Experiences of South Asian Teachers Teaching South Asian Students in Greater Toronto Area Schools in 2016

By

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Abstract

Since the population of ethnic minority students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is increasing, new and ongoing research is required to meet the needs of these students. In response to the changing demographics, this research project investigated the experiences of South Asian teachers (SATs) working with South Asian students (SASs) in GTA classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three South Asian school teachers from the GTA about their efforts to create an inclusive classroom for culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students. These teachers used their own or their family’s experiences to create a supportive learning environment, which in turn reportedly allowed students to share and affirm their identities. The SATs reported that this strategy improved the literacy achievements and oral presentation skills of their students, including South Asian students. This study and related literature suggest that there may be a connection between students’ academic success and having a teacher who speaks their language of origin. Other study findings suggest that SATs’ relationships with South Asian parents can be both positive and negative. A significant finding in this study is that the SATs reported using their heritage languages and culturally relevant materials in their teaching. The study offers both immediate and long term recommendations for South Asian parents, settlement workers, resource teachers, school administrators, policy makers, and school boards.

Key words: South Asian teachers, South Asian students, heritage language, inclusive classroom, ethnic minority teachers
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Research Context and Problem

Of the total population of Canada, 19.1% belong to a visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2011). In 2011, the three largest visible minority groups were South Asian, Chinese and Black (people of African descent). Together these account for 61.3% of the visible minority population. This was followed by Filipinos, Latin Americans, Arabs, Southeast Asians, West Asians, Koreans and Japanese people. Based on the 2011 National Household Survey, seven out of ten people from visible minority ethnic immigrant populations lived in the three largest metropolitan areas in Canada: Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver. The Greater Toronto Area (GTA) has attracted millions of visible minorities as immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2008). "By 2031, immigrants are expected to account for 26%, and visible minorities 31% of Canada's population" (Government of Canada, 2017, p. 1). Hence, the student population in the GTA classes is extremely diverse and multicultural and becoming more so.

Toronto’s schools reflect this incredible diversity, and prominent racialized groups include: White (29%), South Asian (24%), East Asian (15%), and Black (12%) (Yau, Archer, & Rosolen, 2013). Further, Yau et al (2013) states that students in the GTA also identify as: “Mixed, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, Latin American, and Aboriginal” (p. 1). In conjunction with the increasing number of ethnic minority students, the recent curriculum policy documents encourage teachers to perceive student diversity and incorporate a variety of multicultural teaching materials into their classes based on the particular cultures represented (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).
The Ontario Human Rights Commission (2017) has warned that there may be both conscious and unconscious discrimination by some teachers, principals, and educators who may hold assumptions and stereotypes, whether consciously or unconsciously, about students of colour. Even though this might be unconscious, it may still lead to discrimination against racial minority students. For example, it has been found that Tamil, Aboriginal, and Latino students are disciplined more harshly than other students in the GTA and other parts of Ontario (Safe Schools Act, 2001). As a result, a critical and democratic teacher education is extremely important in Southern Ontario, as many new Canadian immigrants choose to move to this part of Canada. As mentioned above, immigration has resulted in a student population that is more and more diverse in all areas (Barrett, Solomon, Singer, Portelli, & Mujuwamariya, 2009). It is imperative that curriculum is developed to meet the needs of this increasingly diversified student population, and to address stereotyping and other forms of marginalization (Schroeter & James, 2015). Because of the increasing population of ethnic minority students in the Greater Toronto Area, new and ongoing research to ensure that the needs of these groups are being met with professional best practices is also required.

Pivotaly, there may be a relationship between the ethnicity of the teacher and the success of the student. Culturally relevant pedagogy scholar Villegas (2002) suggests that:

There may be difficult situations in building the cultural bridges between home and school for the students if there is a sharp difference in biographies of the teacher and their students; as the teachers [who] know little about students’ experiences may find [it difficult] to select materials, draw suitable examples from the students’ daily lives, manage classroom[s], apply evaluation strategies and provide opportunities that are familiar to the students. (p. 18)
In many schools, dominant, middle-class, and monolingual English-speaking teachers struggle to comprehend and relate to the experiences of students of colour (Villegas, 2002, p. 18). These teachers may have difficulty choosing culturally relevant materials and examples that connect to students’ daily lives. Further, they may struggle to match students’ cultural styles, and provide assessment options that meet the needs of the students. There is a clear mismatch in the current education system in Canada in terms of race/ethnicity and student success (Faez, 2012). This mismatch is creating a need to diversify the teaching force and practice equitable hiring in the teaching profession. The challenges of moving from theory (recognizing and celebrating student diversity) to practice (implementing policies and practices) to meet the needs of students and their families are complex (Chan & Ross, 2009). If this gap increases, the success of ethnic minority students may be put at risk due to their teachers’ lack of connection to the students’ cultural backgrounds.

Farkas (2003), as quoted by Riley and Ungerleider, argues that teachers who do not share a student’s background may have culturally inappropriate expectations or perceptions of that student. This misunderstanding may hurt the chances of success for SASs compared to majority students. Farka’s study “examines racial discrepancies in education, particularly those that may be attributable to discrimination” (as quoted in Riley & Ungerleider, 2008, p. 379). Farkas found that, teachers who do not share their students’ background have been found to base their expectations on many different aspects: “prior or current academic performance; comments made by former teachers; standardized test scores; and information irrelevant to the student's performance such as the ascription of stereotypically based characteristics of race, ethnicity, sex, or physical appearance” (Riley & Ungerleider, 2008, p. 380). James (2012) observes that the reason might be some educators tend to disregard or
hesitate to recognize students’ educational experiences based on race and racism as deciding factors because of “the colour-blind discourse of Canada’s multiculturalism” (p. 466).

Teacher candidates who are people of colour have been found to “bring richer experiences and perspectives to multicultural teaching than most dominant culture teachers” (Sleeter, 2001, p. 94). Generally, teachers tend to have preconceived notions about students who are not from the same background as they are; there might be a distinct difference when teachers teach students from the same background.

However, there is little Canadian – let alone Ontarian or Torontonian – research on the experiences of minority teachers who are teaching students who share their ethnic background. The present study focus on the lived experiences of South Asian teachers (SATs) teaching South Asian students (SASs).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Given the increasing number of diverse immigrants and ethnic minority students in Toronto, the goal of my research is to study the experiences of South Asian teachers working with students from a similar background in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). To explore this topic, I interviewed three GTA South Asian school teachers about their efforts to support ethnic minority students who shared their background. I am interested in their accounts of efforts to create an inclusive classroom for all linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students; their understandings or perceptions of the needs of ethnic minority students who share their background, and how/whether they meet those needs; and their relationships with their students, their students’ families, and community members who share their background. My goal is not to seek explanations or make predictions about teachers’ perceptions of SASs, but to arrive at a deeper understanding of the issues from the perspective of a small sample of
teachers. I aim to share these findings with the education research community in order to further inform instructional support for SASs.

1.2 Research Questions

The central research question guiding this study was: what are the experiences of SATs working with SASs in Greater Toronto Area school classrooms in 2016?

My research sub questions are as follows:

• How are SATs working to support ethnic minority students of their same background?

• How are SATs trying to create an inclusive classroom for all linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students?

• How do SATs understand or perceive the needs of ethnic minority students of their same background and how/whether they meet those needs?

• How do SATs build relationships with (support) the families and community members who share their background?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

I am an Indian Hindu immigrant to Canada living in Mississauga. This research topic, experiences of ethnic minority teachers teaching SASs, is particularly interesting to me because during my teaching practicum class some ethnic minority students were very comfortable working with me. They, for example, came to me during lunch and spoke with me in our mother tongue. Both of my practicum school associate teachers were members of the dominant culture and bilingual in English and French, but almost 90% of their classrooms were made up of students of colour who spoke different home languages. This raised many questions for me: how do teachers perceive students of different backgrounds than their own? How do they modify their instructional strategies so that their lessons are better suited to
students’ backgrounds? How do teachers address the cultural differences between themselves and their students? I also began to wonder about the experiences of other ethnic minority teachers teaching students of the same ethnic background. During my second practicum, a few students introduced themselves to me as Indians in the community circle. My associate teacher later told me that they must have felt some sort of connection since their background matched my own. She told me that she had never observed them introducing themselves as Indians to anyone before. During break time, a few students came to me to share their personal interests and hobbies, their state in India, and their mother tongue.

I have had similar experiences as a parent. I was invited to give an identity speech during Asian heritage month at my daughter’s elementary school. The occasion engaged students in sharing, making connections to their own culture, and taking pride in their own heritage. Although this school in Peel Region is made up of 27.6% of visible minority students, I observed that a vast majority of teachers in the school were from the dominant culture, an observation which is confirmed by research on this topic. As I myself have transitioned into a teacher education program this sparked my interest. I wanted to explore the experiences of SATs teaching SASs. Overall, I have developed a strong interest in learning how SATs support ethnic minority students. As a teaching professional, my goal is to help learners reach their potential in a nurturing learning environment, to contribute to a socially just society, and to achieve teaching excellence.

1.4 Overview

To respond to the research questions, I conducted a qualitative research study, using purposive sampling, that involved interviewing three Toronto elementary or middle school teachers from different minority ethnic backgrounds about their experiences with teaching
students of the same minority ethnic background. In Chapter Two I review the literature in the areas of how perceptions of teachers teaching students with the same background differ from those of teachers teaching students of different backgrounds. Next, in Chapter Three I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter Four I report my research findings and discuss their significance in light of the existing research literature, and in Chapter Five I discuss the implications of the research findings for my own teacher identity and practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also articulate a series of questions raised by the research findings, and point to areas for future research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature pertaining to the perceptions and experiences of ethnic minority teachers working with ethnic minority students. More specifically, I review the literature related to teachers teaching students who have the same ethnic minority background as themselves. First, I review the literature about diversity in classrooms, teacher practices, accommodations, and modifications. For example, this literature review includes Individual Education Plan (IEP), classroom community-building strategies, and grouping/classroom management. Second, I review findings on the effects of the above strategies on minority student achievement. Third, I review literature on how teachers of the same background understand and perceive the needs of ethnic minority students, and whether there is a lack of cultural representation between dominant culture teachers and minority students. Fourth, I review literature on the challenges that pre-service and in-service teachers and special education teachers encounter in multicultural classrooms. Finally, I provide an overview of the scope and limitations of the studies reviewed. It is noteworthy that there are few studies in the Canadian context on this topic, but there are many studies from the United States and Europe (particularly in Germany). Therefore, I reviewed literature from these countries as it can be related to the Canadian context.

2.1 Teachers Teaching Students of their Own Ethnic Minority Background

As presented in Chapter 1, GTA schools are multicultural in character. This diversity has been described as a strength and a benefit to the Canadian society; GTA schools have been described as “like a mini-United Nations with more than [twenty, thirty, sometimes fifty] languages spoken” (Dippo, Basu, & Duran, 2013, p. 46). Compared to many regions in Britain,
the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and China, the GTA is more diverse (Dippo, Basu, & Duran, 2013), and this is reflected in GTA schools. The gap between the teacher’s background and students’ backgrounds is increasing. Furthermore, Bernhard (2010) notes that immigration patterns have changed in ways that may produce a more challenging student population for Canadian teachers. Bernhard further explains that earlier immigrants were from European countries and thus it was easy for teachers to find cultural matches between themselves and their immigrant students, but now newcomers tend to be from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Bernhard mentions that this new immigration pattern may have created a large cultural gap between teachers and students. As a result, teachers often face the difficulty of finding methods that recognize and facilitate the educational needs of students from such diverse cultural backgrounds (Baskerville, 2009). In Canadian multiracial schools, Solomon (1997) posits that there is a relationship between classrooms being populated by many students of colour and some teachers’ preconceived notions. Because of some teachers’ preconceived notions, Solomon notes that many students of colour miss the opportunity of having a high quality of academic and personal success in school. Solomon (1997) also notes that there are disproportionately few minorities in the teaching profession.

As Canada is becoming more and more ethnically diverse, a discussion of cultural representation in the classroom is necessary. Ladson-Billings (1995, 2001) found that teachers who develop cultural competency are more successful with diverse students, and in facilitating their students’ academic and social success. Teachers who are also visible minorities may enhance the education of diverse students by bringing their personal experiences with diversity-related issues within a multicultural context and related cultural competencies to their teaching (Solomon, 1997; Zirkel, 2002). When teachers of the same background as their students have
personal experiences with immigration or have heard the stories of others, they bring that experience to their diverse classrooms. Fifty percent of Toronto residents were born outside of Canada and children of Latino, African, and Portuguese backgrounds tend to have less success in academics (Bernhard, 2010). The benefits of teachers of the same background are: “Teachers who are themselves immigrants from the same communities of the children and families they serve may be well positioned to bridge the cultural and linguistic worlds of home and school” (Adair, Tobin, & Arzubiaga, 2012, p. 2). However, there seems to be comparatively less racial diversity in teacher education: “Unfortunately, the Canadian educator workforce displays considerably less racial diversity than the current Canadian and student populations” (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009, p. 609). Atkins, Fertig, and Vicky (2014) interviewed fifteen high school teachers of both White and ethnic minority background to study teachers’ influence on students’ success and their feeling of connection to the school. The White teachers from Atkins et al.’s study noted that same race ethnic minority students build stronger connections and felt more comfortable with same-race ethnic minority teachers. The perceived reason behind this was shared background (culture, experience, and language). Atkins et al., (2014) carried out a quantitative analysis; secondary data were collected from a survey (done by National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health) of 9,922 middle and high school students from Grade 7 to 12. Of the 129 schools studied, 23% of teachers were African American and 21% were Latino/a. The quantitative study found that minority students see minority teachers as role models and feel like they are more included in the school. However, both the qualitative and the quantitative studies done by Atkins et al. struggled to identify the causal mechanisms underlying these findings.
Having teachers of colour does not assure that the journey in North American schools will be smooth sailing for immigrant students and students of colour. However, the main idea proposed by Ladson-Billings (2005) and others is that diversity in the teaching force can empower immigrant students to better integrate into a diverse and democratic society. Registration of minority students in urban schools has also increased in the United States (Kewal Ramani, Gilberston, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). In a relational demography study, it was found that 67.8% (Descriptive statistics = 32.56) of teachers of colour were in racial coincidence with students of colour compared to 55.9% (Descriptive Statistics = 29.47) dominant culture teachers sample with dominant culture students (Fairchild, Tobias, Corcoran, Djukic, Kovner, & Noguera, 2012). When the racial coincidence from Fairchild’s study is 70% or more of the student population, teacher teaching same-race students correlated positively with job satisfaction. However, Fairchild et al. (2012) conclude that demography is a blunt factor for matching racial congruency among teachers and students.

In this section, literature was reviewed relevant to teachers teaching students of their own ethnic minority background. In the following subsection, literature relevant to teacher practices is reviewed.

2.1.1 Teacher practices

The school system in Canada may need to change to accommodate diverse student populations. Solomon (1997) argues that education for minority students who are Indigenous or of African descent has been historically under par; hence a new, suitable learning environment needs to be implemented. Much research has been carried out on teachers teaching students from the same background. Culturally competent teachers make use of students’ cultural backgrounds in their classrooms (Ladson-Billing, 1995). It is well documented in the literature (Clewell,
Puma & McKay, 2005; Dee, 2004; Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, & Shuan, 1990; Hanushek, 1992; Evans, 1992; Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, & Brewer, 1995; Pitts, 2007; Hess & Leal, 1997; Klopfenstein, 2005) “that students of colour accrue academic benefits when taught by a same-race teacher or when exposed to a teaching force that is racially/ethnically representative of the student population” (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 180). In addition to academic benefits, Villegas and Irvine (2010) argue that teachers of colour teach students of same background with an in-depth understanding because of the similarities in cultural background. Teachers who were educated abroad possess knowledge of the educational system in other countries which is additional to the culturally relevant materials in their teaching. In the next subsection, literature about how ethnic minority teachers provide accommodations and modifications for their same background students is reviewed.

2.2 Accommodations and Modifications

In this subsection, literature about accommodations and modifications for ethnic minority students is discussed. Not all immigrants, newcomers, and refugees are English Language Learners (ELLs). Aud et al. (2013) note that, nationally 10% of the total enrollment in public schools comprises ELL students. Because of increasing diversity, “educators’ [need] to be well prepared to serve in increasingly multicultural, multilingual schools is even more imperative” (Chu & Garcia, 2014, p. 218). Faez (2012) states that non-native English speaking teachers (NNESTs), also referred to as Internationally educated teachers (IETs), may teach all subjects other than English. However, others (Dei, 1995; Solomon, 1997) insist that ethnically diverse teachers practice more culturally relevant teaching. Further, Faez (2012) notes that NNESTs are empathic and understanding towards ELLs because of their personal experiences as language learners.
Chu and Garcia (2014) studied three urban school districts in the southwestern United States; about 344 participants responded and completed the online survey. The results from the survey mention that teacher preparation for diverse students depends on variable factors such as “teachers’ language characteristics, instructional setting, certification in bilingual education/English as a second language, and perceived quality of professional preparation” (Chu & Garcia, 2014, p. 218). However, Chu and Garcia (2014) insist that research needs to be done in the area of teachers speaking an additional language and whether that added strength helped ELL students’ second language learning. One of the dominant culture male teachers in Atkins et al.’s (2014) study reported that, however hard he tries to build relationship with African American and Latino/a students, they do not believe that he can understand them and did not trust him. Later, the same teacher wrote an article about struggle of Latino/a students in a local paper. After this student felt more connected with him and came to him for advice about different issues.

Limited research has been conducted on culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) special educators from ethnic minority background working with culturally diverse students (Kea, Trent, & Davis, 2002; Paneque & Barbetta, 2006). The following are observations about special educators serving ELL and immigrant students: the few studies show that the participants’ instructional success depends on the subject and the presence of CLD students in the classroom (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008); and teacher performance research has studied pre-service teachers’ willingness to help students compared to that of in-service teachers (Chu & Garcia, 2014). Further, Chu and Garcia (2014) insist that research needs to be done about in-service teachers who are special education teachers helping students with
special needs. The next subsection looks at literature on classroom community-building strategies used by ethnic minority teachers.

2.3 Classroom Community-Building Strategies

Some newcomer students come to school having experienced different complex traumas in their home country. Some newcomer students come due to forced migration and other difficult situations that teachers need to understand and respond to with additional support from community and settlement organizations (Dippo et al., 2013). The increasing number of immigrants to Canada has resulted in a proportionally greater number of students of colour than teachers of colour (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). Some immigrant teachers sometimes presume the experiences of refugees and forced migrants which may result in lack of empathy, and sometimes refugee students are traumatized when asked by a teacher about their life back home (Dippo et al., 2013).

Teachers need to adapt to this current challenge to address the varying needs of diverse students. Teachers of the dominant culture have been reported to have “negative perceptions and expectations of minority-racial group students and often give preferential treatment to students from their own culture” (Cornbleth & Korth, 1980; Rubovits & Maehr, 1973, quoted in Solomon, 1997, p. 396). Solomon (1997) conducted a two-year case study with 20 teacher candidates (TCs) of colour who were enrolled in a B.Ed. program in the GTA. Solomon’s (1997) study found that the teachers of colour represented themselves as role models for students of colour and provided culturally relevant teaching, which in turn has dispelled the barriers that usually exist between dominant group teachers and ethnic minority students. Additionally, these teachers can help to improve communication between the school and minority communities (Driessen, 2015). In general, all the teachers in the school make a
connection for students and increase students’ expectations for the future (Atkins et al., 2014). Irrespective of race (and also gender), however, students have found that all teachers can serve as role models for students and assist in students’ educational choices and finally serve as home-to-school liaisons (Atkins, et al., 2014).

### 2.3.1 Student grouping

Different ways of student grouping will yield different results. In this sub-section literature on ethnic minority teachers’ grouping of students is reviewed. Farkas (2003) points out that grouping of students is not done in an equitable manner for ethnic minority and low-income students. Farkas (2003) states that these students were put in lower ability groups, and are reported with a lower grade, which has the potential risk of reducing their opportunities to excel in school. Immigrant students may be at risk for academic failure due to minimal attention towards their social structures and anticipated groupings (Bernhard, 2010). Dee (2004) conducted the first experimental analysis of the relationship between teacher race/ethnicity and student achievement in Grades K-3. Dee’s four-year large scale study called Tennessee’s Project STAR analyzed test score data for students of colour and dominant culture students to determine the relationship between class size and student achievement. Dee (2004) found that assignment to an same-race/ethnicity teacher was correlated with math and reading achievement of both Black and White students. Studies (Adair, 1984; Graham, 1987; Hess & Leal, 1997; Stewart, Meier, & England, 1989) have shown that ethnic minority teachers may influence ethnic minority students and act as role models. The math and reading test scores from 2001-2002 through 2008-2009 of Florida public school students from Grade three through ten with teachers of the same background and of different background, have undergone analysis (Egalite, Kisida, & Winters, 2015). The study found a significant positive
effect when teachers worked with same-race students, and prior low performance of Black and White students improved with a same-race teacher. A 10-year theory-based study done for immigrant parents resulted in immigrant parents being able to provide support for their child’s education in a new country (Bernhard, 2010).

In the United States, policies have been enacted to recruit African American, Hispanic-American, Asian-American, and Native American minority students into teacher education programs by offering scholarships of up to $4000 (Florida Fund for Minority Teachers, Inc., 2014) with the aim of improving the overall performance of ethnic minority students (Egalite et al., 2015). However, only scant research was found with respect to racial/ethnic identity in secondary school. Major studies so far have focused on early grades. Most of the research done so far has been done in the United States (Egalite et al., 2015). More research should be done to find out if the same effects occur outside of the United States.

2.4 Heritage Language Use

Language plays an important role in school. In large school boards, such as the Toronto District School Board, almost half or 46% of the student population have a language other than English as their mother tongue or primary home language (out of which 34% Non-English languages only and 22% English and another language) (Yau, et al, 2013). Students’ immigration and language backgrounds may affect teacher’s evaluation. Ethnic and language background of students influence teacher expectations, evaluations, and predictions of students’ performance (Hachfeld, Anders, Schroeder, Stanat, & Kunter, 2010). Studies on immigrant students have shown that their lower educational outcomes are closely related to their lower reading skills (Baumert & Schumer, 2001; Lehmann et al., 1997). Accurate
evaluations are crucial for instructional planning, and inaccurate evaluations may lead to inappropriate teaching materials to support ELL students. The performance difference between native speakers and ELL students is especially pronounced on linguistically complex items (Abedi, Lord, & Plummer, 1997). ELL students may need specific instructions and to be evaluated based on their individual needs.

2.4.1 Additional benefits of same-background teacher

Research proves that other than classroom teaching and besides academic benefit, teachers teaching students of the same background has lots of benefits for building the community. Atkins et al. (2014) found that the presence of African American and Latino/a teachers improved some students’ expectations for the future and their connection to school. McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) examined the Add Health data (The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health – done for grade 7 – 12 students) to isolate effects on minority students of being taught by minority teachers. McNeely et al. found that “positive classroom management climates, participation in extracurricular activities, tolerant disciplinary policies, small school size” were crucial for school connectedness for ethnic minority teachers taught by same race teacher (p. 138). Atkins et al.’s (2014) qualitative and quantitative study findings show that minority teachers present themselves as role models for same background students. A study done in Georgia (school-level data analysis) found that the presence of African American teachers can improve reproductive health of female minority students (Atkins & Wilkins, 2013). However, there is little evidence of the mechanism behind this finding (Atkins et al., 2014). Teachers teaching students of the same background may benefit students’ communities as well.
There are several studies suggesting that attachment to teachers is a key determinant of school completion (Barclay & Doll 2001; Bond, Butler, Thomas, Carlin, Glover, Bowes, & Patton, 2007; Marcus & Sanders-Reio 2001). This connection has been tested by Atkins et al.’s (2014) study (data used from National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health) that accounted for different variables that affected minority students’ connection to school.

Relatively few studies have attempted to identify a relationship between exposure to own-race teachers and subsequent achievement by students of colour. A number of theories exist to explain the mechanism by which assignment to an own-race/ethnicity teacher might influence this (Egalite et al., 2015). In the next section, literature on the effects on teachers on parent or community relationships is reviewed.

2.5 Effects on Teacher, Parent and/or Community Relationships

In this section, literature on the effects on teacher, parent and/or community relationships is reviewed. Dominant group teachers may be unaware of cultural differences of visible minority students and their families (Bernhard, 2010). The challenges faced by newcomers to Canada have been the focus of a number of studies (Bernhard, Landolt, & Goldring, 2009; George & Michalski, 1996; Goldring, Berinstein, & Bernhard, 2009; Lo, Preston, Wang, Reil, Harvey, & Siu, 2000). In the North American educational system, there can be a disadvantage and disengagement of Latino or African-descent children because parents can find it difficult to support their children in the new country (Bernhard, 2010). Studies (Bernhard, 2004; Bernhard & Freire, 1996) suggest that there may be a preconception that immigrant children are "disruptive" by dominant group teachers.

Bernhard (2010) studied various institutional obstacles, complex procedures and teacher ignorance about dominant Western cultural norms among immigrant parents.
Communications from school to parents including report cards can be incomprehensible if no translations are provided and the parents may assume academic failure when they see "your child is enrolled in a special need program" (p. 321). When parents and students recognize themselves in school and as a result develop more affinity with education there is more parental participation (Driessen, 2015). Community building in a classroom is highly crucial for student success in the classroom. In the next subsection limitations of the reviewed research is discussed.

2.6 Limitations of the Reviewed Research

Taken together, the reviewed studies show that minority teachers can have a positive influence on students or families who share their ethnicity, but none have addressed whether this mechanism is active or passive, or how it may relate to teacher intention. Further qualitative research should explore the mechanisms by which these effects occur. Although some scholars have studied same race/ethnicity teachers and students, this has been only in mainstream or general education settings; there is little research on new teachers and special education teachers. In addition, most of these studies relate to the elementary level, and there is minimal research on same-race/ethnicity middle and high school students and teachers. Finally, it is not clear that any positive effect of minority teachers will reduce systemic racial discrimination in education; and this is an important area of ongoing and future research.

Teachers of the same race/ethnicity could potentially reduce racialized achievement and other gaps as they serve as quality role models and can set high expectations for students’ performance based on a deep knowledge of students’ cultures. It is important to address the issue of ethnic minority teacher representation in Toronto due to the growing number of ethnic minority students.
2.7 Conclusion

The main barrier that I faced in conducting the foregoing literature review was the paucity of literature on the Canadian context. Thus, my research study aims to address this gap in the literature and contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this field. In this chapter, I reviewed research on minority teachers teaching minority students and the common challenges faced by these teachers in the classroom. This literature reviews concludes noting the diversity in North American classroom, particularly in Toronto, and how the teacher educators and educational institutions can prepare teacher candidates to work in linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse classrooms. This review explored the extent to which there are both educational and non-educational effects of the presence of ethnic minority teachers in diverse classrooms. It also raised the issue of the limited study of in-service minority special education teachers in culturally diverse classrooms and points to the need for further research in this area. Lastly, the review clarified the extent to which same-race teacher serve as role models for minority students. In light of this, the purpose of my research is to study the experiences of SATs teaching SASs in the GTA.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology used to study the perceptions and experiences of SATs working with SASs and to find answers to the question: how are SATs working to support SASs of their same background? I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures, and data collection instruments before elaborating more specifically on participant sampling and recruitment. I describe data analysis procedures and review the ethical considerations relevant to my study. I also identify a range of methodological limitations, and speak to the strengths of the methodology. I conclude the chapter with a brief summary of key methodological decisions. My rationales for these decisions are provided throughout.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

Qualitative research explores individuals’ lived experiences. For example: a researcher interviews participants and then analyses themes. Maykut and Morehouse (1996) describe qualitative research saying, “[Qualitative research is] understanding a situation as it is constructed by the participants, and attempts to capture what people say and do, that is, the products of how people interpret the world” (p. X). My task as a qualitative researcher is, in Maykut and Morehouse’s (1996) words, to “capture this process of interpretation that is not sweeping generalizations but contextual findings” (p. X). In contrast, quantitative research focuses on numbers and statistics. Minichiello and Kottler describe the contrast between quantitative and qualitative research: [Quantitative research] relies on measuring outcomes through statistical analysis, qualitative methods are defined by a notation system comprising words, images, and languages. Rather than assigning numerical values to data that are collected, qualitative researchers examine transcripts of conversations, transformed into more accessible
and usable forms (p.18). This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with three SATs.

Qualitative studies seek to gather participants’ lived experiences and their reactions to certain circumstances, to grasp certain situations. I studied a small sample, maintained the originality of the analysis, analyzed surprising experiences and impacts, generated new theory based on the events interpreted, and I advanced explanations (Maxwell, 1996). All three participants were Greater Toronto Area SATs. These teachers’ experiences were documented and collected as data. A qualitative research approach allowed for studying their lived experiences. Additionally, within the small sample, I can and did maintain the authenticity of the research subjects’ analyses and understanding of their situations. In my own analysis of their stories, I was able to document and explore any interesting experiences; generate new themes; and find answers for my research questions based on their responses. I remained as subjective as possible by recognizing my own social position; this helped me to effectively construct questions that could further the interview process by going deeper into the experiences of the research subjects. This research project is qualitative in nature, involving semi-structured interviews with teachers, data collection, and data analysis; and taking account of all ethical and methodological limitations.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

Participants’ extensive knowledge about their experiences is the main focus of qualitative interviews (DeMarrais & Lappan, 2004). The instrument for data collection used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured format allows the interviewer to design and plan an interview relevant to their research focus and questions while leaving room for participants to elaborate and even re-direct attention to areas previously unforeseen by the
I included probes in my semi-structured interview. Probes are described by Thyer (2001) as “simply follow-up questions that help the interviewer to go deeper into the interviewee's responses” (p. 314). As my research study was the study of the experiences of SATs, I collected data using a qualitative interview approach. The qualitative interview method meant that based on the responses of the participants, I could better frame my questions.

The main goal of my qualitative interview was to learn about the experiences of the participants from their answers. To achieve this goal, during the interview I framed my semi-structured interview questions in an open-ended way, which helped the participants to give a detailed answer on my research topic by connecting their experiences to the research questions (DeMarrais & Lappan, 2004). I conducted individual face-to-face interviews, and worked to create a rapport in order to put the interviewee at ease. I used neutral wording in the interview questions and I was flexible and responsive. To be flexible, I used the semi-structured interview guide as a base and generated questions based on the participants’ answers (DeMarrais & Lappan, 2004). During the interview process, I focused on the participants’ answers and intentionally spoke very little. (DeMarrais & Lappan, 2004). I organized my interview protocol (located in Appendix B) into 4 sections, beginning with the participant’s background information and school context; followed by questions about their experiences working with SASs and parents; and concluding with questions about supports, challenges, and next steps for teachers. Examples of questions include:

- How does your South Asian identity as an ethnic minority teacher affect your professional identity?
- How do SASs parents approach you as an ethnic minority teacher?
• Do you observe any difference in group works among the SASs and as a whole class (working with same ethnicity or different minority)?

3.3 Participants

In this section, I review the sampling criteria and sampling procedures that I established for participant recruitment. I have also included a section wherein I introduce each of the participants. Three participants were recruited for this study.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria were applied to teacher participants:

1. Participants are teachers who are working in Greater Toronto Area schools with a minimum of five years of teaching experience.

2. Participants identify as members of the same ethnic minority as a significant proportion of their students (to be determined by participant at the time of volunteering).

3. Participants speak at least one language other than English or French.

The reader will notice that my sampling criteria do not specifically reference South Asian identity. However, because all teachers who I recruited happened to be South Asian, and because I am a South Asian teacher myself, I modified my study topic to focus on the experiences of these teachers given that this is an under-studied area. All participants were employed within GTA to maintain a geographic focus.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures/recruitment

Maykut and Morehouse (1996) suggest the following when building a qualitative research sample: “[q]ualitative researchers, set out to build a sample that includes people selected with a different goal in mind: gaining deep understanding of some phenomenon experienced by a carefully selected group of people” (p. 64). I used a technique called Snowball sampling to find
my third participant: I located my third participant for my study through my second participant (Maykut & Morehouse, 1996). Padgett describes purposive sampling as “a deliberate process of selecting respondents based on their ability to provide the needed data” (Padgett, 2012, p. 73). In contrast, “convenience sampling is based only on participant’s availability, hence snowball sampling is very easy to refer to reach new participants through the first participant” (Padgett, 2012, p. 76). Due to the methodological parameters of my research study, the sampling strategy I employed was a combination of both convenience and purposive sampling. I recruited the first participant using purposive sampling. I found the second participant through convenience sampling and the third one using the second participant for snowball sampling.

To recruit participants, I attended professional development conferences hosted by school boards, professional associations, teacher education program conferences, and subject-area specialization workshops. I provided potential research participants with an overview of my research study. I provided participants with my criteria and requested these individuals to distribute my information to teachers they believe may fulfill them. I provided my contact information rather than ask these individuals to provide me with the names and contact information of people they think would be suitable. This helped ensure that teachers were volunteering to participate rather than feeling pressure to participate.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

In this section I briefly describe my participants. I provide short biographies of each participant. All three of my participants have a South Asian background. Further, all three participants have experience teaching South Asian students. I met one participant while attending a conference hosted by the Ontario Association for Mathematics Education (OAME). I met
another participant through a school I volunteer at. The third participant was recruited through snowball sampling.

The first participant, “**Thomas,**” is a high school teacher who teaches Grade 11 and Grade 12 Math in a GTA school. Previously, Thomas worked for 15 years in the field of business. He has 10 years of teaching experience, which he refers to as his second life. Thomas has basic fluency in Hindi. All his teaching experience occurred at the same public high school. Thomas, as a teacher of Indian origin, believes that building relationships with students who are of Asian origin is easy compared to building relationships with non-Asian students. He believes that students of Asian origin are often more comfortable with him, however, over time he was able to connect with all his students.

The second participant, “**Anchita,**” is a Grade 2 teacher in a GTA school. Anchita was an immigrant from India who had worked as a teacher in India and Dubai. She completed her Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) in India and completed additional courses here in Canada. Anchita started teaching in Canada in 2004 and now she is teaching Grade two. For Anchita, ethnicity has played a huge role in her life; she believes that when students get exposed to different cultures it makes them open-minded and more tolerant.

The third participant, “**Wahida,**” is an English as second language (ESL) and resource teacher with over ten years of teaching experience. She completed her Masters of Teaching abroad. She completed Additional Qualification courses in reading, math, and ESL after completing her teaching degree. She completed her additional qualification courses in Canada. She supports Grade three and four students in building language skills for all subjects, except Music, French, gym and drama. For Wahida, ‘ethnicity’ means race, cultural background, and language.
3.4 Data Analysis

For Packer (2011) “arguably the most well-articulated approach to analysis is grounded theory that involves collection of data, coding and analysis” (p. 60). I followed a grounded theory and qualitative approach. Additionally, after each interview, I transcribed the audio recordings and annotated the transcripts. I analyzed the data based on the approach of Ritchie and Spencer (2002). They argue that

[t]he analyst gains an overview of the richness, depth and diversity of the data, begins the process of abstraction and conceptualization. While reviewing the material, the analyst will be making notes, recording the range of responses to questions posed by the researchers themselves, jotting down the recurrent themes and issues which emerge as important to respondent themselves. (p. 313)

I coded each transcript individually and then identified categories of data (e.g., group work among ethnic minority students with other students) and themes within categories (e.g., group work of ethnic minority students with whole class). I then organized the data in the way Shank (2002) suggests: to order data based on “patterns of order that seem to cut across various aspects of the data and these patterns become organized to different segment of data, called themes” (p. 129). I discovered themes within my interview data by reviewing categorized codes. A later stage of analysis was the meaning-making process where the findings were analyzed in terms of the literature discussed in the literature review chapter.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

This research project followed the approved ethics protocol for Master of Teaching students at the University of Toronto’s Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Participants were asked to sign a consent letter (Appendix A) giving their consent to be interviewed as well
as audio-recorded. This consent letter provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and outlined the expectations of participation (one 60-minute, semi-structured interview). The confidentiality and anonymity of participants was ensured throughout the research. Miller (2012) insists that, “reconfiguring of research boundaries and research possibilities raise new questions about how/whose power operates across the domains, that are now examined further through a focus on aspects of the research process: collecting qualitative data and researcher-participant relationships” (p. 33). During the study, I maintained a trusting relationship with the participants to create a comfortable interview environment. I explained to my participants how I would use their data. This was done to reduce anxieties on the part of the participants. I explained that in my analysis and interpretation of the data I would use pseudonyms. I ensured that participants would be able to identify themselves while others would not.

Participants were treated respectfully and courteously at all times. I created my interview questions in connection with the research purpose as described by the work of Maxwell (1996). Participants could decline to answer any specific questions and were free to change their minds and withdraw their participation at any time even if they had consented to participate (see consent form at Appendix A).

For qualitative research, the ethical concerns are confidentiality and consent; right to withdraw; risks of participation: and data storage. Participants may have benefited from participating in this study in various ways, including knowing that they had helped contribute to the scarce body of literature regarding this topic. For any publications related to this research, pseudonyms will be assigned to protect participants’ identity. As mentioned earlier, all participants gave written consent to their participation; this is to reassure participants that their
participation in the research is voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from it at any point and for any reason.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and strengths

This study had certain limitations given the ethical parameters and limited amount of time approved for completion of the MTRP: for example, it was not possible for me to interview: SASs or their parents, or do classroom observations. Another limitation was the size of the sample. The sample was relatively small, it contained only three participants. As the sample size was very small, the findings from this topic can inform the topic at hand, however, the research cannot claim or make any generalizations about the experience of SATs. A bigger sample would probably enhance the reliability of the research. As such, a variety of perspectives and experiences may not be represented. Further, some participants may have declined to share some negative experiences might deviate from the question asked. Maxwell (1996) insists, there may be a risk of a flawed study, if the data analysis were done with bias without careful consideration of methods and conclusion.

In terms of methodological strengths, the interviews with the subjects chosen for this study provided more in-depth details than a survey could. It also created space for teachers to speak about what matters most to them about this research topic. In this way, interviews validated SATs’ voices and experiences. The research gave SATs an opportunity to make meaning from their lived experiences. Further, the interviews were an opportunity for the teachers to reflect on their practices and to articulate how they conceptualize particular topics in theory and in practice. Focusing on a very specific sample allowed me to gather more in-depth data than a survey would allow.
3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I explained the research methodology. I began with a discussion of the research approach and procedures, delving into the meaning and significance of qualitative research, highlighting some of its major differences from quantitative research. I then described the instruments of data collection identifying interviews as the primary source of data. I explored the various types of interviews conducted in qualitative research. I spoke to some of the benefits of semi-structured interviews. After recruiting the participants based on the listed criteria, I completed the participant bio section. I also described recruitment procedures which entailed purposive sampling in order to maximize the richness and depth of data obtained. As well I discussed the convenience and snowball sampling that was also used. I proceeded to describe how I analyzed the data, examining individual interviews. I looked for common patterns and themes across the data. Further, I discussed ethical issues such as: consent, risks of participation, member-checks, right to withdraw, and data storage. I wrote about ways to address these potential issues. Lastly, I discussed the methodological limitations of the study, such as: small sample size and biases of the researcher, while also highlighting some of the strengths, such as: in-depth data and lived experiences of ethnic minority teachers. Next, in Chapter Four, I report the research findings.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter One, I discussed Toronto’s growing diversity and the purpose of the study, which is to research the experiences of South Asian teachers (SATs) teaching South Asian students (SASs) in 2016 in Greater Toronto Area (GTA) school classrooms. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature pertaining to the perception and experiences of ethnic minority teachers, and related this to SATs working with SASs. In Chapter Three, I discussed my qualitative research methodology and offered descriptions of the three participants. By using semi-structured interviews, I explored the experiences of SATs teaching SASs. In this chapter I outline and discuss the primary findings from the interviews that answer the central research question: What are the experiences of SATs working with SASs in Greater Toronto Area classrooms in 2016? This data was collected from semi-structured interviews conducted with three SATs teaching SASs in the GTA: Thomas, Anchita, and Wahida. I organized my findings into five emergent themes, each with subthemes:

1. Sparks conversation with students”: Exceptional understanding about SASs
2. Reported best practices of SATs teaching SASs
3. Reported accomplishments of SATs towards an inclusive classroom
4. “The smile is as big as they have seen a Santa Claus”: SATs’ relationships with parents of SASs
5. SATs’ experiences of racism

I first describe each theme and support it with my data, and finally discuss the implications of each theme alongside findings from the existing literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Finally, I outline my findings and make proposals for next steps.
4.1 Sparks Conversation with Students”: Exceptional Understanding about SASs

Teachers consciously use their shared South Asian ethnicity to encourage and support South Asian students. I found that the South Asian teacher participants’ own identities and experiences were reflected in their understanding of SASs, and that this reportedly resulted in increased confidence of students that in turn improved students’ academic success. I first discuss the way SATs’ ethnic identity and the personal stories of Thomas, Anchita, and Wahida resulted in understanding and connectedness with SASs. Then I explore how SATs use reflective practice to support newcomer students, which participants reported resulted in increased confidence for these students. Finally, I share these teachers’ perception that these actions improved academic success for students who shared their background.

The central reason that the participants felt exceptional understanding and connectedness with SASs was their own personal experience and visible ethnic identity. When asked how her classroom dynamics or community was affected by her sharing an ethnicity with her students, Wahida pointed out that she “personally learned the stories of immigration from her parents, thus [she] understands the impact of immigration on students’ lives.” Wahida gave a sensitive response when asked how her own ethnic identity informed her professional identity as a teacher:

I think that I am aware you know that I heard the stories of immigration and the impact that it had on people's lives and the kinds of decisions or choices that they had to make. Because of being ethnically different from the majority of the population, … maybe it allows me to dig deeper and ask kids questions.

Wahida’s answer emphasized the connection between her ethnic identity and personal experiences and the understanding she reported being able to share with students of her own background. For Wahida, “students of [her] own background asks questions about [her] place of
birth or what language [she] speaks, [and] students were curious about that and it sparks conversations.” This is similar to the data from Dee’s (2004) STAR class-size experiment done with 11,600 5 to 8-year-old students from 79 schools, to investigate whether students and teachers being of the same race affects math and reading performance. The data analysis from Dee’s study indicates teachers teaching same background students increases math and reading achievement. Further, the analysis of data from 1207 African-American five to ten-year-old from ECLS-K-5 who were taught by at least one same-race teacher versus White teachers showed that scores between Kindergarten and Grade five were higher when students were taught by at least one same-race teacher (Easton-Brooks, Lewis, & Zhang, 2009). The reported results and the literature suggest that there may be academic benefits to teachers teaching students of the same background.

Wahida specified that, although she does not wear any ethnic minority dress, her visible ethnic identity sparked conversation with students of the same background. When I asked a question about whether they explicitly talk about their ethnic identity with their students and integrate that into their classroom, both Anchita and Wahida mentioned that they do that at the beginning of the school year. Wahida said, “I model it in a way, so that kids can have conversation about the story of their family settling in Ontario that really connected and embedded in Grade two and three Social Studies curriculum.” Furthermore, Wahida reported that openly talking about her ethnic identity in class made connections that affirmed the identities of students of a similar background, which resulted in improved literacy achievement. For example, SATs spoke about using heritage languages with SASs in their class to build vocabulary, or culturally relevant text to promote reading. Wahida’s reported the following: “In certain case, for example, I had a student write the word “grass” in Arabic and I could tell he was
already writing left to right, but he was switching direction. I knew the letter that he needed to write, at that point I was able to help him. Or if kids are looking for a particular word, I would be able to know whether they chose the correct word.” Egalite etal.’s study found that there is significant positive effects and academic success when ethnic minority teachers taught students of a similar background, with positive achievements found in reading and math. This study was done over a seven-year period with three million students connected to 92,000 teachers throughout Florida public schools (Egalite et al., 2015). Egalite et al.’s study with Asian students in Grades six to ten found that a same-race teacher is strongly linked with math success of .053 SD. These teachers’ reported experiences and other literature suggests that there may be a positive effect on students as a result of being taught by teachers of the same visible ethnic identity.

Anchita stated that she is successful and comfortable with sharing her own ethnicity and is also proud of her own heritage. She expressed her belief as follows:

People should be proud of their own heritage, and in order to foster that, you know we need to kind of respect other languages, other cultures. So, that's my belief and I feel that I am being successful in that. Because I can see kids sharing ... their values and their beliefs in class comfortably without any discomfort or fear.

Anchita expressed this pride and comfort with her heritage through her dress. She often wore clothes that represented her ethnicity when teaching. Anchita explained when and how she uses ethnic dress in her class. She often dresses traditionally for celebrations and encourages her students to wear their ethnic outfits as well. This has the effect of incorporating students’ heritage and literature directly into the Grade two Ontario curriculum. Further, Wahida and Anchita shared their experiences of their day-to-day conversations with students in the school of
their background. These two teachers reported working to bring out their connection to students of their own background.

All participants believed their ethnic background enabled an identity-based connection to their students. The teachers interviewed in this research consciously used their shared South Asian ethnicity to encourage and support SASs. They used this practice regardless of how long their students of South Asian heritage had lived in Ontario. The SATs consciously used their shared South Asian ethnicity to encourage and support the SASs; the following subtheme explores specifically how SATs reportedly supported new comer students in the classroom.

4.1.1 Use of reflective practice on ethnic identity by SATs to support newcomer SASs

Teachers used their own or their family’s immigration experience to identify with and support newcomer SASs. When asked about whether ethnicity played a role in her life, Anchita said that her ethnic identity played a huge role in her life. She reported that she went through culture shock after moving to Canada and again in her first placement as a teacher. Anchita and Thomas had both experienced “culture shock” and articulated their initial struggle getting into the school board. They voiced the opinion that the school board needs to hire more ethnic minority teachers (people of colour) to affirm their identities as well as those of students of colour. Fairchild, et al. (2012) found that when the teacher and student are of the same race, this was associated with increased job satisfaction (p. 188). Furthermore, Lund and Lee (2015) found from their study that, “[t]he pre-service teachers interviewed offered evidence of an increased sense of cultural humility, and understanding of the teacher's pivotal role in creating more equitable learning experiences for all children and youth, including those from immigrant families” (p. 24). Thus, the literature and this study’s findings suggest that same-ethnicity
teachers may have more connection with newcomers and that all school boards should hire more teachers of colour in an era when more and more students are newcomers themselves.

The teachers interviewed made all students feel their identity made them accepted and included. Wahida shared an interesting experience about a student who was very curious to know her identity and religious background:

I don't know why he obligated to ask this question he wanted to know, actually he asked me: “are you Hindu?” … so, I think that it's really important that they feel that they need to know that information that you are they also comfortable to give that information about them. So, I said … “you know I am not Hindu.” “So, what are you?” “I am Muslim.” … “Oh, my family is from Bangalore too,” and I was like “you should know that there are many people from different faith backgrounds who are from the same city, it's very multicultural and multilingual and multi-religious country.”

It is evident from Wahida’s story that her students of South Asian background were very curious and comfortable enough to approach her with questions about her identity. She also expressed her belief that it is important for ethnic minority teachers to disclose their identity to students and open the discussion for the students to share their identity and acknowledge that all students should feel accepted; otherwise “kids never voice that side of themselves and when we don't access their identity, we lose out on a whole part of themselves and research confirms that they attain literacy achievement.” Wahida also believed that sharing and affirming students’ identities allows students to improve their writing and oral presentation skills, and that this can be done by teachers sharing their own identity as part of their everyday teaching practice. Atkins, Fertig, and Wilkins (2014) conducted interviews with 15 high school teachers selected by convenience
sampling and found that having people who share one’s race or ethnicity in the school setting, whether they are peers or teachers, can increase one’s feeling of being connected to the school. Atkins et al. (2014) conducted a study on whether school connectedness improves outcomes of students and found that, “[a] Latina teacher discussed how Latino/a students commented that they liked to see that there is someone like them at the school” (p. 509). The same teacher from the study added that students whom she had never had in class reached out to her because of the shared background (Atkins et al. 2014). That Latina teacher believed that her presence in school made a difference in students’ feelings about their belonging in school, they feel as comfortable as other students. Thus, I argue that there may be a significant positive effect on students’ academic achievement when SATs share their ethnic identity with their SASs.

SAT participants in this study perceived that their own South Asian ethnic background allowed them to engage with students of the same background and feel enthusiastic about teaching them. All participants reported enthusiasm for integrating aspects of their culture into their teaching in order to introduce students of other backgrounds to the South Asian culture and other ethnic minority cultures. Thomas shared that his South Asian origin helped him connect well with the students of the same background and understand their styles and behaviours. Thomas remarked:

Basically, I am able to connect more well with the students who are of Asian origin, their level of comfort working with me. Because when you are in school, you are a teacher to them and also like a second parent to them … understand their behaviours, understand their lingo, probably they use the same styles and behaviours, languages that they express, in English of course with the same they would do in their home.
Thomas mentioned that the end goal of meeting the curriculum is met easily by building a relationship with the students as they get to know him, regardless of what he wears. Anchita talked about how students easily bonded and connected with her which created a sense of community that helped her to meet the curriculum easily.

As a high school math teacher, Thomas’s reported goal was to maintain a relationship between himself and the students that in turn permitted him to, “pass on the knowledge to the students” and provided a level of comfort for all students. Thomas saw himself as a “dad” for students at his school and felt that this created a community for both South Asian and other minority students and was dedicated to students’ academic success. Thomas expressed his connection with students as follows:

So, you know that you have already won that and therefore, once you win that then you can say, [students] used to see mom and dad at home, they see dad at school and that person is like myself sort of the same bridging … In my knowledge, everybody, even for the non-Asian students as well they feel very comfortable.

Thomas further concluded that, before even starting the curriculum, it is highly essential for a teacher to build a positive relationship with students that will in turn help the teacher to pass on knowledge easily. This section discussed the use of reflective practice on ethnic identity by SATs to support newcomer SASs. The following theme section discusses the reported best practices of SATs teaching SASs in GTA school classrooms in 2016.

4.2 Reported Best practices of SATs

SATs teaching SASs in GTA school classrooms in 2016 reportedly used their heritage language (childhood language fluently spoken by the participants) along with other culturally relevant materials to support SASs. Of the three participants, two, Wahida and Anchita, used
their own heritage language in class with students of the same background with the intention of improving the students’ academic success. The third participant, Thomas, used his heritage language “to help out somebody, person from Asia, if they need any guidance or something, in getting used to the system here in Canada.” I divided the subthemes for the best practices of SATs as follows: participants’ use of heritage language (Wahida: Urdu and basic fluency in Arabic; Anchita: Malayalam and basic fluency in Hindi; and Thomas: Hindi) in classrooms and in the school community, culturally relevant teacher practices, and SATs’ methods used in classrooms to meet the curriculum expectations. I explain each subsection using findings from the interviews and relate them to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

All three participants had basic fluency in a heritage language common among people of South Asian descent and that some of their students also spoke, and they reported using this language to support these students. Additionally, the participants believed that the use of this heritage language created positive learning opportunities for immigrant students and students of their own background. Wahida’s experience as an ESL (English as Second Language) resource teacher suggests that students’ English literacy may improve because of the use of their heritage language. She assisted students with their writing in their heritage language to help them understand the meaning of certain words in English:

I know that when I am working with our students who primarily speak Arabic, that is their first language and mother tongue, the language that they feel most comfortable in and they knew that I can understand or help a little bit and I think they do feel excited and they ask me.
Wahida also shared her observation that some parents who are recent immigrants prefer their child to practice more English rather than speak their heritage language in school. Wahida shared some of these parents’ concerns about students using their heritage language in school:

Even our newcomer Syrian families, they are really concerned … you could pass the hurdle and move on and be part of the learning like everyone else's. ... that's definitely beneficial, but parents are also really concerned about use of first language when we really encourage that here at the school.

Wahida highlighted that, although many Canadian schools promote the use of second language to help ESL students to improve their literacy skills, teachers limit their practice of this because of some parents’ concerns about the use of a heritage language in school. However, this is not always the case. Anchita shared an experience in which a parent deliberately sought her out and spoke to the school administration to have their son, who has a disability, placed in Anchita’s class because she spoke that boy’s heritage language.

Anchita and Wahida both believe that there may be benefits to SATs using their heritage language with students of the same background, specifically for improving literacy skills, helping to support students with disabilities, guiding and helping the school community in general, and connecting with newcomer parents. These benefits were also found by Bernhard’s (2010), 10-year ethnographic study with newcomer parents to develop theory-based interventions designed for immigrant parents to provide support for their child’s education in a new country. Bernhard’s theory stated that “By cultivating an optimal learning environment— instructing a child in his or her first language, using a child’s prior knowledge and personal experiences—educators and school personnel can provide greater opportunities for immigrant students to achieve academic success” (p. 324). This speaks to the central research question:
what are the experiences of SATs working with SASs in Greater Toronto Area classrooms in 2016? The above literature and interview data suggests that there may be a connection between the use of heritage language and supporting SASs. This section looked at best practices of SATs, and use of heritage language in the classroom. The following theme explores the participants reports of their progress towards creating an inclusive classroom.

4.3 Reported Accomplishments of SATs Towards an Inclusive Classroom

SATs believed that their intentional relationship-building with SASs did not prevent them from providing an inclusive classroom for students of other backgrounds. SATs reportedly provided an inclusive and positive classroom environment for both South Asian and other minority (Chinese, Latina, North American and Caribbean students) students by grouping students based on their ability to do work. To answer the research sub question regarding teachers’ efforts to create an inclusive classroom for all linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse students, all three participants answered that for group work they group students based on their ability to do the work and not based on ethnicity. I discuss the approaches that the teachers used to reach other students in the same classroom in detail.

The teacher participants used different approaches to reach the other students in their classrooms. Wahida and Anchita’s practices displayed the most evident use of culturally relevant materials in reaching out to other students. Thomas remarked that, as a Math teacher, he did not generally use culturally relevant materials, but mentioned that he would try incorporate them in his teaching in the future. All participants expressed encountering no issues reaching other students in the classroom while connecting to students of their own background. To answer the question about how students were grouped for group work, Thomas said that he, too, always grouped students based on their ability to work. Thomas also added that he will not group
students based on ethnicity for the following reasons: “It becomes obvious, it will not be perceived well, they might lose track by socializing and they use their own heritage language and will be off task.” All three participants mentioned that they do not group students based on ethnicity. Instead, all reported that they group students based on their ability to complete an assigned task. However, Anchita and Wahida mentioned that they group some newcomer and immigrant students so these students can use peer-to-peer learning from a classmate of the same background.

Wahida pointed out that she makes a habit of including a variety of resources in her teaching practice in order to include all students in the classroom. She mentioned that the themes are always the same in different cultures, explaining that:

- bringing something into the classroom from other culture to discuss a topic, whether it is honesty or respect, similar themes … everybody finds some way of connecting to it and if you just honour that, well ok? What does respect mean in your family and how do you act upon that with people in your family, like everybody has got some kind of experience with it, so if you show the similarities … I think you can still reach all kids.

Wahida said that she “is always mindful of including other students in the same classroom to create an all-inclusive classroom.” Thomas’ belief about the inclusive classroom is that “ethnic minority teachers were not going to give a different test because [some students] are of a non-ethnic background.” Anchita briefly explained that she included all students to build a community in her classroom. She integrated math and language linked to different communities, different languages spoken in her classroom, and the different countries her students are from to include all students as a community. Thus, it is evident from this study that SATs may provide a comfortable learning environment to SASs and other students to meet the curriculum
expectations and create an all-inclusive learning environment using their professional judgement to assign students’ work.

Anchita strongly believed that non-ethnic students in the same classroom interact with and learn a lot of new things from ethnic students and that it is good to get exposed to other cultures because it broadens students’ horizons. Lumb’s (2014) findings from four Muslim participants’ experiences in the teacher education program and during practicum experiences, found that students feel more connected and included and feel able to overcome any issues they encounter. For example, one of the participants in Lumb’s study mentioned that she was an asset in her practicum placement school because she was very sensitive and aware of the students’ needs as she was able to understand their culture and language. Understanding students’ culture and language is an asset that helps create an all-inclusive environment in schools. Both the literature and this study suggest that ethnic minority teachers provide a positive and an all-inclusive space for ethnic minority students.

4.4 “The Smile is as Big as They Have Seen a Santa Claus”: SATs Relationships with Parents of SASs

SATs reported that their relationships with South Asian parents are both positive and negative: positive because their shared ethnicity reportedly enhances South Asian families’ experiences of school, and negative because of boundary issues. All three participants were very enthusiastic about answering my questions regarding their relationship with ethnic minority parents. This was clearly evident from Thomas’ answer about how excited and happy his SASs’ parents were to approach him and share stories about their child during parent-teacher meetings. Thomas shared that “[b]ecause all along they never had an ethnic teacher teach their child ... they come with smile from one ear to the other, the smile is as big as a they have seen a Santa Claus
for some reason or something.” After their parent-teacher meeting, teachers reported, South Asian parents felt comfortable and relaxed to see that their child was being taught by a teacher of the same background.

The participants also reported that parents sometimes lose their sense of time when they have an ethnic minority teacher teaching their child. Wahida, being an ESL and resource teacher, meets many parents of her background and she stated that sometimes parents have overlook time boundaries perhaps because they are of the same background. All three SATs mentioned that sometimes parents had excessive levels of comfort with them and that it is a challenge to maintain a professional relationship. Thomas expressed that because “[t]hey have extreme level of comfort ... [he] as a teacher [has] to maintain that balance and also time restriction as well, because otherwise, [parents] lose that boundary line or border between when to cross and when not to.” It was evident that all the teachers blamed this phenomenon not on the parents but on the lack of sufficient numbers of ethnic minority teachers. Previously, the school board was not hiring many ethnic minority teachers, however, now the board is hiring more diverse teachers.

This converges with Lumb’s (2014) study about the connection between creating an inclusive environment and teacher diversity conducted with pre-service teachers of ethnic minority (Muslim) background about their practicum experiences. All the participants in Lumb’s study connected easily with students and parents because they shared a cultural and ethnic identity. One of the participants in the study acted as a cultural interpreter between teachers and parents. This study may report a positive relationship between ethnic minority teachers and ethnic minority parents. Both the literature and my study’s findings draw parallels between ethnic minority teachers and the growing diversity of the student population. This is reinforced by the finding that there is a positive relationship between ethnic minority teachers and ethnic
minority parents. Teacher education institutions may recruit diverse teacher candidates and teachers as there is a need for diverse community of candidates (Gambhir, Broad, Evans and Gaskell, 2008). Also, ethnic minority parents are more likely to see ethnic minority teachers teaching their children and hence there may be a need for diversification in the teaching force. The following subtheme is the reported effect of South Asian parent volunteers in SATs’ classrooms.

4.4.1 Reported Effects of South Asian parent volunteers in SATs’ classrooms

South Asian parent volunteers in SATs’ classrooms were described as both positive and negative depending upon the performance of the volunteers. Despite the fact that ethnic minority parent volunteers are helpful in the classroom, Thomas shared an observation that both ethnic and non-ethnic parent volunteers prefer to volunteer as lunchroom or hall monitors rather than volunteer in the classroom because, “they don’t remember the high school math.” On the other hand, Anchita’s experiences with South Asian parent volunteers were very positive. She expressed that although it was a lot of work to communicate and co-ordinate with ethnic minority parent volunteers, it was a great success. She remarked:

So, they would have to sign up to read a book, a dual language book and so that was one big success. It was really good, but we needed a lot of work. So, other than teaching, because, we have to go get yourselves prepared, and the library had certain amount of dual language books … parent reads the book.

Ethnic minority parents were reportedly willing to read dual language books in Anchita’s class. She found her parent volunteers to be very helpful. Bernhard’s (2010) findings from a ten-year ethnographic study with newcomer parents resulting from three interventions reported, parents support their child’s success in school and improve their contribution. Even if they do not speak
the school’s language, they can contribute towards their child’s education. A parent volunteer took Syrian students and students who need more attention outside Anchita’s class to do more efficient small-group work. It was evident from Anchita’s statement that “Especially, even sometimes [the parent volunteer] takes Syrian kids, because [the newcomers] were doing letters of the alphabets and numbers and they could do not understand what I was teaching to the class.” “Parents and students recognize themselves better in school and as a result develop more affinity with education and which results in more parental participation” (quoted in Driessen, 2015, p. 180). Anchita added that an ethnic minority parent volunteer borrowed Kindergarten books and flash cards to teach some basics to the students in that small group.

In contrast to Anchita’s positive experience with her parent volunteer, Wahida described difficult experiences she had with ethnic minority parent volunteers when she was a classroom teacher. Wahida found that “it is hard for [her] to plan for the entire class and also to teach the volunteer and manage students in a culturally appropriate and effective way.” For Wahida and Anchita’s Anchita, ethnic minority parent volunteers were great in classrooms when they were helpful. She shared some of the examples “where the parents messed up an activity by cutting everything upside down, and another parent messed up a community template colouring up people’s faces in blue or wearing odd things.” Wahida remarked: “Sometimes it's a little bit more of a headache to have a parent volunteer in your classroom. If it's helpful that's great … we really need to learn more about the person and then figure out how they are going to be interacting with kids.” It is an interesting that high school participant reported that parent’s preferred to volunteer outside the classroom teaching, whereas the elementary teacher participants reported parent volunteers volunteered in classroom activities.
In a study conducted with five teacher candidates and a focus group, Resplandor (2010) found that "Asian parents play an important role in their child’s achievement and had high expectations that connected to their cultural belief" (p. 24). Anchita mentioned that all ethnic minority parents have found her approachable and talk to her even outside of the school. Anchita mentioned that some Asian parents wanted their children to have homework every day. It was however a dilemma for her to give homework because the other two teachers in the same grade did not give any homework, so she decided not to give any homework to her students. I argue that there exists a pressure from the staff and administration and parents to give homework to students from different backgrounds. Thomas shared that besides classroom teaching he had good interactions with other students as he was coaching cricket. He mentioned that even outside the community, the interaction with ethnic minority students’ parents and the community is always positive. For Anchita, cultural events during family fun night were very successful. She reported that, “So many families from India and other countries enjoyed the Bollywood songs and dance stall.” This teacher connects more with her student’s parents within the school community and expressed her cultural values and beliefs. Except the boundary issues all South Asian parents were happy to see South Asian Teachers teaching their children. All three teachers reported that parents cross their time limit during parent-teacher interview because they do not see many ethnic minority teachers teaching their children and the reason for the boards to hire many ethnic minority teachers.

4.5 SAT’s Experiences of Racism: “Old Timers” Level of Thinking With 21st Century Teachers

All three participants reported experiences of racism in their teaching career. This theme describes the challenges, supports and next steps and community barriers that SATs encountered
Anchita mentioned that although she had all the qualifications for teaching job in Canada, she was not given an opportunity and her placement was delayed when she applied for teaching job in Canada. This was evident when she shared her story about the barriers and challenges she had faced in her profession. She mentioned that “I was really upset, because I was best fit for that role, but … I had done couple of interviews.” She explained that she was indirectly rejected by the administration and asked to look for a job in another location because of her ethnic background. Another incident that Anchita shared was that her administration allotted to her a split grade classroom, which she did not prefer, and when she stood up against the administration it was later assigned on rotation to all teachers. During the interview with the participant Wahida, it was interesting to note that she was extremely conscious in all her answers. For example, Wahida explained that although her ethnicity allowed her to build relationships with students and their parents, she restated several times that parents and students approached her for information because of her role as a resource teacher not based on her ethnicity. This teacher appeared to be more worried about the power that exists in the administration.

The participant Thomas reported his experiences about being labelled as an ethnic minority teacher for his actions in school. Thomas described his experience as follows: “there is always going to be the “old timers,” because they are the ones created the labels … their level of thinking, Thank God, they were retiring … They are more dominant in the workforce; they are the ones that they are going to put those barriers.” Thomas concluded that 21st century teachers are moving in a positive direction, whether they are from an European background, or from a non-Asian background, they do not look at it as giving a label on [SATs]. Thomas believed that, “the moment we get rid of all the old timers, [he thinks] the world can lead in a positive
direction. It’s just taking it too long.” Thomas shared his point of view about experienced teachers labelling other ethnic minority teachers for their work. Wahida believed that, although the board is hiring ethnically diverse staff now, she said that there is still an overall lack of ethnically diverse staff in the school board. For Wahida, “[she] believed that [she] really had to say something and speak up, if [she] had been marginalized or not being represented.” Kohli and Pizarro (2016), based on a study involving 218 teachers of colour, argue that teachers of colour are "often pressured to dismiss the ways of being that they share with students and have developed as members of communities of color” (p. 82). Teachers of colour may try to express their concern about not being represented or feeling oppressed, however they might be hesitant because there may exist a pressure from the administration to voice their opinion or thoughts.

The participants reported feeling supported by their colleagues during their teaching careers. Anchita’s first school experience as a teacher in a more white-dominant culture made her feel that board should hire more teachers like her. Anchita remarked:

Teachers were extremely nice and the kids needed more exposure, it's good that they are hiring more people like me. Because, I think kids need to be exposed to different cultures makes them more broad minded and more tolerant of other cultures and other religions. So, for me it's a huge thing.

Anchita expressed from her experience that school boards need to hire people of colour, so that student’s exposure to different culture makes them more tolerant. Thomas mentioned that there is always a positive support from the administration and the school community. He received support from teachers of all background during a multicultural festival. He explained that he had, “asked for help, academic perspective, extracurricular perspective and social perspective” and
received help from the school system readily. Thomas described his point of view about people of colour as follows:

We got to be open just like you see a different kid’s different background you can’t personalize things… it’s not the 1960s where the Blacks were to sit at the back of the class… outside elements that will always try to influence you in some way. But it’s not a perfect way… some people have light skin, dark skin for any purpose, the big question is whether you respect that.

Thomas views towards students of colour may be an inspiration for future teachers of colour about perceiving students of colour in the teaching field. All three participants reported experiences of racism either directly or indirectly from the administration at some point of their teaching career.

4.6 Conclusion

Five main themes emerged from the data analysis. The first theme was the exceptional understanding of SASs by SATs and how this can build a positive relationship and sparks conversation with students of the same background. This understanding of SASs reportedly increased student confidence and success in literacy and math. The participants reported experiences suggest that there may be a positive effect of students being taught by teachers of the same background. There is enough literature to support this finding even though the literature is not specific to SATs but rather teachers minority ethnicities teaching students who share their ethnicity. The subtheme in this section is the use of reflective practice of SATs’ ethnic identity to support newcomer SASs. The teachers reportedly used their own or family experiences to create a supportive learning environment which in turn allowed students to share and affirm their identities. This reflective action of the SATs reportedly improved their students’ literacy
achievements and oral presentation skills. There may be a significant positive effect on students’ academic achievement because of SATs shared ethnic background with SASs in their classrooms.

Second, I found that the best practices of SATs include the use of their heritage language with students who speak the same language to assist them in their academic learning. Two participants reportedly believed that there may be benefits to using heritage language for improving literacy skills, supporting disabilities, and guiding and helping the school community in general. They believed using heritage languages in class may improve students’ literacy skills. It is interesting to note from this study that there is some parent resistance to the use of heritage languages by teachers to support ESL students in school. This study and related literature suggest that there may be a connection between a students’ heritage language and an SAT who speaks the same language to help and support SASs. I suggest an area of further study is to investigate the level of intervention of parents in response to the use of heritage languages in schools based on the reported data from this study.

Third, I found that the SATs provided an inclusive environment for all students in the classroom. This was achieved by purposeful grouping and making decisions based on professional judgement to provide an all-inclusive working environment for SASs and all students. Next, I found the SATs’ relationships with South Asian parents were both positive and negative. Although there were some boundary issues, South Asian parents were happy to see a same background teacher teaching their child and the teaching force should be diversified so that more ethnic minority parents see ethnic minority teachers teaching their children. Participants reported that South Asian parent volunteers can helpful in the classroom but also that ethnic minority parent volunteers sometimes mean additional work for the teacher, and
sometimes they do not perform the expected work. All the participants mentioned that the interactions outside the community and family nights in school with ethnic minority parents were always positive.

Finally, participants reported experiencing racism in their teaching career, as well as other challenges, supports, and next steps. All the participants reported that there was an initial struggle to enter the teaching career because of their ethnic background. In this last theme, I discussed how teachers were cautious in answering the research questions, maybe because of the label administration and colleagues give them. I suggest two areas of further study: to what extent homework can be given to students of all background by SATs, and the level of intervention from administration and colleagues in the teaching style in the classroom of SATs.

This small study thus contributes to a growing body of literature with respect to ethnic minority teachers, in particular to our knowledge of SATs teaching SASs. Furthermore, this study gives voice to the values and feelings of a small sample of SATs in this broad educational research field. As my study focused only on SATs, this area needs further research and discussion further for new SATs in the education field. In Chapter Five, I discuss broad implications of my study for the educational community and narrow implications for my own teaching practice. I also provide recommendations for the various stakeholders, such as school boards, principals, ethnic minority teachers, resource teachers, settlement workers, and parents. Finally, I describe potential areas for future research.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

The focus of this study has been the experiences of South Asian teachers (SATs) teaching South Asian students (SASs) in Greater Toronto Area (GTA) schools in the year 2016. In Chapter One, I discussed the purpose of my research and outlined the research questions for the study. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature pertaining to the perceptions and experiences of ethnic minority teachers. Next, in Chapter Three, I described my qualitative research methodology and the semi-structured interviews with three SAT participants. In Chapter Four, I discussed my findings from the interviews using five major themes as follows:

1. “Sparks conversation with students”: Exceptional understanding of SASs by SATs;
2. Reported best practices of SATs teaching SASs;
3. Reported accomplishments of SATs towards creating an inclusive classroom;
4. “The smile is as big as they have seen a Santa Claus”: SATs’ relationships with parents of SASs; and
5. SATs’ experiences of racism.

In this final chapter, I first provide an overview of my key findings and their significance. Second, I share the broad implications of my study for the educational community and the narrow implications for my teaching practice based. Third, I make recommendations for various stakeholders, such as school boards, principals, ethnic minority teachers, resource teachers, settlement workers, and parents. Finally, I outline areas of future research suggested by my study.
5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

The analysis of the interviews showed that South Asian teachers’ shared ethnicity with SASs fostered supportive and positive relationships with students. SATs’ visible ethnic identity resulted in spontaneous conversations with SASs that lead to exceptional understanding of those students. SATs reported that SASs approached them in a comfortable way to voice their identity and felt able to express who they were in an authentic way. It is the perception of the SATs that a connection with students through their shared background and personal experiences of immigration lends itself to the Grade two social studies curriculum. This resulted in student improvement in literacy and math as reported by the participants. This is a significant finding because it converges with current research that highlights the benefits of having a teacher of one’s own background: in this case, SATs teaching SASs.

The use of heritage languages by two SAT participants with SASs who speak the same language reported improved literacy skills for immigrant students and others. One of the significant findings from this study is that South Asian parents volunteer in SATs classroom to help and support students in small groups using their heritage language. One participant reportedly assisted a student with writing in their heritage language to help the student understand the meaning of certain words in English. However, some parents’ objections to the use of the heritage language in class was also reported by the participants. Participants mentioned that some parents believed that their children would not learn English in the school if they used their heritage language. Participants reported that they had to reduce the use of heritage language based on these parents’ objections. The participants believed that acknowledging students’ identities made all students treat each other’s cultures in a respectful way and that this
created a respectful classroom climate for all students. Two participants used culturally relevant materials in their classroom to value SASs’ culture in their classrooms.

SATs believed that their intentional relationship-building with SASs did not prevent them from providing an inclusive classroom for students of other backgrounds. SATs reported providing an inclusive environment for all students. It was evident from the participants’ remarks that their goal was to meet the curriculum expectations. They reportedly did this by including a variety of resources that helped to build a sense of community in the classroom. SATs reported that they could provide an inclusive classroom for all, regardless of cultural background. SATs reported that their relationship with South Asian parents was both positive and negative, positive because it enhanced the family’s experience of school, and negative because of potential boundary issues. SASs’ parents were reportedly happy to see a teacher of their own background teaching their child and felt relaxed as if there were a second parent in the school. They reportedly felt comfortable sharing their child’s story in detail as they had not seen an ethnic minority teacher before during their child’s school career. One of the participants saw himself as a “dad” to all the students in the school, particularly those of his own background, as he felt that he completely understood the learning style and behaviour of the SASs. The main challenge expressed by the SATs was that some parents felt extremely comfortable and crossed the line in terms of time restrictions during parent-teacher interviews with them. SATs felt that this is because the education system does not have many ethnic minority teachers. The literature and this study concur that there is a need to diversify the teaching force so that an increased number of ethnic minority teachers will be available to teach ethnic minority students.

All three participants reported that they had experienced racism during their teaching careers. The SATs reported that South Asian parents were surprised to see a South Asian teacher
teaching their child, reportedly because their children’s previous teachers had all been White. SATs reported that they experienced pressure from their administration and parents to modify their teaching practices, such as homework policies. Participants reported that South Asian parents wanted more homework for their child, but as the SATs’ colleagues did not give any homework, SATs also had to follow the same practice. This is the overview of my key findings. In the following section I discuss the broad and narrow implications.

5.2 Implications

Based on the data from the semi-structured interviews done with each of the three SATs, I identify several implications. In the first subsection, based on my findings, I discuss in detail the broad implication for certain stakeholders, such as school boards, SATs, parents, students, resource teachers, and settlement workers in the educational community. In the second subsection, I review the study’s implications for my own professional identity and reflective teaching practice.

5.2.1 Broad implications: The educational community

Ontario classrooms are becoming more diverse; hence teachers may need to incorporate culturally relevant material into their teaching practice in order to activate the prior knowledge of students. Culturally responsive educators improve student success because they promote equity and inclusivity, which are fundamental educational needs (Gay, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2001). However, SATs may face resistance from the administration when they use culturally relevant materials and when they try to implement their own teaching styles. For example, some SASs’ parents were concerned about how the integration of heritage languages in their child’s education might affect their child’s ability to learn the school’s language. This concern limited SATs’ use of heritage language in their classrooms in spite of the advantages of using heritage languages as
a teaching tool. SATs may also face pressure from colleagues and administrators because even though some South Asian parents wish to have homework for their children, SATs cannot assign any homework when teacher colleagues do not give homework to their students.

One participant reported purchasing bilingual books and other culturally relevant materials for her school and recommended books for her librarian. Further, one participant, spoke of purchasing shorter books and games that were bilingual for the class and SASs. Not only are SATs more sensitive to cultural classroom resources but, parents of SASs are often more engaged during parent teacher interviews, which is positive but can also lead to time management issues. Participants reported that parents were very excited to see an ethnic minority teacher in the school for the first time and crossed the time limit during parent-teacher interviews.

5.2.2 Narrow implications: My professional identity and practice

Being a SAT, I noticed from this study the importance of sharing my ethnic identity with SASs. My presence in the classroom will provide an opportunity for SASs to feel confident, affirm their identity, and feel accepted for who they are as people. As my findings suggest, the teacher-student relationship will be better for sharing an ethnic identity, I incorporate lessons that acknowledge different cultural identities in the classroom. Since SASs reportedly benefited from the use of the heritage languages in their classrooms, in my future classroom, I will use my heritage language (Tamil) whenever needed to help Tamil speakers achieve academic success. I will make an effort to make use of heritage languages to help students who have recently immigrated and others who struggle to speak the school language to be confident and feel included. I will also use purposeful grouping so that students who share same heritage language can interact and learn from each other. From the finding that use of culturally relevant materials
and resources may benefit ethnic minority students, I will use all of the available culturally relevant materials in the school and school board library and from community partners in my teaching. As my study found connection and strong relationship building happens when we share our identity, I will provide various opportunities for students to affirm each others’ identities and create a positive, inclusive classroom in which all students are respectful of other cultures. Ethnic minority parents were surprised to see an ethnic minority teacher teaching their child, so I wish that more ethnic minority teachers could teach students of their own background because that decreases the surprise level for ethnic minority parents. Due to this connection, there is an exceptional understanding between SAS and SATs. As a self-identified South Asian teacher, I have an understanding of SASs. I can connect with them while also creating an inclusive classroom. As a future researcher, I would investigate the amount of parental intervention with respect to the use of heritage languages in the classroom.

5.3 Recommendations

In this section I discuss immediate and long-term recommendations based on the findings of this study for South Asian parents, settlement workers, resource teachers, school administrators, policy makers, and school boards.

First, the benefits of using heritage languages in the class should be explained by settlement workers or resource teachers to parents of SASs in their own language with the help of an interpreter or pamphlet written in their language. This will help parents understand the benefits of heritage language use for their child’s success in the long run. There could be a “Morning tea” for first time parents where parents could meet teachers and get to know more about the school (Australian Government: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). This would provide South Asian parents with an opportunity to
socialize and get to know the teacher in a more informal space than a parent-teacher interview. Second, school administrators should create additional network meetings before or after school for parents of SASs with SATs for casual conversation so that during parent-teacher meetings they can get down to business.

Further, school policy makers should explicitly mention the benefits of the use of heritage language in the classroom. School principals, resource teachers, and settlement workers should explain to newcomer parents the benefits of heritage languages for the success of students who do not speak English. A paper released by the Student Achievement Division of the Ontario Ministry of Education reminds us, “[c]ultur[ally responsive pedagogy] is not about ‘cultural celebrations,’ nor is it aligned with traditional ideas around multiculturalism. It involves careful acknowledgement, respect and an understanding of difference and its complexities” (Student Achievement Division of the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 2). Culturally responsive pedagogy meets the needs of diverse students. To that end, I recommend that school boards conduct more professional development courses for high school in-service teachers to help them incorporate more culturally relevant pedagogy in their classroom.

Next, I recommend that school administration and school boards allot more funding for the purchase of culturally relevant materials for ethnic minority teachers. All parents may volunteer in the classroom; however, South Asian parents may have an added opportunity to donate and engage in their child’s education by giving guest lectures and reading multilingual books based on their cultural background. Although it is not possible for all South Asian parents to contribute to their child’s education, it is highly recommended that parents to share their background and lived experience with students. More ethnic minority teachers need to be hired by school boards as ethnic minority students and parents currently do not often get to work with
ethnic minority teachers. Ladson-Billings (2005) proposes that “having diversity in the teaching force can empower immigrant students to better integrate into the multicultural and democratic society” (p. 31). The vast majority of teachers are White. I recommend that school boards hire more ethnic minority teachers so that parents and students feel more connected and confident, which would result in positive outcomes for students’ academic success. Finally, if more ethnic minority teachers were hired, parents would not be surprised to see an ethnic minority teacher for the first time in the school. Within a five-year period, all boards should diversify the teaching force to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student body in GTA schools. Meeting the needs of a growing and diverse student body involves many stakeholders.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

In this section I address the gaps found in my literature review and important areas for future research. The extent of the use of heritage languages in the classroom should be studied and the studies made available to ethnic minority parents. The available literature is very limited as it relates specifically to SATs teaching SASs. However, there is a large body of research with regards to ethnic minority teachers in general, hence more research should be done on SATs teaching SASs. Furthermore, much of the literature I reviewed in Chapter Two relates to the experiences of ethnic minority teachers in an American context; very limited research has been done with SATs in Ontario. Another area for future research is the use of culturally relevant materials by SATs at the high school level, as there are more research findings available related to the elementary and middle school levels. Racial discrimination faced by SATs within the educational community is an important area of future research. My study raises the question of how ethnic minority special education teachers and high school teachers could use culturally relevant materials in their classrooms. This is another important area for future research.
5.5 Conclusion

This study found that there are benefits for students when they are taught by teachers of the same background. The reported use of heritage languages, culturally relevant materials, and other resources by SATs was a significant finding from my study. I hope that all boards of education will offer more professional development courses to in-service ethnic minority teachers, in particular to high school teachers, in order to help them integrate culturally relevant materials in their teaching pedagogy. School administrators should also increase the amount of culturally relevant resources in schools. Teacher education programs should accept and train more ethnic minority teacher candidates to meet the growing diversity of students in the GTA. I recommend that all school boards in the GTA hire more ethnic minority teachers, so that all students, including students of colour, will benefit. As an SAT, I will implement my own teaching style using culturally relevant pedagogy, my heritage language for SASs who speak my heritage language, and my own homework policy based on the needs of the students. Furthermore, I will incorporate a variety of teaching materials besides culturally relevant materials to provide a sense of community, which in turn will create an inclusive classroom. I will acknowledge and respect my students’ backgrounds. I will help my students embrace their identities in order for them to achieve academic success and to create a safe space in my classroom. More research needs to be done with respect to the experiences of SATs teaching SASs in Ontario to explore further the benefits of teachers teaching students of the same background.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date:

Dear ________________,

My name is Vimala Mannan Shanmugasundaram and I am a student in the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research study will focus on the experiences of ethnic minority teachers working with students from a similar background in Greater Toronto Area (GTA) elementary and middle school classrooms. I am interested in interviewing ethnic minority teachers – whether born here or immigrants – who have minimum five years of experience working with ethnic minority students in the GTA elementary or middle school. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic. Your participation in this research will involve one roughly 60-minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper and informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will
remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded.

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

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

Sincerely,

Vimala Mannan Shanmugasundaram
Consent Form

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

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

Signature: ________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Please note that my sampling procedures yielded only South Asian teachers; therefore, my interview guide is broader although my topic eventually became more specific. See Chapter Three for more information.

Thank you for participating in my research study. The purpose of this study is to learn the experiences of teachers teaching students with the same background as ethnic minority teachers. This interview should take approximately 60 minutes, and is comprised of approximately 28 questions. The interview protocol has been divided into 4 sections, beginning with your background information, followed by questions based on school context, their experiences as an ethnic minority teacher, your relationship with students and parents, and concluding with questions regarding supports, challenges, and next steps for teachers. I want to remind you that you can choose not to answer any question, and can remove yourself from participation at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

To begin may you state your name for the recording?

**Section A – Background Information**

1. Were you born in Canada?

   Probe: a) (If born here) Where did you grow up?

   b) (If not born here) Which country did you immigrate from?

2. Do you speak any languages other than English or French? If yes, which ones?

   a. (if yes) Can you describe your fluency in these languages?
b. (if no, stop the interview and thank them for their time as they do not comply with your sampling criteria)

3. How many years have you been working as a teacher in Canada?

4. How many years have you been working at this school?

a. In addition to your role as a teacher, do you fulfill any other roles in the school?

i. Probe: For example, any additional role as a coach, advisor, cultural activity guide, political role, resource teacher etc.

5. Can you tell me a bit about your formal training?

a. Probe: Where you studied, when you got your degree and how long ago you completed your schooling?

6. What grades and subjects do you currently teach?

a. Which grade(s) have you previously taught?

7. Can you describe the community in which your school is situated?

a. Probe: (i.e. diversity, socioeconomic status)

b. How long have you taught in this school?

8. Could you list some of the core values of this school community?

9. As you are aware, I am interested in learning about ethnic minority teachers’ experience working with students from the same ethnic minority. You have self-identified as an ethnic minority teacher and are hence participating in this study. Can you tell me about what ‘ethnicity’ means to you and what role it plays in your life?

a. What term do you use to describe your ethnicity? For example, I use the term(s) - Indian, Chinese, Sri Lankan, Latin American, etc.

**From now on, I replaced all bold-face words with participant’s description about ethnicity.**
10. Would you say that your **ethnic identity** is ‘visible’ on a daily basis?
   a. Probe: For example, do you regularly wear any clothing or jewelry that indicates your ethnic identity?
   b. (If yes) Do you regularly wear these things to school?
   c. (If yes) How in your experience does this visibility impact your experience in your current school?
      i. (if applicable) How about in other schools you have worked in?

11. Are there other teachers at your school of your **ethnic minority**?

12. How would you say your identity as an **ethnic minority** informs your professional identity as a teacher?

13. In what ways, do you feel your **ethnic minority** identity has affected your teaching?
   a. Your relationships with colleagues, administration and teaching pedagogies.

**Section C – Experiences with ethnic minority students and their parents**

14. Do you integrate your/your students’ shared ethnicity into your classroom?

15. (If yes) Can you tell me about a time you did this?
   a. How did your **ethnic minority** students respond?
   b. How did your other students respond? Was their response different? How?
   c. Did you find any difference in their group work or individual work?
   d. Do you choose any teaching materials based on ethnicity? Can you give some example?

16. How do you think or perceive that your classroom dynamic or community is affected by you sharing the same ethnicity as some of your students?

17. Do you find any challenges in reaching out other students in the same classroom?
18. Research has shown that ethnic minority teachers are more able to practice culturally responsive pedagogy than dominant culture teachers. What do you think of this finding?

19. How does it make you feel?

20. Is it born out in your own experiences?

21. Can you describe your relationship with ethnic minority parents?
   a. Do they feel safe and happy to approach you for any questions?

22. How do ethnic minority student’s parents approach you as an ethnic minority teacher?
   a. Do you have any parent volunteers?
      i. (If yes) What are their duties?

23. Can you describe your relationship with other teachers at your school?

24. Do you regularly interact with students of your ethnic minority who are not in your class?
   i. (If yes) Please describe.

25. What overall effect do you think your presence has on students in the school and on the community?

Section D – Supports, Challenges, and Next Steps

26. What kind of support systems and resources are available to you both inside and outside of school as an ethnic minority teacher in a mainstream education system?
   a. What do you think about the supports and resources that are available?

27. What barriers have you faced in relation to your professional teacher identity and practice as a result of your ethnic identity?
   a. How have you managed these barriers?
28. As a beginning teacher who similarly identifies as an ethnic minority teacher who would like to work with students of my own background, what advice do you have for me entering the profession?

29. Do you have any final thoughts?

Thank you sincerely, for your time and considered responses.