indigenous perspectives into French Immersion classrooms, the participants noted that teachers should critically engage their students in understanding the intricate relationships between Indigenous peoples and Canada. One way to achieve such a goal would be to bring more authentic, first-hand knowledge, perspectives and testimonies from Indigenous communities into mainstream classrooms, including French Immersion classrooms. Findings suggested a need for Indigenous communities to be better represented, heard, and more often invited in classrooms in order to create a more balanced perspective and understanding of Indigenous people in Canada.

5.2.2 Personal professional practice

My personal knowledge about Indigenous education keeps growing and evolving. As an educator, I believe it is my responsibility to continue educating myself, familiarizing myself with Indigenous communities, the land, and Canada’s history, past and present. The findings of my research reassured me that it was possible to integrate Indigenous perspectives in French Immersion classrooms. Mike’s testimony suggested an approach to Indigenous education that
encouraged teachers to become allies and advocates towards reconciliation. A process that I think requires digging into the cultural and political aspects embedded in our relationships with Indigenous people.

In terms of my own practice, I would like to further explore ways to integrate Indigenous worldviews through oral stories and audio texts in French. Both Mike and Paul introduced the concept of board-vetoed cultural presenters, people from Indigenous communities, approved by the Toronto District School Board, to come share and teach Indigenous content to students. An initiative that two of my participants described as good resource, but also as a potential roadblock due to the length of the process, the money required, and the authenticity of the stories shared. By contrast, both participants seemed to rely more on personal friends or members of the community to informally share their stories and knowledge with their students. The literature (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011, Goulet & Goulet, 2014) also stressed the importance of Elders and members of the Indigenous community to offer a holistic and inclusive perspective on Indigenous knowledge and education. Following my participants’ points of view, and to strengthen my personal development as a teacher, I would like to be able to enroot long-lasting relationships with Indigenous communities and to rely more on primary sources from Indigenous worldviews to integrate Indigenous perspectives into the French Immersion curriculum.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations from this study focus on ways to support French Immersion teachers and elementary schools’ administrators in Ontario in integrating Indigenous perspectives in the classroom. These recommendations are:

1. *Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and histories should be studied in pre-service educational teaching programs.* This first recommendation echoes back to teachers’ positionality
and knowledge about Indigenous people, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (2015) revealing that, “Too many Canadians still do not know the history of Aboriginal peoples’ contributions to Canada, or understand that by virtue of the historical and modern Treaties negotiated by our government, we are all Treaty people” (p.114). Furthermore, the literature (Kanu, 2007, Nardozi, Restoule, Broad, Steele & James, 2014, Toulouse, 2008, Hunter, 2015) revealed that the concept of Indigenous education remained confusing for many teachers. Although the three participants had strong cultural and political knowledge about Indigenous people in Canada, I believe it is important for pre-service teachers to continue learning about Indigenous peoples as part of Canadian History. The Ministry of Education of Ontario should offer and increase University programs, in both French and English streams, for future educators, and citizens, to learn more about past and present relationships between Indigenous people and Canada. At the University of Toronto, where this research project initiated, there are several courses available for students and educators. The Deepening Knowledge Project developed by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education offers a list of courses related to Indigenous issues, knowledge, and history. However, it remains important that for the Ministry of Education of Ontario to provide more visibility and accessibility to undergraduate and graduate levels courses related to Indigenous knowledge and Canada history.

2. Teachers should be encouraged to bring more authentic life stories and Indigenous worldviews in the French Immersion classrooms. Paul’s pilot unit in French and First Nation cultures, where students worked with Indigenous court métrages (animated short films) was part of a larger project, including 16 other schools in Toronto, designed to bring accessible entry points to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) cultures for both the English and French stream. This unit should be available for teachers across the Toronto District School Board and the
province of Ontario to bring more Indigenous primary sources of knowledge and worldviews into the curriculum, including French programs. The Ontario Ministry of Education, school boards, administrators and educators should encourage these types of projects to allow more French Immersion students to have access to a variety of authentic stories and texts to explore Indigenous perspectives. As narratives, Indigenous films and other media (e.g., art, songs, and audio texts) could offer an alternative way for French Immersion teachers to integrate Indigenous worldviews and perspectives throughout the curriculum. Famous artists Gord Downie and Jeff Lemire’s recent animated-short project The Secret Path (Downie, 2016) is a good illustration of how non-literate forms of communication can bring authenticity to Indigenous stories. This is the story of twelve year-old Chanie Wenjack who died in 1966 trying to escape from the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School, near Kenora, Ontario. Without dialogue but powerful song lyrics, this animated film reveals a darker side of Canada’s history, a rich resource for educators across the country.

3. Teachers interested in Indigenous education must be resourceful. Funds were addressed as a potential roadblock in accessing current, relevant and age-appropriate books and resources about Indigenous people in French. However, the participants also suggested that, when it came to Indigenous perspectives, teachers should not always wait for more books to find the appropriate resource. Indeed, as my participants Lily, Paul, and Mike explained, teachers interested in Indigenous education, willing to embrace a more critical discussion, should rather move beyond textbooks and extend their search to integrated, cross-curricular resources, including accessing information in English, the use of technology, and support from local Indigenous communities and organizations. Having been placed in four very different school environments during this two-year Master of Teaching program, I do realize that more than
anything, lack of time is often an issue for many educators. I do believe that part of being an educator is to have a passion for learning, and as such, educators have a responsibility to be open-minded, to reflect on their own knowledge and biases, and to educate themselves as time is constantly evolving.

When I started this research, finding relevant information about Indigenous education and later about Indigenous perspectives and teaching practices, was indeed time consuming and often overwhelming. I remember one of our instructors at OISE told us on the first day that as a teacher you will have to choose your battle, there is always so much to do. I chose Indigenous education as my battle and in hoping that this research can benefit other educators, I am sharing a few resources here.

➢ Toronto District School Board, Aboriginal Education Centre (n.d.). Their website offers a variety of resources and services related to Indigenous education. Resources include information about Treaties in Ontario, a library, curriculum connections, articles and news stories, and services for. Some resources are available in English and French.

➢ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). This website includes the TRC findings and final report, information about reconciliation, recent news events, and extensive resources on residential schools.

➢ The Legacy of Hope Foundation (n.d.) is a charitable organization to educate and raise awareness about the legacy of residential schools. The website includes oral stories from residential schools’ survivors and a resource section that includes an extensive reading list accessible for children.

➢ Reconciliation Canada (2012) is an Indigenous-led organization that promotes reconciliation by engaging dialogue. The website offers information about workshops,
events and stories to help build a sense of community and shared history between Canadians and Indigenous people.

- Indspire: Indigenous education, Canada’s future (2017) is an Indigenous-led charity invested in Indigenous education. Their *K-12 Institute for educators* program offers more than 1000 online resources including webinars and successful practices.

- Laurier University Faculty of Education website possesses an extensive Aboriginal Educational Resources section that includes books, video resources, games, activities and lesson plans by grade.

- The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto has developed the Deepening Knowledge Project where students and educators can find information and resources related to Indigenous education, communities, events, university courses, and the Native Learning Centre of Toronto designed for Indigenous youth.

- Woodland Cultural Centre was established in October 1972 under the direction of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians upon the closure of the Mohawk Institute Residential School. It offers tours of the museum or the residential school, and workshops to familiarize children and adults with First Nations games, music, craft, plants, and ways of living and historical contributions.

### 5.4 Areas for Further Research

Further research on how French Immersion teachers integrate Indigenous perspectives into the classrooms would be helpful for future educators. The literature did not propose a lot of research within the French Immersion context and I believe further research could centre around teaching practice in a French-speaking province such as Québec. It would be useful for current and future French Immersion educators in Ontario to observe alternative ways to integrate
Indigenous perspectives in other provinces to inspire them within the French as a second language Ontario curriculum.

In addition, from my research findings I believe it would be valuable to conduct further research on the presence of Indigenous community members and board-vetoed presenters within Ontario elementary classrooms. If board-approved cultural presenters appeared as a step forward in integrating Indigenous voices and perspectives into the classroom, my participants also thought they could be seen as a roadblock, slowing down the process. Further research in this field could record the evolution of having cultural presenters from Indigenous communities in elementary classrooms and analyze possible changes and impacts. This type of research could also observe if other partnerships have been created within Indigenous communities and professional associations.

In terms of the research design, I think it would be beneficial to allow in-class observation with the participants and students. Within the limitations of the Master of Teaching Research Project, including constraints of time and the choice of participants, my research could not collect data from direct observation of teacher-students connections and interactions during class. By contrast, further research could follow an ethnographical framework that draws on “in-depth illustration that explicates culturally situation meanings and abundant concrete details” (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Since the French as a second language curriculum (OME, 2013) emphasizes the importance of oral authentic communication, it would be interesting to observe French Immersion teachers in direct action with students, as they talk about and integrate Indigenous perspectives in everyday class settings.
5.5 Concluding Comments

The purpose of this study was to explore how French Immersion elementary teachers integrate Indigenous perspectives in their classrooms. What I found through interviewing three elementary teachers in French Immersion was that Indigenous perspectives can be integrated in various ways that are current, relevant, authentic and engaging. Teachers’ positionality, their own experiences and knowledge about Indigenous people in Canada, appeared to have an impact on how these teachers integrate Indigenous perspectives into their classrooms. My participants’ testimonies revealed a desire for a “decolonization of knowledge and people searching for change in a postcolonial civilization and being dedicated to change” (Battiste & Henderson, 2009, p. 9).

Concurring with the French as a second language curriculum’s emphasis on authentic oral communication (OME, 2013), the teachers interviewed for this research employed authentic resources, including oral stories and Indigenous short films, to integrate Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in meaningful, purposeful, and relevant way. The findings also suggested that teachers need to be resourceful in finding information outside of traditional textbooks and in building new partnerships with members of Indigenous communities.

The participants’ answers resonated with St. Denis’ (2010) vision of teachers as learners, “people who themselves listen, ask questions and listen some more. They’ll challenge themselves and challenge you as well” (p. 52). I believe this research brings new knowledge on Indigenous education and is valuable for current and future elementary French Immersion educators interested in becoming allies in integrating Indigenous perspectives and worldviews into their classrooms.
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Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date:

Dear [Name of participant]

My name is Julie Lesongeur. I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. I am interested in exploring how French Immersion elementary teachers approach Indigenous education and pedagogy in their classroom. I am interested in interviewing exemplary educators who are implementing creative strategies in teaching Indigenous education in French Immersion. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 40-60 minute interview, which will be audio-recorded and transcribed. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. 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 research coordinator Angela Mcdonald.

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, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

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

Sincerely,

Researcher name: Julie Lesongeur
Email: julie.lesongeur@mail.utoronto.ca

Research Coordinator’s Name: Angela Macdonald
Contact Info: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

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

I have read the letter of consent provided to me by Julie Lesongeur and I agree to participate in an interview.

Signature: _____________________________
Name: ________________________________
Date: _________________________________
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today.

This research study aims to learn about the strategies French Immersion elementary teachers are using to Indigenous perspectives into their classroom. This interview will last approximately 40-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your teaching practice in French Immersion, your understanding of Indigenous education, your perspective on integrating Indigenous knowledge, and your reflection on culturally relevant pedagogy in your own teaching practice.

I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Stage 1: Background information**

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What grade are you teaching this year?
3. How many students do you have?
4. Can you tell me a bit more about your students, their background?

**Stage 2: French Immersion**

5. What is your experience as a French Immersion teacher?
6. What part of the curriculum do you find the most challenging?
7. Could you give me an example of this?

**Stage 3: Aboriginal education**

8. Can you tell me about teaching about Indigenous education in your classroom?
9. What would a day in your class look like?
10. When did you start exploring First Nations history in your classroom?
11. What do you perceive to be the benefits of teaching Indigenous education in your classroom?
12. What are the challenges of teaching Indigenous education in a French Immersion classroom?
13. What resources are you using to teach Indigenous education in your classroom?
14. What kind of resources would you like to see?
Stage 4: Culturally relevant pedagogy

15. How do you bring your students’ personal experiences, culture, and identity in your classroom?
16. Could you give me an example of this?
17. How is knowing your students; their cultural background, language, and interests helpful in your teaching?
18. The term culturally relevant pedagogy has been defined as “a humanizing pedagogy that respects and uses the reality, history, and perspectives of students as an integral part of educational practice” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.173). Are you familiar with this approach?
19. What connections do you see between French Immersion, Indigenous education, and culturally relevant pedagogy?
20. Is there anything else you want to add that we didn’t discuss?

Thank you for your participation in this research.