On Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives

On Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives:
The Perceptions of Grade 10 English Language Arts Teachers in a Large Urban School Division in Western Canada

By

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to atone for almost two centuries of mishandling, and faced with ballooning urban Aboriginal populations, many of Canada’s governments and educational institutions have adopted policies to encourage the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in schools. Realizing that their efforts can only be given life by teachers, this study explores the perceptions of eight teachers integrating Aboriginal perspectives into their Grade 10 ELA classes in the Buffalo Stone School Division (pseudonym used). Interviews conducted with the teachers explored how personal, contextual and institutional realities have shaped the perceptions that the teachers bring to their practice.
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On Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives:

The Perceptions of Grade 10 English Language Arts Teachers in a Large Urban School Division in Western Canada

Pandora’s Box: An Introduction

“Hope ... which whispered from Pandora’s box after all the other plagues and sorrows had escaped, is the best and last of all things. Without it, there is only time” (Caldwell & Thomason, 2004, p. 196).

In “You’ll Never Believe What Happened”, Thomas King (2003) re-tells the story of evil coming to the world; witches gather at a conference to see who can create the most evil thing. The winner is the witch who tells a story full of blood and murder, disease and death. Having finished his/her story (no one can determine this witch’s gender), the other witches beg the storyteller to take it back. To their dismay, they discover that once a story has been told it can never be untold. It is loose in the world forevermore.

This project ultimately began when the first Aboriginal children educated by people who were not their own released their own story into the world. It took a long time to grow, but some time during the 1980s, when mainstream media started to pick it up, the story of the education of Aboriginal children by non-Aboriginals became widely shared. Despite instances of caring, of love and of best intentions, like the witch’s story it is one regrettably full of blood, disease and the intended death of a host of cultures and languages. Responding to the story, federal and provincial governments, under whose
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control the education of children had fallen, began to take action. Theirs is an attempt to work for and with Aboriginal peoples to end the injustices done to Aboriginal children and to begin to rectify the horrors of the past. In another sense, we might argue that they are looking for what the Cree call mino pimatisiwin – the good life (F. Deer, personal communication, November 21, 2011), the kind that we all cherish, a more satisfying ending to a largely unhappy story.

Today’s efforts to continue that project in schools are, as far as I can tell, a Pandora’s box of controversy, racism, misplaced goodwill, ignorance, apprehension, love, trust and mistrust, good and evil.

Full libraries and centuries of stories may begin to scratch the surface of the plethora of issues surrounding Aboriginal education that I could never hope to do justice in a project such as mine. My hopes and goals are much smaller and simpler.

I would like to explore a snapshot of the current chapter of this unfinished story, the one that explores how a small group of teachers are responding to their involvement in it. Whether they like it or not, they are a part of this story loosed on the world so long ago. What will their part be? How can they be supported? What is working for them and what is not? How do they know? Most importantly, what effect do they perceive their efforts having on the young people in their classrooms? Are they becoming part of a story with a happier ending for all of its players?

With a little luck, their narratives will help me to better understand how I can better make my contribution to the happy ending that we all want to hear about. And just maybe, their contribution can also become a part of the bigger story and a much more agreeable conclusion.
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Preamble

This is a study about the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the ELA curriculum in public schools in Western Canada. As such, I believe that it needs to take seriously the traditions, cultures, and knowledge of many different peoples. Part of many of those cultures is the importance of narrative which, albeit that of a non-Aboriginal man of European descent, will be included throughout the work.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background: On Listening to the Nation’s Story (Pun Intended)

There are any number of stories that might explain how we got here. A first story might explain how a man and woman were created in the Garden of Eden, and how their descendants built the world of man. Later, it would explain how centuries ago, Europeans arrived on the shores of what is now called North America, a massive continent with a story very different from that of their own. The story would explain how the new arrivals saw a vast, rich landscape sparsely populated with “savages” who did not know Christ or gunpowder, who wore clothing made largely from animal skins, and who lived in structures which seemed amazingly crude compared to the cathedrals and monuments of Europe. Following a rather established human pattern, the newcomers preferred their own ways and set off to bring them to the current residents and to save them from their ignorance.

A relationship of trade was established. More and more Europeans crossed the big water, and despite the occasional conflict, through hard work, sacrifice and ingenuity
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they slowly but surely built a ‘new world’ in North America, one that more successfully mirrored the one that they had left behind. When some of the land’s original inhabitants did not want to take part in that new world, they were invited to occupy select areas of land where they would be free to make their own decisions and to continue to live as they chose.

This story would largely ignore the part about what happened when the original peoples had outgrown their usefulness in trade. Some of the newcomers attempted to wipe the original inhabitants from existence. Others set about to assimilate them into what had become the dominant culture, and one of their most effective tools (weapons?) was the “education” of children at schools where their families could not come. These stories, however, were only told from the perspective of the people who had taken the children in an effort to civilize them.

I would suggest that this is the story that has dominated classrooms in Western Canada for generations. It was certainly, in its essence, the story that was told in my public school classrooms and textbooks just twenty years ago.

A second story might tell of how long ago, Raven discovered the first men in a clamshell on an unknown beach. It might tell of how those men went off into the forests and mountains and plains, how Trickster crafted the first female genitalia from an elk’s liver, and how the men and these new women established families and tribes and nations. Then how centuries ago, strange floating objects appeared on the big water, and how people from an unknown nation came to the land. It might talk about the wonderful, seemingly magical trinkets that they brought with them and how, soon after, the original inhabitants were able to exchange furs for the newcomers’ treasures.
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This second story might start to explain how at some point, the deals stopped seeming so wonderful, how the original peoples started to feel cheated, or even how some of the ‘gifts’ turned out not to be gifts at all. It might tell of how they began to feel that they had lost their ability to control their own destinies as the newcomers encroached upon their territories and upon their beliefs and traditions. The most horrific part of this story would not be of battles and bloodshed but of how, eventually, the original inhabitants of this land had their children taken away from them. The story, well told, would throw the listener into the confusion and horror of families ripped apart in the name of education.

To be convincing this story would largely ignore the happier parts of the story where men and women from either side fell in love, or how small groups of the original inhabitants enjoyed the richness of their own communities coupled with an exciting education among the newcomers. A good story needs some conflict, after all.

A third story, my feminist friends might suggest, would be her story, not his story. A fourth might be the story of a child, a three hundredth the story of an Aboriginal family murdered intentionally with blankets carrying smallpox, a seven thousandth story might tell that of the Aboriginal woman who was shipped to Europe where she prospered and thrived. The stories, I have come to realize, all have something in common. They are all true. But they are not a complete truth.

By now, those not used to storytelling are wondering when I will get to the point, though it has already been hinted at. The first story has been the dominant story told in print and in schools for the last several centuries. Its authority was reinforced by the medium of print, and by the authority of the storytellers themselves. Let’s call a bunch of
them “teachers” and let’s assume that young people are put in their care and told to listen. King (2003) suggests that its acceptance as the story was even encouraged through the language used in its telling, one that wasn’t full of those crazy talking animals and magic and laughter.

The effect of this first story’s dominance has been catastrophic for Canada’s First Peoples. It has contributed to a people who have been continuously politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised. In Canada and in the province where this study takes place, Aboriginal people are grossly overrepresented in prisons and in statistics on poverty and poor health (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1999). They are grossly underrepresented in political stations, in leadership positions and in employment sectors deemed desirable by the majority. Aboriginal children, when compared to others, are struggling to succeed in a public school system that, for a very long time, ignored the value of their contribution and made them feel worthless. The consequence, Cajete (1994) writes, is that “…many of the brightest and most creative Indian students continue to be alienated from modern education and drift about in a malaise of apathy and self-abuse” (p. 187). Many have been disconnected from the languages, cultures and even the communities of those who share their ancestry.

Thankfully, the dominant story (the story of the group that I have always been a part of) has begun to evolve. Somewhere along the way, not long ago, we started to listen to Canada’s original inhabitants. The injustice they spoke of began to be the target of our righteous indignation.

With yet another nod to Thomas King for articulating it in a way that I can understand, we have been given a new story. We can do with it what we please. Tell it
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to others, make it into a television movie, or forget it. What we can’t do is say in years to
come that we would have acted differently if only we had heard that story. We’ve heard
it now.

Background: On the Impact of the Story, Heard

Reactions to the story that was ignored for so long varied, as reactions to
distressing stories that threaten the dominant hegemony are wont to do. Thankfully, the
reactions that perhaps mattered most to a future that more fairly shares the human story in
Canada was that of political and educational leaders. In that regard, there are certainly
reasons for optimism. When one considers that there were Aboriginal children at
federally funded residential schools as late as 1996, it is remarkable how much progress
has been made in that world labelled “Aboriginal Education in Canada”.

Residential schools no longer exist, and a public apology for the horrors that
occurred in many of the schools was delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in June
of 2008, 22 years after that of the United Church of Canada’s (Canadian Broadcasting
Corporation, 2008). Optimistically, that official apology signals a nationwide
acknowledgement that the first dominant story of Canada’s history is no longer the
juggernaut that it once was. The public statement affirms that Canada recognizes the
wrongs done to its first peoples, and that it accepts the responsibility of trying to make
things better not only for a more just present, but to make amends for a very unjust past.

These reasons for optimism may be impeded, unfortunately, by the surviving
legacy of the past. The Indian Act, for example, retains its status as the document
guiding the decisions of legal institutions where Aboriginal people are concerned, and it
still allows Canada’s government to decide where ‘Indian’ children go to school,
irrespective of their parents’ wishes (Mendelson, 2008). Over 500 on-reserve schools lag
seriously behind their off-reserve counterparts when measured by today’s dominant kinds
of academic success coupled with the future prospects of their students. Even those who
live on reserves but attend public schools remain funded by the federal government.
Though the discrepancies vary by region, there are indications that most Aboriginal
students living on reserves are funded at a rate significantly lower than the average
amount spent per student in public schools across the nation (Levin, 2009; Laboucane,
2010) when in fact the challenges of their environments might logically lead us to believe
that they should be funded more.

On a smaller scale, remarkable efforts of the past couple of decades in particular
make evident that each of Canada’s provinces has also taken on the task of improving
Aboriginal education. A current visit to the Manitoba Education homepage, for example,
will reveal an entire portion of the site dedicated to Aboriginal education. There are new
curriculum portals, links to any and every sort of media, lesson plans, results of studies
on Aboriginal education, employment information pages, and more. While many still
find reasons to criticize the government’s projects, information found on the site alone is
impressive in its scope, particularly when one considers that none of it existed such a
short time ago.

Delegating the responsibility of education ever more widely, the demands of the
province’s educational ministry are carried out by local school divisions. Despite the
government’s efforts, statistics paint a bleak picture of the Aboriginal reality in the City
of Cedar Hill. Demographic data indicates a steadily growing Aboriginal population. In
areas of the Buffalo Stone School Division, Aboriginal children may make up almost a
third of all students, and demographic projections suggest that that percentage will only
increase in the coming decades. Unfortunately, the data also suggest that a
disproportionate number of these students suffer in poverty, and that an unfortunately
small percentage of them will ever graduate. Still, whether federally, provincially or
municipally, abnormally low graduation rates are steadily increasing and one cannot
ignore the difference in efforts to increase the justice and benefits of Aboriginal
education when compared to the situation of so few years ago.

The Buffalo Stone School Division, the largest in the city, provides an example of
what can happen when federal and provincial governments decide to address an issue
seriously and to implement important changes. The list of changes made in efforts to
include the Aboriginal story and to make right is impressive. Among a host of other
changes, an entire policy on Aboriginal Education was drawn up in collaboration with
Aboriginal communities. It was adopted in 1996 (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2005).
Dozens of employment positions designed to improve Aboriginal education now exist at
all levels of the Division’s organization. Aboriginal resource materials have been
acquired and even created. Professional development opportunities and funding for
teachers seeking to be part of the new story are relatively abundant. Two schools in the
Division use the delivery of Aboriginal perspectives and even languages as their guiding
principles. The Division regularly seeks the advice of community elders. Finally, despite
the fact that there are extremely few classrooms in the Division made up entirely of
Aboriginal children, teachers across the Division are required by policy to incorporate
Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms. In short, for the very first time the stories of
Canada’s Aboriginal peoples have been given institutional authority.
There is every reason to be optimistic that a school division putting this much effort into making a bad situation better is doing the right thing. The story is loose and it is being shared.

**On the Author’s Role in the Story**

Like so many teachers that I have spoken to, I believe that the efforts of governments and educational institutions are timely and essential. Like the teachers observed and interviewed by Kanu (2005) I, too, believe that Aboriginal perspectives need to be taught in public schools. I was and remain pleased to see the public acknowledgement of wrongs done. I nod my head and smile when reading school divisions’ Aboriginal education policies. I pump my fist when I find new classroom resources with helpful Aboriginal content. I choose professional development opportunities that focus on Aboriginal education. And then I stand in front of my students, or sit with them in a circle, or walk with them outside, and introspect about just what it is that I am doing, and wonder and doubt whether I am doing anything at all of value. I do not think that I am alone.

I believe that the legacy of the past still interferes with teachers’ good intentions. Kanu (2005) suggests that teachers attempting to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms face a number of challenges, including: 1) their own lack of cultural knowledge; 2) the racist attitudes brought into schools by educators and students; 3) insufficient support from administrators; 4) incompatibility between school structures and Aboriginal values; and 5) a fundamental lack of appropriate resources. Deer (personal communication, July 12, 2011) suggests that these challenges result in some degree of
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apprehension among teachers who are expected to include Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms.

The devil’s advocate in many of us (me?) might argue that apprehension is not always negative. It might push teachers to work harder to get to a place of comfort. In this case, if teachers are apprehensive about how little they know, then to alleviate that apprehension they may seek out the cultural knowledge and information that they need. If they suspect racist attitudes, perhaps they will challenge themselves to confront these while simultaneously challenging their administrators to support them and searching out amazing new resources. While they are at it, they will no doubt engage in spiritually enlightening conversations with their community’s Aboriginal elders, smudge regularly and plan units based on the teachings of Medicine Wheel models. They will get past the feeling of lacking authenticity despite their knowledge. Facetiousness aside, the description above describes the teacher that I would so often like to be; the teacher who is somehow living the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives, and not just going through some poorly understood motions.

That is the teacher that I fear that I often am. I am willing to accept some responsibility for that, but I also think that the old, dominant story needs to assume some blame. I was 22 years old and had almost completed a university degree when the Division drafted its Aboriginal Education Policy. I had never even heard of a residential school. I couldn’t identify one Aboriginal person in my public school yearbooks, and had certainly never been taught by one. The creation stories that I was most familiar with were that of Adam and Eve, and the one called Evolution.
When I started my Bachelor of Education degree several years later, that situation had only changed because of my own interest (not because of a systemic one), and the courses that I took geared at any sort of Aboriginal content or perspectives were electives that many of my peers never experienced. Presently, I regularly spend sleepless nights trying to figure out just what it is that I believe it means to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in my classes. I feel apprehensive about the task that my employers and my governments have assigned, and I wonder: Am I alone in this struggle, or do other teachers feel the same way?

The story loosed so long ago, for me, comes down to the moment that my students set foot into my classroom. I would like to feel that I have something to offer them. Though I am very open to discovering with them, I also want to feel comfortable guiding the journey. Ultimately, I want their experience at school to leave them more prepared to make a better world than the one we live in. I believe that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives has a major part to play in making that happen, even that its contributions to a student’s experience are what are missing in schools as a rule. But I also question whether I am even beginning to get it right, and I cannot believe that I am best serving my students if I am continually apprehensive about what I am doing in my classroom with them.

Purpose of the Study

Kanu’s research suggests that my feelings of discomfort are not unusual. She acknowledges the wealth of research on Aboriginal education, but also suggests that more research involving teachers is needed. This project is intended to address that need
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in the hope of contributing to a general awareness of teacher responses to the Aboriginal education initiatives created by their guiding institutions. Ultimately, regardless of how good a provincial plan or policy might be, it is teachers that bridge the gap between a great idea and its impact on students.

While it is important to understand how teachers of every subject area at every level are responding to the challenge of including Aboriginal perspectives, the scope of this inquiry is much more limited. It is restricted to teachers of Grade 10 English Language Arts (ELA) in the school division chosen for a number of reasons. First of all, my own experience with this subject and Grade level offers me a significant understanding of course objectives and expectations. The flexibility of the process-driven ELA curriculum potentially makes the integration of Aboriginal perspectives easier to deal with than in courses heavily guided by content. ELA curriculum documents legitimize enormous varieties of written, aural, oral and visual text, theoretically simplifying the process of gathering appropriate resources either produced by people of Aboriginal descent, or dealing with Aboriginal themes and perspectives. There are built-in expectations of covering thematic units on discrimination and human rights. The course appears to be one most open to the new challenge.

The relevance of the high school, or senior years, level is particularly important in trying to gain an understanding of why students drop out of school. Particularly, how do teachers perceive whether the integration of Aboriginal perspectives at this stage in their education is making a difference in the lives of students?
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Theoretical Framework

Given the current realities surrounding the integration of Aboriginal perspectives (its history, current initiatives and policies) and my own struggles with integration, I find myself spending a lot of time wondering about how other teachers perceive of this mandate to integrate. The conversations that I have had with other teachers have only further complicated my thinking, leading to a whole series of general questions about teacher perceptions:

- First and foremost, what does the integration or integration of Aboriginal perspectives mean to them and how does that affect their practice?
- Are their challenges the same as mine?
- Are they optimistic or pessimistic about the present and/or future of integration?
- What do they see as the opportunities inherent in the integration of Aboriginal perspectives?
- What do they see as working for them and what is working against them?
- How do they perceive that the integration affects their students?
- What do they perceive is the evidence of the impact of integration?

This paper will be based largely on the writing of Dr. Yatta Kanu, a professor and researcher at the University of Manitoba. Kanu’s 2005 paper addresses the perceptions of Manitoba teachers trying to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. That article, with additions from her newly released book, Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into the School Curriculum (2011) has helped me develop an initial framework for looking at teachers’ perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal perspectives (see Figure 1).
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This framework begins with the challenges (identified by Kanu) that are facing teachers trying to include Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms: 1) their own lack of cultural knowledge; 2) the racist attitudes brought into schools by educators and students; 3) insufficient support from administrators; 4) incompatibility between school structures and Aboriginal values; and 5) a fundamental lack of appropriate resources. Her work gets to the heart of very real, lived challenges facing teachers. I also wonder, however, about the successes that teachers are experiencing and about what they are seeing as opportunities as opposed to challenges.

Conversations with teachers and studying of the topic have led to my belief that there are many more factors affecting how individual teachers perceive of and respond to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. In addition to the challenges identified by Kanu, teacher experience and professional preparation (both pre-service and in-service) seem to be key factors in how teachers respond to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. As well, school demographics seem to play an important role in influencing teachers’ perceptions. Finally, personal and contextual racism may be added to the systemic racism already included.

Figure 1 (Appendix A) is an effort to represent my developing understanding of the many factors affecting the perceptions of Grade 10 ELA teachers in the Buffalo Stone School Division. It makes sense to me to group the five aforementioned challenges (identified in the diagram by a ‘K’) and the additional considerations into 3 ‘dimensions’ of teacher realities.

The first level, what I call the “Personal” dimension, of the graphic encompasses the other dimensions to allow the individual agency of any teacher to play the most
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An important role in determining their perceptions. A person’s life experience informs their belief systems. Positive or negative, a person’s experiences with Aboriginal peoples (or their lack thereof) will certainly impact their sentiments about Aboriginal perspectives and their integration into their classrooms.

The experiences of teacher preparation also vary greatly on a personal level, as ranks of teachers are drawn from countless disciplines and university settings. Leavitt (1994) suggests that listening to Aboriginal elders tell stories be part of non-Aboriginal teacher preparation, but this certainly does not fall into any current certification requirements. Recent graduates of teacher education programs in the province have had to complete coursework in Aboriginal Education, whereas those who more than four years ago did not, potentially a response to what Baker (2008) suggests was an inherent lack of Indigenous resources and scholars at modern universities. Recent graduates are more likely to have been taught by Aboriginal professors. Interestingly, even this effort on the part of certifying institutions may be criticized. LaDuke (2009) warns: “...when viewing teacher education as a curriculum, this is a form of the "add in" approach that multicultural educators warn against”.

In teaching, personal experiences also play key roles in determining an individual’s response to a directive to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. Again, idiosyncratic experiences with students and/or course materials may work to shape a person’s beliefs, their willingness to engage in something different, or even in their levels of tolerance, acceptance or celebration of diverse perspectives.
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The lack of cultural knowledge identified by Kanu is situated in the personal because it is often a personal feeling of inadequacy or doubt expressed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers in Kanu’s study.

Ultimately, individual classroom teachers are going to have individual reactions and responses to any directives from many different levels of administration, and will react and respond individually to contextual realities. While one teacher may, for example, adopt Aboriginal perspectives as a ‘passion’ or area of interest, another may simply tolerate it as a ‘requirement’.

The second level, what I call the “Contextual” dimension, will refer here to the realities unique to a teacher’s classroom and/or school. Kanu’s identified challenge of ‘lukewarm administrative support’ is situated here because administrative support (i.e. from principals and superintendents) for teachers varies incredibly from school to school, from district to district, division to division.

I have also situated Kanu’s identified “lack of resources” in this dimension as resource availability often varies greatly from school to school and because resource ordering is accomplished largely at a school level (at least in the Division). It falls within the larger dimension of the personal since the lack of resources is often mitigated by the personal resourcefulness of individual teachers who use their private collections, who make personal commitments to collecting and accessing resources not already in the school, who apply outside of the school for resource grants, etc.

School demographics are situated in the contextual because they may influence and inform teachers’ perceptions about the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. The 100% Aboriginal population at one of the Division’s schools is sure to influence a teacher’s
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perceptions about including Aboriginal perspectives differently than the sparse (less than 5% Aboriginal) populations of other schools in the division. It may even be the case that teachers perceive a need for the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in one context but not in another.

Other contextual factors which may fit under school demographics may include the composition of the Parent Advisory Council (who may, interestingly, fundraise to provide resources), the involvement of Aboriginal parents or elders in school activities, and other (either Aboriginal or more experienced) staff members. However, yet again, different individual teachers will respond to each of these factors in their own way, highlighting the importance of the personal dimension to the overall graphic.

The third level, what I call the “Institutional” dimension, describes those aspects of education shared across the division, province and/or nation (i.e. the structures and decisions that are beyond the control of a classroom teacher or school administrator). They include, but are not limited to: policies adopted by school divisions; per-student funding provided by either school divisions, provinces or the federal government; curricula set forth by the province; teacher certification requirements (provincial); assessment, and reporting practices.

Situated here are also two of the challenges identified by Kanu (incompatibility of structures and cultural values or norms and systemic racism). All of these institutional challenges are real. They ultimately mandate, for all teachers, a host of requirements for teachers both before and after they step foot in a classroom. However, personal understandings of, and responses to, institutional initiatives/policies/directives will yield different perceptions at a classroom level.
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In each of the dimensions I have included bullets indicating ‘other’ factors that I may not have considered.

Figure 1 has been used to formulate the questions that I asked of the study’s participants (see Appendix A), and as a lens through which to organize interpret their responses to those questions.

In this case, I will focus on the factors affecting teachers’ perceptions as they apply to Grade 10 English Language Arts in Buffalo Stone School Division. They are teachers who work in a school division that seems to encourage and support their efforts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives, including course-specific professional development.

The study attempts to further my own and a collective understanding of how any of the challenges may have changed in the six years since Kanu’s paper was published. It attempts to share what teachers perceive of as successes or reasons for optimism. It also tries to establish how today’s teachers perceive challenges, opportunities and new initiatives affecting both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in their school division.

Significance of the Study

A lengthy historical process has left today’s schools struggling to serve the needs of a growing Aboriginal population. Encouragingly, educators today at every level are working in conjunction with Aboriginal communities to improve our systems of education for Aboriginal students. Fundamentally, it is at a classroom level, through the action of teachers that any of these efforts reach students.

In this division, part of that project is to mandate the integration of Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. In the case of Grade 10 English Language Arts,
teachers have undergone at least some professional preparation specific to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives.

It is up to teachers to bring integration to life, yet surprisingly little research has been dedicated to teachers’ perceptions of that integration. The significance of this study is to contribute to a relative dearth of research on teachers’ perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives.

**Limitations of the Study**

**Sample.** I acknowledge the many limitations of this type of research, and accept the inability to generalize the perceptions of the teachers that I interviewed to all of the Division’s teachers. Nevertheless, I would argue that there is value in hearing their stories regardless of the generalizability of the findings. As Myers (2000) suggests; “The mission of qualitative research, as I understand it, is to discover meaning and understanding, rather than to verify truth or predict outcomes” (para. 16). Meaning gleaned from this study is intended to assist me and educational institutions to continue to improve the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in ELA classrooms.

As already acknowledged, the generalizability of the findings is limited. Since the study involves such a small sample, it simply does not make sense to claim that my findings are true of any group of teachers. The research is limited to a very small population of teachers who teach one subject area in one Western Canadian city. There may be very little validity in attempting to extend its implications beyond that specific population.

Furthermore, the study also faces challenges in its very nature and in the level of willingness of its participants. One limitation may be the hesitation of professionals to
admit the discomfort that they may feel while performing a task that they are expected to perform with some proficiency. The honesty, or rather dishonesty, of the participants may be problematic if they do not freely share their actual feelings. This might be understood by reluctance to be perceived as racist and/or culturally insensitive, given the nature of culturally sensitive questions: “...interview data may be deceptive and provide the perspective the interviewee wants the researcher to hear...the presence of the researcher may affect how the interviewee responds” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218).

As participation in the interviews occurred on a strictly voluntary basis, it became evident that all of the teachers who did volunteer to participate are among a group of teachers who fully support the division mandate. Each participant suggested a personal connection to the topic that probably exceeds the expectations of the division. Their comments regarding their observations of other teachers in the division suggest that each of the participants has dedicated themselves to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in a way that is exceptional, rather than the rule, among Grade 10 English Language Arts teachers. Still, as Myers suggests, generalizability is not the point of this qualitative research. If, as I suggest, teaching relies heavily on the individual nature, interests, and talents of each teacher, then the story of each becomes meaningful and significant in and of itself.

Finally, when considering the sample of teachers, it should not be overlooked that no teachers who expressed negativity about integration in the English classroom chose to volunteer. Despite the suggestion by the actual participants that many teachers disapprove of the mandate, none were part of this study, and it is unsurprising that they are less willing to participate than those who feel positively. Given the nature of the
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study, it is likely that those teachers may be apprehensive about being perceived of as not supporting division policy, or worse, being perceived of as racist. The sad reality is that disapproval of integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the English classroom may be interpreted as disapproval of Aboriginal peoples and/or topics.

Results. The project is limited in its usefulness as it seeks only to identify, not to propose action. While individual participants did identify changes that they deem worthy, and while I will suggest possible courses of future action for both teachers and/or policymakers, the aforementioned lack of generalizability detracts from the possibility of using my findings to justify significant changes at the school or Division level.

Data collection may be limited by the personal biases of the researcher, although every effort has been made to objectify data analysis. The researcher’s lack of experience may be limiting, and is perhaps further impeded by the fundamental lack of research on teacher perceptions in education acknowledged by both Kanu (2005) and Zurzolo (2010).

Finally, a host of limitations exist as a result of cultural questions, sensitivities and/or biases. As a non-Aboriginal person and product of a post-colonial education system, the researcher himself brings certain cultural baggage in the skin of the (former?) oppressor. He may or may not lack the understanding/cultural sensitivity that an Aboriginal researcher might alternatively bring. As an analytical project, in a very Eurocentric discipline, the project itself may lack a more traditionally Aboriginal narrative that it requires to get at some of the surrounding issues. For example, the analysis will use neither the six dimensions of the medicine wheel model (Hampton, 1983) that dominates the Aboriginal narrative, nor analyze the mandate using Cajete’s
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(1994) Indigenous Stages of Developmental Learning. In short, it may be a study about integrating Aboriginal perspectives that regrettably falls very short of integrating Aboriginal perspectives.

Assumptions

It was assumed that each of the participants is aware of the mandate to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into their Grade 10 ELA classrooms in the Division. Since it is described as mandatory, it was further assumed that the teachers have all attended the Division’s professional development workshop focusing on Aboriginal perspectives.

Definition of Terms

The terms used to describe the peoples involved in this study are recognized as evolving placeholders that may never adequately represent their subjects. Since the context of the study is the large urban school division in Western Canada, their definitions will be used where possible. Other terms have been adopted from what I feel are reasonable sources given the nature of the study.

- “Aboriginal is defined as First Nation, Inuit or Metis who are descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada” (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2005, p. 1).

- “First Nations

  o …describes both Status and Non-Status Indian people. Many Indian people have also adopted the term First Nation to replace band in the name of their community (Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, 2011).
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- “First Nations is a term chosen and defined by the Assembly of First Nations, which is a geopolitical, spiritual, voluntary “national” organization, established in 1980, as representative of persons of First Nations ancestry. Not all First Nations accept the authority of this assembly. Nor do all Status Indians believe the Assembly of First Nations to be representative of themselves as membership in this Assembly is not compulsory” (Calliou, 1998).

- “Inuit are those people who identify as Inuit and are accepted by an Inuit community as Inuit” (Chartrand, Chartrand & McKay, 2006, p. 9).

- “Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation” (Métis National Council, 2002).

- “Non-status Indian refers to an Indian person who is not registered under the Indian Act. This may be because his or her ancestors were never registered, or because he or she lost status under former provisions of the Indian Act” (Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, 2011).

- “Registered or Status Indian refers to a person who is registered under the Indian Act of Canada” (Manitoba Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, 2011).

Overview of the Study

In Chapter 1, I have tried to tell the story of how Europeans arriving in North America in boats has ultimately led me to question the perceptions of Grade 10 English teachers in a large Western Canadian school division. I have addressed the history and
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the evolution of the education of darker-skinned children by those with lighter skin. I have tried to paint a picture of the legacy of that injustice, and of growing efforts to make it right.

The unifying theme has been a population of children described by grossly inadequate words: Indigenous, Indian, Aboriginal. They are words sometimes used to describe the residents of this continent when European ships arrived. The last is now widely used as a label for all of the others who were spread across the over nine million square kilometres of land now known as Canada. And all of their descendants. The word insultingly ignores their tremendous diversity. However, as a storyteller in a time of a huge transition in how the ‘Aboriginal’ story is told in Canada, it seems to be the best word that I have at my disposal, and it is the word attached to the policies that affect my job as a classroom teacher.

Teachers in the city’s schools today have been charged with integrating Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms, a project that I believe attempts to isolate and teach students about the commonalities between the diverse populations of Canada’s first peoples.

It is important to understand that a major part of this country’s efforts to right the wrongs of the past rests with teachers. As such, it is important to deepen our understanding of how these teachers are faring in their monumental task; the very thing that this project seeks to accomplish.

The final part of Chapter 1 has attempted to describe a theoretical framework, a lens through which to study the very complicated realities that teachers face when trying to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms.
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The first part of Chapter 2 encompasses a review of literature in support of the concepts covered in the story of Chapter 1. A regrettably brief, documented evolution of the history of Aboriginal education in Canada is followed by research that paints a picture of its legacy: the current reality for Aboriginal people, particularly students, in Canada and in one of its large urban centres. That reality sets the tone for proposed objectives on the part of a host of institutions to improve the situation, including a more comprehensive examination of the initiatives adopted by governments and school boards.

The second part of Chapter 2 reviews the literature about the tasks assigned to teachers. It draws heavily on Dr. Kanu’s research into the challenges facing the teachers integrating Aboriginal perspectives and on the other aspects covered in the theoretical framework represented by Fig. 1. It will furthermore investigate the possible challenges proposed by educational change theories, including teacher resistance to change in general. After all, swapping a whopper of a story 500 years old for one only told for a few decades old is no small task.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the inquiry. It expands on the reasons and justifications for the participant selection process, as well as reviewing the ethics review boards’ procedures to ensure the protection of the participants. This chapter also includes an examination of academic literature on the advantages, processes and challenges of the qualitative research methods that will be used in the study.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the findings, and explains how the participants’ responses were organized into recurring themes. Most importantly it attempts to determine whether teachers feel as if their efforts are yielding the desired impact on Aboriginal and/or non-Aboriginal students.
Chapter 5 attempts to make sense of the findings and to draw some conclusions about Grade 10 ELA teachers’ perceptions about incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms. Suggestions for practice and further study are included.
“The public education system has largely failed to meet the needs of First Nations children. In spite of notable exceptions, and the good will of many educators, the overall pattern remains discouraging” (Postl, 2005).

CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Evolution of Aboriginal Education in Canada

The history of Aboriginal education in Canada is long and complicated. It is impossible to begin its discussion without the acknowledgement that it has been happening in the land that is now Canada for far longer than any other kind of education has. The transmission of knowledge among Aboriginal peoples was largely oral and social, and because of its difference from more traditionally European approaches to education, Aboriginal ways of knowing did not, until more recently, receive the recognition that they are due. Of the differences, Gamlin (2003) writes:

Traditional knowledge on thinking and problem-solving goes well beyond mainstream efforts to measure isolated parts of cognitive information processes. It goes beyond mainstream notions of intelligence as being fast, analytic, and without social and moral dimensions. Onkwehón:we\(^1\) traditional knowledge about thinking provides a wholistic account of a thinking process, a process that is governed not only by rational dimensions, but also by social, spiritual, and moral dimensions (p.18).

\(^1\) Commonly known as Iroquois or the Six Nations
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Atleo’s (2009) work with Nuu-chah-nulth Elders in British Columbia provides another example of how the very ideologies guiding educational practices differ between Aboriginal and European societies. She examines what she dubs Aboriginal themes of learning including prenatal care, grandparents' teachings and care, oosumch (the discipline of Nuu-chah-nulth spiritual bathing in sacred sites), and the use of ancestor names. Canada’s public schools rarely, if ever, consider these types of themes beyond perhaps as topics of content in Social Studies classes. The social, moral and spiritual dimensions that each author addresses are the same as those that will emerge as central to current-day projects in Aboriginal education.

Accounts of the education of Aboriginal peoples pre-contact depend largely on oral histories and archaeological evidence of what their societies may have looked like:

There was much variety in cultures, means of subsistence, tribal laws and customs, and philosophies of trade and intertribal relations in pre-contact Canada… The one characteristic virtually all the groups in pre-contact Canada shared was that they were self-governing and politically independent (Guisepi, 2002, para. 2).

Further to these forms of organization, Battiste (1995) suggests that even Aboriginal literacy was well-established before European contact through the use of pictographs, petroglyphs, notched sticks, and wampums (p. vii). Still, the European settlers soon began to take the education of Aboriginal children upon themselves.
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Two considerations of this topic are important to this discussion. First of all, Aboriginal people spoke and wrote and educated their children and thrived in North America before the arrival of Europeans. The second is the recognition that European settlers soon disrupted a thriving and vibrant education ‘system’ when they first embarked on the project of having Europeans educating Aboriginal children. Aboriginal education, in the minds of those of European descent, became what it would remain for centuries: the education of Aboriginal children by people who were not Aboriginal.

The first records of settlers so engaged indicates that as early as 1605, French settlers planned on the assimilation of these children, beginning, as might be expected, with their planned conversion to Christianity (Doig, 2001). Community-specific schools and work camps continued to operate under church guidance until more schools began to appear in Ontario in the late 18th century. A significant increase in the number of schools operating occurred in the 1830s. Day schools were exchanged for boarding schools, where attendance was more easily controlled (Trevithick, 1998, p.50). The manual labour camps and schools sought to “civilize” Aboriginal children. They theorized that the children, upon graduation, could return to their reserves not only ready to interact socially and economically with “Whites” in the area of their reserves, but also to act as catalysts for civilizing change within their reserve populations (Milloy, 1999, p.17). When the camps and schools failed to produce the desired results, the settlers added politics to their strategies for civilization.

The latter part of the 19th century in Canada was characterized by a number of acts passed by settler groups and by ongoing treaty processes between Aboriginal and European settler groups. In 1857, the (Imperial) Department of Indian Affairs introduced
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the Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in the Province.

Where schools had failed to produce tangible changes in reserve populations, Milloy (1999, p. 18) suggests that the Act was instituted to “circumvent” the tribal positions on reserve land. Put another way, since it was believed that the processes of civilization were at odds with reserve life, it sought to undermine and/or sever the connections that individual Aboriginal people had with their reserves by offering them land outside of the reserves. Aboriginal males deemed to be adequately educated, free from debt and of good character could acquire fifty acres of land off-reserve if they relinquished their tribal affiliation, including the property and/or economic rights attached to their status as reserve Indians. Despite continued resistance from Aboriginal leaders, who saw the Act for what it was, the provisions were re-introduced twelve years later, in 1869. Now under a federal umbrella, they became known as the Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians (Milloy, 1999, pp. 19-20).

In other political moves, as early as Treaty 1 of 1871, the Crown had agreed to its provision of education and the fiduciary responsibility attached to it (Carr-Stewart, 2001). Interestingly, the first treaties agreed to the provision of education when Aboriginal populations on reserves requested it. By the time Treaty 3 was introduced in 1873, the language had already been changed to give “Canada” the right to the decision whether or not to provide it. 1877’s Treaty 7 again changed the wording and expectations, perhaps of both parties. It provided that Canada would pay teachers’ salaries but did not mention schools or education as broadly as earlier treaties.

Carr-Stewart’s (2001) interviews with Aboriginal elders suggest that the entire Treaty process was flawed because of fundamental differences between how each ‘side’
understood Treaty items. She proposes that the Aboriginal signatories believed in education as a life-long process guaranteed by the Crown, something elders believed would allow their peoples to recover from the loss of lands and traditional ways of living: “The missionaries taught everyone [adults and children]; that is what our People understood formal education to be” (p. 233).”, and elsewhere: “Our ancestors taught their children how to hunt, snare... [which] were our traditional means of survival. Our [means of] survival were taken away from us and the government promised us education for future success.”

Beyond the treaties, Confederation, in 1867, was instrumental in creating an educational reality whose legacy is still felt today. Though it was widely agreed in Britain and its colonies that the education of children was an important right, divergent systems were established. The establishment of “Canada” allowed an organized government to implement policies that would have disastrous consequences for Aboriginal peoples. Canada’s federal government was made responsible for the education of “Status Indian” children (those from Treaty-signing groups) while responsibility for the education of other Canadian children, including non-status Indians, Métis and Inuit children, fell to the provinces (Virag, 2005). The British North America Act of 1867 further increased federal domination over a huge segment of Canada’s Aboriginal children:

[The] Act made all Indians wards of the state, treating them as though they were unruly children, and under the 1876 and 1880 Indian Acts "Indian self-government was abolished, and finance and all social services, including
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education, were placed under federal control (Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1986, pp. 4-5).

The Indian Act of 1876 was enormous in scope. It gave unprecedented control to the government to determine the affairs of Aboriginal peoples:

This authority has ranged from overarching political control, such as imposing governing structures on Aboriginal communities in the form of band councils, to control over the rights of Indians to practice their culture and traditions…[it] enabled the government to determine the land base of these groups in the form of reserves, and even to define who qualifies as Indian in the form of Indian status (First Nations Studies Program, University of British Columbia, 2009a).

The combination of these political acts and several lived realities in Canada created the conditions that facilitated the government’s next move. Loss of traditional forms of living was experienced by many nations. Trevithick (1998) indicates the disappearance of the buffalo herds, for example, leaving elevated numbers of Aboriginal peoples left in the care of the government (p. 50), setting the stage for upheaval among Aboriginal populations. The Treaties, the BNA Act and the Indian Act of 1876 allowed the introduction of what is today probably the most commonly-known educational experience for Canadian Aboriginal children over the last one hundred and fifty years. The Acts gave the government’s Department of Indian Affairs the ability to establish boarding facilities to house Aboriginal children:

Preference was given to creation of large industrial residential schools located away from reserves, and, later, of day schools for young children.
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that were located near reserves. "There, attendance would be ensured, and all aspects of life, from dress to use of English language to behaviour, would be carefully regulated. Curriculum was to be limited to basic education combined with half-day practical training in agriculture, the crafts, or household duties in order to prepare pupils for their expected future existence on the lower fringes of the dominant society" (Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1986, p.6)

The 1870s and 1880s saw the establishment of many of the now infamous boarding or residential schools (Kirkness, 1995, p.30). The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC)’s (2008) “A History of Residential Schools in Canada” indicates that the schools considered children more easily ‘moulded’ than adults. Those that created them were convinced that boarding schools would best prepare the children for the settlers’ society. A project that the government called “aggressive assimilation” began, one more interested in somehow transforming Aboriginals into members of the dominant group, than in honouring their contributions (CBC News, 2008a). The legacy of the federally-run boarding schools is effectively described by Antone (2003):

For a century or more, the DIAND [Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development] attempted to destroy the diversity of Aboriginal world-views, cultures, and languages. It defined education as transforming the mind of Aboriginal youth rather than educating it. Through ill-conceived government policies and plans, Aboriginal youths were subjected to a combination of powerful but profoundly distracting forces of cognitive imperialism and colonization.
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Various boarding schools, industrial schools, day schools, and Eurocentric educational practices ignored or rejected the world-views, languages and values of Aboriginal parents in the education of their children. The outcome was the gradual loss of these world-views, languages, and cultures and the creation of widespread social and psychological upheaval in Aboriginal communities (p. 4).

The proliferation of residential schools was extensive. In 1930, the system peaked with 80 schools in operation, and estimates put the total number of children affected at over 150,000 (CBC News, 2008a). Statistics Canada’s (2001b) webpage section “Residential Schools” concludes the following about them:

The system has contributed to a loss of language and culture among Aboriginal people, as a key objective of the residential school system was the assimilation of Aboriginal children…The negative effects of these schools have, in many cases, been passed from one generation to the next. As a result, even though the residential school system no longer exists, an intergenerational legacy remains, affecting many Aboriginal people and their communities (Aboriginal Healing Foundation 2002; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996a, paras. 27-28)

By the middle of the twentieth century, it was already obvious to Canadians (including government officials) that the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples into the dominant culture via residential schools was failing. One result was a new strategy of assimilation. The Sixties’ Scoop was a period of history characterized by “drastic overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child welfare system…when Aboriginal
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children were seized and taken from their homes and placed, in most cases, into middle-class Euro-Canadian families” (First Nations Studies Program, University of British Columbia, 2009b). This phenomenon, however, did not replace the residential school program.

In 1963, the Government of Canada commissioned a report called *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies*. More commonly referred to as *The Hawthorn Report*, after its author, the paper officially documented the inequalities between Canada’s Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. He reported that Aboriginal people were Canada’s most marginalized group, labeling them “citizens minus”, i.e. minus the rights and privileges enjoyed by most Canadians. He officially attributed this reality to the failures of federal government policies and slammed the residential school system, which he recommended ending (First Nations Studies Program, University of British Columbia, 2009c).

The federal government responded to the report with years of consultation. In 1969, despite the inclusion of Aboriginal peoples in their discussions, the result was *the Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*. More commonly known as *The White Paper*, the proposal was widely denounced by Canada’s Aboriginal peoples: “In effect, it advocated abolishing the legal rights of Indians, scrapping the reserves system, unilaterally abrogating the treaties with Indians, and removing any special rights Aboriginal people might have derived from specific legislation such as the *Indian Act*” (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1999).

It is interesting to consider how the paper was received by different groups. The federal government’s statement from the time suggest that they believed that the White
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Paper was providing Aboriginal peoples with an opportunity to achieve equality with other Canadians: “The Government believes that its policies must lead to the full, free and nondiscriminatory participation of the Indian people in Canadian society” (Government of Canada, 1969, Foreword). Aboriginal groups, however, saw the proposals put forth by the government as a kind of final project of assimilation, ultimately destroying their unique cultural identities and negating the treaties. Harold Cardinal, for example, a 24-year-old Cree man who headed the Indian Association of Alberta, called the paper “a thinly disguised programme of extermination through assimilation”. The association produced their official response, the Red Paper (or Citizens Plus) in 1970. It claimed: “There is nothing more important than our treaties, our lands and the well-being of our future generations” (First Nations Studies Program, University of British Columbia, 2009c).

The White Paper was ultimately rejected and it took the Government of Canada almost four more decades to finally put an end to residential schools. The year that the last school closed coincided with the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, released in 1996. That extensive document commissioned by the Government of Canada did much of what Hawthorn’s report of 1969 had done, this time studying the evolution of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples, the Canadian government and Canadian society. Its recommendations led to Gathering Strength: Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan in 1998, which began with a statement of reconciliation and an acknowledgement of the government’s culpability in the residential school system (Milloy, 1999, p. 304). Gathering Strength is listed among “key milestones” on
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Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada’s website, and is arguably the first on their list wherein healing from the legacy of residential schools is primary.

At the heart of healing is education. The legacy of over a century of turmoil is still affecting Canadian students today. It ultimately guides modern government policies, institutional conversations and classroom planning where Aboriginal education is involved. It is a major part of why the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is mandated, and why this study exists.

Statistics to Encourage Change

The CBC News (2008b) reports that the federally-funded, Anglican Church run Gordon Residential School, last of hundreds across Canada, closed its doors in 1996 amidst allegations of ongoing abuse. It was during the same year that the Buffalo Stone School Division adopted its Aboriginal Education Policy. And though the 2011 realities of Cedar Hill’s Aboriginal population are very different from the realities of residential school survivors or the population of just a generation ago, the numbers paint a bleak picture.

Many quantifiable realities indicate why study in the domain of Aboriginal education is particularly timely. Statistics Canada census data indicates that in 2006, 23% of Manitoba’s children were Aboriginal (CBC, 2008). Currently, there are approximately 23,000 on-reserve First Nations students funded by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). Of these, approximately 17,500 students attend schools on reserve at 57 band-operated elementary and secondary level schools. Levin (2009) remarks that on-reserve schools receive less per-student funding than the levels of most
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provinces despite greater needs (p. 690). Former Prime Minister Paul Martin (2011) argues that these schools are funded at a level 20-30% lower than provincially-funded schools. The effects of underfunding are well-documented and obvious across the country.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996b) sums up the issue simply: Mendelson (2008) notes the 2006 Census data that approximately 60 percent of First Nations on-reserve residents aged 20 to 24 still have not completed high school or obtained an alternative diploma or certificate. Approximately 5,500 Aboriginal students who live on reserves attend private or provincial schools off reserve (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2010). They are ultimately the on-reserve students most directly connected to this small exploration of teachers’ perceptions in public schools. Mostly, it is the urban population of Aboriginal children (those attending public schools) that will feel the impact of provincial and divisional initiatives.

According to the 2006 Census, roughly 10% of Cedar Hill’s population is Aboriginal, and 40% of this population is under the age of 19 (Statistics Canada, 2001). Just over a quarter of the Aboriginal population over the age of 15 in the city have a high school diploma or equivalent, and only 8% were likely to have a university degree, compared to a likelihood of 23% among non-Aboriginals (Statistics Canada, 2006). The City of Cedar Hill has the most numerous urban population of Aboriginal peoples in all of Canada (CBC News, 2008b), yet also has one of the lowest percentages of Aboriginal youth who graduate from high school (Silver, et al., 2002).

If high school graduation and/or retention rates are to be the standards by which success is measured, then Aboriginal education policies must also be a response to the
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educational realities indicated among all of Canada’s, and Manitoba’s, Aboriginal students. Levin (2009) explains that in 2006, close to 40% of Aboriginal people in Canada had not finished high school, a percentage almost twice that of the overall population (p. 689). Like in British Columbia, where Richards and Vining (2004) suggest that less than half of the Aboriginal students entering Grade 8 achieve a high school graduation certificate within six years, the numerical indicators of success among Manitoba’s Aboriginal learners is abysmally low. 12.4% of Cedar Hill’s Aboriginal youth aged 15-29 have less than a Grade 9 education, often considered a benchmark of functional literacy. By contrast, only 1.9% of the non-Aboriginal population in the same age group have not completed Grade 9 (Government of Manitoba, 2000). Reports based on 1996 Census data suggest that just under 20% of non-Aboriginal youth (18-24) in Cedar Hill did not have a high school diploma. Among Aboriginal youth (18-24) in Cedar Hill, approximately 50% did not have a high school diploma (Lebuski, 1999 as cited in Silver et al. 2002).

At all levels, the education system in Manitoba is trying to improve the success of today’s Aboriginal learners. However, efforts to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students are not limited to those currently populating its schools. The future success of Aboriginal learners is also particularly important when considering the growth of the Aboriginal population and planning for projected demographic realities in the city. The CBC reported that: “The growth of the city's Aboriginal population — defined as those who said they were Indian, Métis or Inuit — has been dramatic in recent years, growing by 22 per cent over five years, compared with only one per cent for non-Aboriginal Cedar Hillers” (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2007/2008). 28 per cent of
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the families with school age children living within the boundaries of the Buffalo Stone School Division are Aboriginal. Whether or not the numbers point to a growing need to engage in the education of Aboriginal children, the reality is simply that more and more of our students are going to be Aboriginal.

Small-Scale Considerations: The Buffalo Stone School Division

The current study may also begin to indicate a need to study the delivery of Aboriginal perspectives on still a smaller level than the Division itself. The demographic realities within the Buffalo Stone School Division vary enormously between the four districts and individual schools. The Division’s website indicates that in 2006, the estimated percentage of Aboriginal families with children at Henderson School in the District was 5.1%, compared to 100% at both Oakwood and Dogwood, both designated as Aboriginal schools. Of those not so designated, Gotham, in the same Inner City district as the Aboriginal schools, had the highest percent of estimated Aboriginal families with children at 72.3%. Of the 29 schools with an Aboriginal family average above 35%, more than half (15) were in District C, 9 were in District B and 5 were in District D. Of the 12 schools with Aboriginal family representation under 15%, 11 were in the District A, and the remaining one in the north. Only Duke Ellington School (21.9%) and Market School (28.0%) had above 20% Aboriginal families in District A.²

² My own experience may also prove useful in establishing the level of priority that the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives receives. At the school where I teach, discussions on the topic of Aboriginal education happen very informally. The division census indicates that less than 20% of the families at the school are Aboriginal, but it is very common to have entire Grade levels at the school with no self-identifying Aboriginal students (Only two students, both from the same family, at the school are actively engaged with an Aboriginal community outside of the school).

It is also not uncommon to find literature on professional development opportunities on Aboriginal education in teacher mailboxes and on the bulletin board in the staff room, but the school staff as a whole seldom engages in formal exploration of Aboriginal education issues. There is only ever one staff member
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Though the number of participants will limit the ability of the researcher to draw generalizable conclusions, it may prove interesting to explore the relationship between a teacher’s perceptions on incorporating Aboriginal perspectives and that teacher’s actual exposure to Aboriginal students.

A further worthwhile consideration is whether a division that recognized a need for Aboriginal schools to serve a segment of its population can claim that each of its many diverse communities address Aboriginal education in the same way. The structures designed to see the delivery of education to the communities in different schools allows principals and teachers to determine the best approach for the students in their buildings.

A brief look at the economic statistics of a few schools signals the very different realities that schools must address in different areas of the city. The “Median Incomes of Census Families with Children” at Henderson and Fraser Schools, in District A of BSSD, were $103,371 and $111,789, respectively, coinciding with unemployment rates of 2.2% and 1.9%. Gotham School, in the District C, had a corresponding income level of $24,968, and an unemployment rate of 15.9%. The same census showed that 71.2% of the parents of Henderson students were university educated, compared to 4.8% at Gotham. An estimated 72.3% of Gotham’s families are Aboriginal, compared to 5.4% at Henderson (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2007/2008). The census document published by the Division also includes the following passage:

The median family income for Aboriginal families with children under 18 living in the Division was $25,899, almost $11,000 less than the median

teaching Grade 10 ELA, who traditionally retains that assignment until leaving the school. The staffing realities of a small French milieu school suggest that no changes to that situation are foreseeable in the near future. The inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in any given curriculum, at this point in time, remains at the discretion and imperative of the individual classroom teachers.
family income for comparable families (Aboriginal with children under 18) living in the City as a whole ($36,876), and it was almost $24,000 less than the median family income for non-Aboriginal families with children under 18 living in the Division ($49,850).

The numbers show an enormous disparity within Buffalo Stone, and speak to the very different realities that the school division’s students face. Some schools have large numbers of Aboriginal students who come from homes that deal with lack of education, poverty and unemployment. Others have almost no Aboriginal students, nor students who deal with these societal issues. What might be effective for the students at Gotham may not work for those at Henderson, and vice versa, but the integration of Aboriginal perspectives can happen (and is expected to happen) at both.

A Response: Current Initiatives to Engage and Improve Aboriginal Education

Canada’s democratic system holds education in high regard. The underlying importance of the delivery of free public education is arguably centered on the very guiding principles of a society concerned with social welfare. When one considers the Aboriginal realities outlined earlier, it is not surprising that government initiatives to improve the situation are increasingly popular in education. They have become moral imperatives of great concern to the Canadians who value a social justice gravely lacking here.

Considering Canada’s massive size and low population density, control over the administration of educational systems is placed into the hands of provincial bodies in an effort to address the very diverse needs of Canadians. In Manitoba, for example, responsibility regarding the delivery of education lies with the Ministry of Citizenship,
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Education and Youth, but is further divided to better address the very diverse needs of Manitobans, as indicated in the Preamble to the Manitoba Public Schools Act:

AND WHEREAS the public schools must take into account the diverse needs and interests of the people of Manitoba; AND WHEREAS democratic local school divisions and districts play an important role in providing public education that is responsive to local needs and conditions;...

(Government of Manitoba, 2011).

As even school boards themselves are elected by voting constituents, Manitoba’s entire educational system is founded on the idea of its democratic connectedness with the peoples of Manitoba.

Increasingly, the people of Manitoba are Aboriginal. Increasingly, local needs and conditions are those of a largely Aboriginal population. As a result, school divisions across the province receive direction and encouragement from the provincial government to make Aboriginal education one of their top priorities; along with the other tabs linking visitors to sections like ‘Curriculum’ or ‘Assessment’ one can now visit an entire section of Manitoba Education’s website dedicated to Aboriginal Education (http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/abedu/) (Manitoba Education and Literacy, 2011).

Concurrently, a document entitled Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives Into Curricula: A Resource for Curriculum Developers, Teachers, and Administrators, is available, published by Manitoba Education and Youth in 2003. A new provincial document from 2010 encourages the sharing of student information between First Nations and provincial schools (Manitoba Education, 2010). Public schools must also act accordingly, and it
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should not be surprising that Aboriginal education is currently a topic of utmost importance for democratic school divisions across the western provinces.

Cedar Hill’s largest school division is no exception. At least at a divisional level, the administrative support for Aboriginal programming seems a far cry from what the teachers studied by Kanu refer to as “lukewarm”. Rather, the Division has a host of initiatives in place in their attempt to adequately address the growing demographic reality of the city. The Division’s “Fact Sheet on Aboriginal Education” provides a summary. As early as 1979, the Buffalo Stone School Division created an Aboriginal education consultant position, which has since expanded into an 8-member Aboriginal education team and 18 half-time Aboriginal school support worker positions. The Division has also developed curricular materials, teaching units and professional development opportunities for teachers. The Aboriginal Academic Achievement Initiative allows all Division schools to: “…support Aboriginal students and encourage understanding of Aboriginal culture by all students through the development of support documents, the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the curricula, opportunities for cultural activities and enhancing the involvement of parents/guardians” (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2010, p. 1). Fifteen schools have active programs designed to encourage and enhance the participation of Aboriginal parents in the schools. Data collection has increased, and special programs designed at increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the Division have been implemented. In the early 1990s, the Buffalo Stone School Division also opened two Aboriginal schools, Oakwood and Dogwood (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2010).
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The ‘History’ section of Dogwood’s school website tells the story of a unique school in Cedar Hill:

In 1988, the Buffalo Stone School Division, in consultation and cooperation with various community groups such as the Thunder Eagle Society, Urban Aboriginal Educational Advisory Committee and parent groups…established a high school in Cedar Hill’s North End that emphasized Aboriginal culture, language and academics. A school that harkens back to the lessons of our ancestors, and made valid the concept of Aboriginality in the education system (BSSD, 2011b).

Dogwood High School continues to be a model of Aboriginal Education and language instruction, and in 2005 was named one of Maclean’s magazine’s Top 10 Schools in Canada. In 1993, the Division opened its Nursery to Grade 9 Aboriginal school, Oakwood, also praised in Cedar Hill as a wonderful school for Aboriginal children.

In addition to supporting Aboriginal schools, the Buffalo Stone School Division adopted the Aboriginal Education Policy in 1996. It addresses the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in classrooms and the success of Aboriginal learners. Potentially, the document itself is a factor in addressing the challenges facing the teachers that Kanu interviewed. In particular, the policy might contribute to a teacher’s cultural knowledge, or even address the perceived conflict between school structures and some Aboriginal cultural values. The document legitimizes Aboriginal perspectives by speaking of education as a life-long learning process involving students, their
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parents/guardians, teachers and the community. It recognizes each student’s gifts and addresses the need for a holistic balance including the development of the intellect, the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional. It identifies the importance of traditional teachings in maintaining that balance, and encourages all of the Division’s teachers to incorporate aboriginal perspectives in their practice:

Aboriginal education is defined as the incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives and philosophies in all curricular areas to inform all students of the past and contemporary lifestyles and histories of Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Aboriginal education encompasses the rich traditions and values of the various Aboriginal peoples and applies those concepts to relevant issues facing Aboriginal children and youth today through the curriculum and cultural activities in positive student-centred learning experiences (BSSD, 2005).

Despite the Division’s encouragement for all schools to adopt the values and practices recommended in the policy document, the Buffalo Stone School Division’s 77 schools face very diverse realities and challenges, perhaps especially when addressing the demands of the Aboriginal Education Policy. The Division is truncated into four distinct districts, each with its own superintendent. Within each are elementary, junior and senior high schools. Overall, population and Aboriginal demographics vary greatly between both districts and schools. As yet, Dogwood and Oakwood are the only Aboriginal schools, both housed in what the Division has named its Inner City District.

Judging only by my own experience in two of the Division’s schools and an inability to find supporting literature, it appears to be unlikely at this point that many, if any, schools within the Division share a particular approach or strategy on Aboriginal
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education. The lack of common approach may reflect exactly the intention of the
Manitoba Schools Act referred to earlier. As each school reflects the unique realities of
its own community, it is up to individual school leaders to determine the right direction
for a school, which (can or must?) be different according to the context of each. Kanu’s
identified challenge of racism, for example, is likely to manifest itself in different ways in
different schools. If visible ‘race’ is in fact a challenge, how can we believe that those
schools with a population approaching 100% Aboriginal students face the same
challenges as those with an almost non-existent Aboriginal presence?

In the end, all schools are guided by the province’s priorities, and encouraged by
Division policies. Each district superintendent communicates these to school principals,
and they are then communicated to staff within the school. It is ultimately at the school
level, in contact with the Division’s students, where the intentions of politicians and
policymakers must come to life.

Just as each school appears to interpret and implement provincial and division
priorities in its own way, so, too, it is likely that each classroom teacher does so when
considering the realities of their own students. The point of delivery is the classroom,
and ultimately the perceptions of Buffalo Stone School Division English Language Arts
teachers’ abilities to carry out the priorities of the Province and the Division are the focus
of this study.

Aboriginal Perspectives in the (Whole) Classroom

There are arguably moral, legal and practical imperatives to meeting the needs of a
growing Aboriginal population. However, as already indicated, few classrooms in the
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Buffalo Stone School Division are composed entirely of Aboriginal students. Certainly teachers should not feel comfortable ignoring the needs of any of their students, either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal.

The Province of Manitoba is also concerned with equitable access to education, as well as to equality within education. The Department of Education’s Curriculum Development and Implementation division clearly identifies elements like Differentiated Instruction, Gender Fairness, Appropriate Age Portrayals, and Human Diversity as important considerations (Manitoba Education, 2011a). Brade, Duncan & Sokal (2003) suggest that academic success increases among Aboriginal students when they simply like what they learn about Aboriginals. Not insignificant to the current question is the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Listed are the province’s goals for its Aboriginal students:

- “to develop a positive self-identity through learning their own histories, cultures, and contemporary lifestyles”
- “to participate in a learning environment that will equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to participate more fully in the unique civic and cultural realities of their communities”.

Also listed are the Goals of Aboriginal Perspectives for Non-Aboriginal Students:

- “to develop an understanding and respect for the histories, cultures, and contemporary lifestyles of Aboriginal people”
- “to develop informed opinions on matters relating to Aboriginal people”
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Considering all of the challenges that teachers face in incorporating Aboriginal perspectives (Kanu, 2005), this study tries to gain a sense of teachers’ perceptions of whether or not (and how) their students are succeeding in meeting these objectives set out by the province. It may also be worth considering whether having identified goals like these has helped teachers in the task of integration.

Though the goals are recognizably different for the different populations, it remains evident that Manitoba’s controlling educational body has definite imperatives where Aboriginal education is concerned, regardless of the student’s history. Interestingly, though there is a documented correlation between the province’s goals for, in particular, its Aboriginal students and increased graduation rates, there is no mention of these rates as objectives of the initiatives. Rather, they seem to reflect the very values of initiatives like the Buffalo Stone School Division’s Aboriginal Education Policy, which acknowledges a holistic philosophy of education as academic, physical, emotional and spiritual. It remains to be seen whether or not teachers share the province’s stated objectives, or whether theirs more closely deals with more traditional notions of success (like graduation rates).

It is also important to start to gain some insight into how teachers view their roles in dealing with the emerging demographic reality, and whether teachers perceive that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is important to addressing that reality. The focus on Grade 10 ELA teachers from the Buffalo Stone School Division is remarked on in Chapter 1, and will be elaborated on in the study’s methodology in Chapter 3. In their case, a reasonable starting point is to use the Division’s Aboriginal Education Policy as a
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launching point for discussion. As a guiding document, it ultimately sets out a series of expectations of classroom teachers.

While I am aware of a body of literature on the efficacy of policy, it is not my intent to comment on the policy’s successes and/or failures. Rather, my intent is to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between classroom teachers and the philosophy and principles of the Aboriginal education policy. I suggest that parts of that relationship include, but are not limited to: 1) teachers’ awareness and understanding of Aboriginal education and the content of the policy itself, as these relate to their practice; and 2) teachers’ feelings and/or perceptions about their efficacy in fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in the policy (I suggest that these will be informed by the teachers’ experiences and preparation); 3) teachers’ perceptions about how the implementation of the policy might impact the lives of their students. As already mentioned, the policy may play a part in addressing some of the challenges discussed.

The centrality of the relationship between classroom teachers and the policy recognizes the role that teachers play in implementing change across the educational system. Silver et al. (2002) suggest that:

…many Aboriginal students continue to resist, and even to reject, an educational system that still does not adequately reflect their realities…

What Aboriginal people have said to us about the educational system is not that Aboriginal people should be forced to change in order to fit into and ‘succeed’ in school…but rather that schools and the educational system generally need to change in order to better reflect the rapidly changing demographic and cultural realities of our community (p. 3).
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It is important to begin to understand how efforts to change the system, like BSSD’s Aboriginal education policy, have indeed changed how teachers approach Aboriginal education, and how the teachers themselves perceive their roles as agents of systematic change. Assuming that teachers desire some indication of their successes, it will be important to understand how comfortable they are in their ability to judge their successes in implementing the policy and in changing the lives of their students.

Another potential benefit of exploration of the policy is a better understanding of teachers’ perceptions of what they feel they need in order to begin, to maintain or to improve their inclusion Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms. Is it important if and/or when their own classes become more ‘visually’ Aboriginal, or is it enough that the realities of their school division and city are, etc? Do the policy and/or Division initiatives make the task of inclusion less challenging than it would be without them?

Appreciating the complexity of the above, and the challenges faced by English Language Arts teachers, the study proposes to determine how its participants understand and appreciate their role in the creation of classrooms where Aboriginal perspectives are integrated. The task is no small challenge.
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The Crux of the Matter: Challenges Facing Teachers and Their Perceptions of Where They Are in the Evolution of the New Story

Kanu (2005, p. 1) identifies 5 challenges facing today’s teachers. In their efforts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives, they must address: 1) their own lack of cultural knowledge; 2) the racist attitudes brought into schools by educators and students; 3) insufficient support from administrators; 4) incompatibility between school structures and Aboriginal values; and 5) a fundamental lack of appropriate resources. Deer (personal communication, July 12, 2011) suggests that these challenges contribute to an apprehension among teachers who attempt to include Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms.

The study’s questions will focus on how Grade 10 ELA teachers in the Buffalo Stone School Division perceive these challenges in their own practice. It is possible that the relatively recent proliferation of professional development opportunities in Aboriginal education (e.g.: the inaugural meeting of the Council for Aboriginal Education in Manitoba’s (CAEM) at 2010’s SAG Conference) has begun to lessen the impact of some of the challenges identified by Kanu. In the case of these particular teachers a full-day, course-specific, workshop may have done the same. It is worth considering whether or not, and how, the workshop may play a role in reducing the apprehension of teachers. Is the experience of integrating Aboriginal perspectives improved for teachers who participate, and how do they perceive its impact on their students?

Culture of the Other (or Not?)

When we consider the complexity of each of the challenges identified by Kanu (2005) it is no surprise that they are challenges to teachers. The lack of cultural
knowledge, for instance, is steeped in layers of complex abstractions, preconceptions and misconceptions.

The word ‘culture’ in itself is a highly contested abstract. Benhabib (2002) quoting Turner (1993) proposes that a reductionist sociology of culture risks “essentializing” the idea as one belonging to a particular group, and that such conceptions “overemphasize” the boundaries (both its ‘boundaries’ and its distinctness’) that define a culture (p.4). These boundaries may also create circumstances felt by the person trying to negotiate their way:

The demarcations of cultures and of the human groups that are their carriers are extremely contested, fragile as well as delicate. To possess the culture means to be an insider. Not to be acculturated in the appropriate way is to be an outsider. Hence the boundaries of cultures are always secretly guarded, their narratives purified, their rituals carefully monitored. These boundaries circumscribe power in that they legitimize its use within the group (Benhabib, 2002, p.7).

We might wonder whether it is this type of activity that is occurring when the teachers interviewed make comments like Ann’s: “...I don’t know if I’m doing it right...There’s lots of rules, lots of protocols about specific times when you don’t do certain things and that you do certain things...every Aboriginal nation does things differently, you know...You cause offence, deep offence if you don’t follow protocol” (Kanu, 2011, p. 177). It is worth noting that Ann was the only Aboriginal teacher interviewed by Kanu, and that her age and lack of experience were remarked on as central to her reasons for discomfort.
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Interestingly, Ann’s example points to yet another complication. It is reported that she is sometimes unfairly called upon to be the ‘expert’ on issues with Aboriginal students. Yet Ann’s status as an Aboriginal person does not automatically make her an expert, a status that her comments imply rests with eldership. Joe, a white teacher self-described as an ‘outsider’ in an Aboriginal community in the Midwestern United States, confirms what Ann seems to be saying: “Probably the best way I can teach culture is to have some respected community member come and do it. That’s the way” (Hermes, 2005, p. 18). Yet at the same time, one must wonder, considering Ann’s comments, whether anyone who is not Aboriginal could possibly become an expert or even an acceptable substitute. If, as Benhabib and Ann seem to suggest, there are carefully protected cultural powers, then an (outsider) teacher’s ability and/or reluctance to negotiate cultural spaces certainly merits further exploration.

In the proposed study, it will be important to explore the participants’ perceptions of ‘cultural authority’ as a potential barrier to acquiring the knowledge base that they might desire. As hinted at by both Ann and Joe, there appears to be a deeply personal component to a teacher’s perception of their ability to engage in integrating Aboriginal perspectives. As Fig. 1 suggests, it seems reasonable to assume that a teacher’s perceptions of issues like ‘cultural capacity or validity’ or even possibilities in the realm of Aboriginal perspectives are tied to personal beliefs and values based on their lived experiences.

Insider/outsider concerns aside, cultural content might also play a role in this identified challenge. On the one hand, teachers may lack a historical knowledge base concerning the realities of traditional Aboriginal cultures (political and social
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organizations, economies, etc.). No formal or official expertise in Canadian history is required of Grade 10 ELA teachers in the Buffalo Stone School Division. Teachers that I have talked to admit that they lack an understanding of treaties, for instance, a subject absolutely integral to a fairer consideration of Canada’s history. Certainly my own experience in studying treaties is very limited, and comments from past students certainly support the notion that there is a significant lack of understanding about what each ‘side’ got out of the ‘deals’. Misconceptions about topics such as taxation and university tuition abound.

On a second level, the lack of cultural knowledge faced by teachers is identified as more procedural. Teachers may be aware of the basic idea of Healing Circles, for instance (or at least that they are an important part of many Aboriginal groups’ cultural practice), but feel uncomfortable with their lack of expertise concerning the ‘rules’ of how such a circle is supposed to happen. Writing personally about this very topic, Celia Haig-Brown (2010) writes:

I work constantly in places with people for whom these words and the things they represent have real meaning, cultural value, and spiritual connections. Their misuse can and does cause pain: real harm. Starting with the circle: It could be any circle but it is not… This one came into my consciousness first as a spiritual sign, primarily from the Plains peoples, that as a white person from British Columbia, I would not think of using in my own work, that I resisted even thinking about…(p. 939)
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This uncertainty regarding whether a teacher is ‘allowed’ to lead a group in certain stories and/or activities without causing offense remains another procedural issue. Teachers’ lack of cultural knowledge touches on their own inabilities to ever appropriate that knowledge. The mere idea of ‘possessing’ knowledge may in itself be a legacy of European traditions, but clearly there are difficulties surrounding the cultural values of who can tell certain stories, or lead cultural ‘rituals’, dances, etc. Can a non-Aboriginal person ever gain the acceptable authority to lead a drum group, for example?

Returning to Haig-Brown (2010), we find the suggestion that in working with Aboriginal peoples and communities, it is possible for non-Aboriginal people to ‘acquire’ and/or develop the kind of cultural and pedagogical know-how that may be central to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. After doing so, she writes:

…I returned to the work now drawing on my own experiences with sweetgrass circles and sweat lodges. I sought additional guidance from First Nations authors… I paid closer attention to what people had been telling me. With a push from the people involved, I wrote what was in their eyes essential to this text… Since that time, I have used the circle to think through the relations among aspects of a topic; I use it for planning, for organizing, and I appreciate its explanatory power every time. Although always acknowledging my teachers, I may not talk explicitly about its spiritual dimensions, I never separate myself and my work from those understandings (pp. 939-940).

Hiag-Brown’s obvious transformation was borne of lived personal experiences rather than most urban professional development opportunities. The rewards that it
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offers the author, in her newfound confidence to draw from Aboriginal cultural knowledge in her work, may point to the kind of transformative professional development that this study’s participants are unlikely to have experienced.

A final consideration is whether or not teachers’ expectations and/or perceptions about what is required to include Aboriginal perspectives exceed what is actually required. In the resource Learning About Walking in Beauty by The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2002) we find the following description about what it might mean to teach Aboriginal perspectives:

“Walking in Beauty means learning how to get along with each other in a kind, sharing, honest and respectful way. This means listening, learning, and knowing about each other - about one another’s cultures, histories, contemporary concerns and worldviews. It means coming together in an Indigenous way, within a circle - where there is no start, no top, no end, and no bottom - where we all have our rights and responsibilities, and where we all value and respect difference...Walking in Beauty may be understood as a universal concept of indigenous knowledge. Its meaning instructs each of us to conduct ourselves “in right relations” with all of creation, including our relations of the natural world (p. Frontispieces (ix)).

My own experience in Buffalo Stone School Division schools leads me to believe that many of the things mentioned in this passage already happen in their classrooms on a regular basis, albeit perhaps without the explanation of their connection to the country’s first peoples. Many of the Division’s teachers enable warm, caring, respectful classrooms, often organized into circle groupings. The Division’s emphasis on
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sustainable development, for example, is consistent with the concepts mentioned in the above resource.

Could it be that on at least one level the challenge of cultural knowledge lies in not making the connection between Aboriginal values and the values demonstrated in these classrooms? Again, exploring Kanu’s identified challenges may help to guide the questions directed at these teachers to clarify their perceptions challenges they face in this domain.

**Racist Attitudes (and Privilege)**

Though Canada is often praised for its multiculturalism and acceptance of diversity, it should come as no surprise to those who live in Canada that racist attitudes remain a challenge for teachers.

Kanu (2005) suggests that the racist attitudes of other staff and of students can interfere with a teacher’s ability to meaningfully incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in their classroom. In this sense, racism assumes positions in both the contextual and personal spheres of the framework. Attitudes of individual teachers will surely vary depending on their own experiences with Aboriginal peoples and on the degrees of racist attitudes that they perceive of in their schools. There is unfortunately much evidence suggesting that this challenge is one that remains eerily tangible in modern schools. Aubry (2007) reports that 4 out of 10 Indian, Inuit and Métis citizens claim to be victims of discrimination at the hands of businesses, police and most importantly here, schools. Silver et al. (2002) remark:

The incidence of overt forms of racism—name calling and stereotyping, for
example—is high. Institutional forms of racism are common. The face that
schools present to Aboriginal students is decidedly non-Aboriginal: for
example, there are few Aboriginal teachers, and little Aboriginal content in
the curriculum. These characteristics suggest to us an educational system that
continues to be overly Euro-centric and even colonial…(p.3).

Respondents in Silver et al.’s (2002) study go on to remark that close to 90% of
Aboriginal parents do not feel comfortable in the schools and that there is evidence of
power disparities, racism and cultural barriers. This reality is one that speaks directly to a
teacher’s ability to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, as the inclusion of the Aboriginal
community itself is identified in as an important component of the teacher’s project
(Kanu, 2005; The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002). The
challenge is one that extends beyond the teacher’s role, however. BSSD’s (2005)
Aboriginal Education Policy (IGABA), for example, states:

School principals shall be responsible for developing strategies to ensure active
and meaningful participation of Aboriginal parents/guardians and community in
the educational process based on mutual respect and understanding, creating a
partnership that will result in education of high quality for all students (p.3).

Remembering that “lukewarm” administrative support is the next challenge to be
addressed, it is possible to see how the challenges facing teachers might actually feed
each other. The prevalence of discomfort among Aboriginal parents is clearly a
challenge not only for teachers, but also for administrators. If a principal is unable or
unwilling to successfully engage the school’s Aboriginal parents and guardians, the
teacher is challenged at the classroom level by their absence. In many cases, past (and
current?) victimization will undeniably render the challenge of reversing racism’s legacy that much more difficult.

Besides their reluctance to participate in school settings, it is also worth considering the possibility that Aboriginal populations in Canada are victimized in ways that other minority populations are not. In a report on racism in Canada by Griffith and Labercane (1993) it is suggested that among minority populations in Canada, there is ‘considerable ambivalence’ about Aboriginal rights and responsibilities. It suggests further that of the minority groups surveyed, only Aboriginal Peoples’ groups did not enjoy strong support. The report raises the possibility that of the many challenges that racism inspires, a particular targeting or discrimination against Aboriginal peoples may further complicate the integration of Aboriginal perspectives, perhaps even more so than more generalized multicultural topics. Students may actually be less receptive to Aboriginal perspectives than they would be to those from other minority groups.

As if the challenges mentioned were not yet enough, there are still more under the umbrella of racism. Silver et al. (2002) report that 100% of respondents replied that racism in some form is a factor for Aboriginal students in school. The 30% that believed overt racism an issue raised the possibility that racism contributed to self-destructive behaviour and substance abuse among Aboriginal youth. The Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples (2003) report on Aboriginal youth described as:

- a generation experiencing a sense of hopelessness for the future because of the barriers and discrimination they face;
- vulnerable to poverty, cultural and social alienation; and
- liv[ing] in a world characterized by poverty, violence and racism.
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They continue: “It is therefore depressingly unsurprising that, despite the probability that suicide rates are under-recorded, the Aboriginal youth suicide rate in Canada is estimated to be five to six times higher than that of non-Aboriginal youth” (Part V, para. 1).

That these realities are reflected in the context of Manitoba classrooms should be obvious, and they are, of course, some of the very reasons that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is a priority in the province. Yet, priority or not, they speak to a group of young people devastated by history who continue to be the victim’s of a society’s ignorance and hatred. Teachers attempting to confront the realities, traditions and perspectives of a group so fundamentally discriminated against have a monumental task.

Institutionally, Aboriginal teachers, whether more equipped or not (see ‘Culture of the Other’ earlier in Ch. 2.) to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into their classrooms face much of the same discrimination as their Aboriginal students. QMI Agency’s (2010) study of 59 Aboriginal public school teachers across Canada proposes that the teachers sometimes feel as if their qualifications and capabilities are disregarded. They also reinforce Kanu’s suggestion that there are lowered expectations form Aboriginal students. The aboriginal teachers felt that they had to assume the responsibility of addressing a racism denied, ignored or trivialized by school institutions.

Finally, the challenge that racism presents to teachers is one not explored in depth by Kanu. It is what Solomon, Portelli, Daniel and Campbell (2005) call the “discourse of denial”, referring to many teachers’ reluctance to confront their own positions of privilege
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and/or their own racist beliefs. The authors suggest that white teachers, in particular, are often reluctant to dig into some of the deeper issues that accompany racist discourse regardless of the setting. They report on the discomfort of teacher candidates asked to engage in discussions about oppression, marginalization, and colonization, while implying that the experiences of these discussions are important for people heading into classrooms.

Solomon et al. (2005) are concerned about many teachers’ unwillingness to examine their own positions of privilege, alternative versions of history or the lasting legacy of colonization. For the purposes of this study, the importance of teachers dealing with these kinds of issues cannot be ignored. The very fact that students are studying English Language Arts in school is a legacy of Canada’s history and the way in which different human societies (European and Aboriginal) interacted. The way in which the English language has been used, from the unfairness of words like ‘savages’ or ‘uncivilized’ to the current inadequacies when describing Aboriginal groups, is an important topic of study. Yet the authors propose that many teacher candidates confront these topics in a less-than-satisfactory way. One of their participants expresses such an approach in the following way:

If ignorance continues we cannot move forward in combating racism. One way of doing this is to have monthly themes that examine other [emphasis added] cultures. This can be done by having guest speakers who are natives of various cultures, decorations around the room depicting a particular culture, eating food from foreign places, include personal reflections from students and so on.

Encouraging students to conduct studies about places that they are not familiar
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with and present it to the class describing the way of living, via role-playing a person from that culture. (WF)\(^3\) (Solomon et al., 2005, p. 158).

Though not attacking her strategies, Solomon et al. criticize the teacher’s underlying thought processes, which they describe as her having:

...effectively removed herself and the role that she plays in this particular dynamic, thereby eliminating the possibility of any critical interrogation of her role in replicating power dynamics…thereby removing the need for an analysis of issues of power, dominance, historical colonization and oppression fostered primarily by whites against other groups” (p.158).

As seen earlier in the section on cultural knowledge, the respondent seems to be identifying herself as incapable of delivering parts of what she sees as the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. She appeals to the need to bring in Native speakers and to the need for exploration of outwardly visible aspects of Aboriginal culture (‘decorations’ and ‘food’). I would suggest these kinds of appeals are, in a sense, part of the racist discourse of privilege, indicating a rather shallow exploration into what it means to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives. Rather, Solomon et al. (2005) suggest a very different approach: “…indigenous scholars (Smith, 1999) have discussed the importance of including indigenous knowledges as important and necessary information for challenging imperialism, oppression and domination in educational and social spheres” (p. 155). This study will explore whether today’s teachers in BSSD perceive the challenging of ‘imperialism, oppression and domination’ as part of integrating Aboriginal perspectives, whether they have been encouraged in their own experiences to explore those challenges, or whether the ‘culturally visible’ aspects of integration remain the focus.

\(^3\) Notation indicating a white female participant, Solomon et al. (2005)
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It is unclear whether or not teachers who agree to participate in the study will be willing and/or able to discuss their perceptions about their personal struggles with racism and privilege. What is clear is that deeply personal exploration into one’s own racist beliefs and/or privilege is not to be overlooked by teachers seeking to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. Discussion of how this topic may limit the results of the study will follow in Chapter 3.

The Relationship Between School Culture and Aboriginal Cultural Values

Kanu (2011) writes about a challenge for Manitoba teachers that she calls “the incompatibility between school structures and some Aboriginal cultural values/practices”. In her preface, she indicates how some teachers might treat their Aboriginal students differently than those who are non- Aboriginal, excusing late arrivals and/or absences, not pushing them to offer answers with the same depth or complexity, etc. Teachers’ explanations for these inconsistencies seem to indicate a lack of confidence in how to approach their Aboriginal students. I suggest that the incongruity between their ‘regular’ practice and their ‘Aboriginal’ practice is due at least in part to their own assumptions about the students’ lives and/or cultural values coupled with the institutional expectations that they are used to. Vera, a teacher in a study conducted by Piquemal & Nickels (2005) also acknowledges a lack of authority or knowledge to teach Aboriginal values. The teachers mentioned in Kanu’s preface also indicate that they fear pushing Aboriginal students too hard, not knowing about circumstances beyond their control (p. xi).

It is difficult to know exactly what to make of their feelings. On the one hand, my own stance is that teachers should be challenging each of their students to succeed, and
that the colour of their skin or ancestry should not have a bearing in whether or not to engage in that challenge. On the other hand, the manner in which challenges are presented is clearly significant. It can’t be impossible to challenge our Aboriginal students. If it is culturally insensitive to do it in the traditionally ‘western/European’ way, then other methods should be attempted. Additionally, teachers are unaware of the circumstances affecting many of their students’ lives. The decision not to intellectually challenge here, unfortunately, appears to be racially motivated, a result of existing stereotypes about Aboriginal students.

The question of success and/or failure itself may be ill-served by the traditional recourse to graduation and/or retention rates. According to *Maclean’s* (2005), some of the successes of Dogwood High School include school spirit, traditional language acquisition and the ability to make good decisions, results which seem to be in line with the province’s objectives listed earlier. While the province and school division undoubtedly would like to see improvement on both personal and academic levels, it may be that success in Aboriginal education requires another kind of measuring tool altogether. Many authors suggest, in fact, that the kind of academic success typically studied in quantitative studies is antithetical to success in Aboriginal education.

Stephen Harris (2000) suggests that “…the major dilemma of Aboriginal schooling- [is] that academic success in the Western system could seriously undermine Aboriginal identity” (intro). Aboriginal students may struggle with the perception that success in the white/non-Aboriginal world robs them of their own Aboriginal identities, a type of ‘becoming white’. Bailey (2000) writes:

We expect our students from very different cultures to fit into our "one
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size fits all' institution. We have a list of largely unwritten expectations:
you will all speak English; you will all write research papers and exams;
you will be on time and always present; you will learn what we decide you
need to know in a series of unrelated courses... Some of my fellow professors
would say that such is necessary if we want our Native students to succeed
in the world as it is today. This is an argument that assumes that success in
white man's terms is "the" way to be. It is also an argument that assumes we are
educating others to take an equal place in our society; yet reality, either
historically or currently, does not show that such is the result of our schooling
practices (Introduction, para 4-5).

While Bailey speaks to success in university courses, they reflect the same
expectations mentioned earlier by Kanu (2011), expectations that clearly exist in Buffalo
Stone School Division high school classrooms. They include, but are not limited to,
expectations of attendance and punctuality, assignments that are to be submitted on time,
tests and a consistent way of formatting assignments. These expectations can, of course, also be behavioural.

Piquemal & Nickels (2005) write about the expectations of a teacher in Cedar
Hill’s inner city who repeatedly demands that her Aboriginal students look at her. She is
angered when they do not, and feels as if they are not listening to her. An Aboriginal
consultant in the study explains that many of the Aboriginal children have been taught
not to look directly into the eyes of the teacher, and that doing so may show disrespect.
She explains that these particular students want to learn by sitting back and observing, an
action misconstrued by the teacher as not paying attention. She further explains that
questions posed directly to the students often make them feel ‘put on the spot’. The examples are just a few of the many ways that the (Eurocentric) expectations of teachers may be at odds with the values and teachings of Aboriginal peoples.

The results of the misunderstandings can be exactly the opposite of what the teacher hopes to accomplish. The teacher reprimands the student and the student (though he hadn’t earlier) mentally detaches himself from the lesson. Much better, says the consultant, to establish a common ground on which shared stories can communicate a student’s understanding (Piquemal & Nickels, 2005).

The examples brought forward by Piquemal & Nickels also have ramifications for traditionally used methods of assessment. Reluctance to answer direct questions may have grave consequences for a student trying to complete an oral examination, for example. Persuasive or expository essays in Grade 10 ELA may be at odds with establishing common narratives or shared stories. The literary structures accepted in schools may interfere with Aboriginal ways of expressing knowledge or understanding. Non-Aboriginal teachers may not understand or be able to teach traditional Aboriginal circular storytelling structures, oral structures or even logic. Piquemal (2003) notes:

The problem I address arises from the fact that Native oral traditions have been marginalized, and when orality is put forward as a teaching method, it is invariably the Western model that is lauded. Unfortunately, this does not take into account the Native perspective and the Native oral tradition that teaches in a way that does not conform to Western logic (para. 33).
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Finally, attempts to motivate through punishment are shown to be highly ineffective for Aboriginal students. Despite the province’s stated goals for Aboriginal students, and the evidence that punitive measures are rarely helpful to their success, the Manitoba Ministry of Education recently re-introduced the policy that permits teachers to penalize students for late work and excessive absences (Manitoba Education, 2011b). It is not inherently clear how to reconcile the goals of integrating Aboriginal perspectives mentioned earlier with a re-issued authority to penalize for not fitting into traditionally ‘Eurocentric’ expectations. It makes one wonder how teachers perceive themselves as reconciling and/or being challenged by what seem to be conflicting Ministerial expectations.

Administrative support

Kanu identifies “Schools administrators’ lukewarm support for integration as a challenge faced by teachers. Not easily quantifiable, this particular challenge nonetheless is one identified by teachers as affecting their ability to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. Aboriginal teachers in Bouvier’s (2004) paper indicate the responses of principals as ‘pivotal’ in adapting school culture, a comment upholding the idea that contextual, school-based administrative support will impact a teacher’s perceptions on integration. Their support, however, requires consistency and commitment: “The teachers spoke about their schools’ additive approach of ‘introducing initiatives here and there’ without the commitment to effectively support and sustain these initiatives on a long-term basis” (Kanu, 2011, p. 186). Ann, an Aboriginal teacher in the study, laments the lack of time
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dedicated to a Native Awareness course, and another participant, Arnie, commented on
the lack of funding available for positions like Aboriginal liaison officers in his division
(Kanu, 2011, p. 187). These kinds of teacher perceptions of contextual realities do not
seem to be commonly researched, but the basic theme extends to a number of different
realms of administrative support or lack thereof, across a wide range of school realities.

Wotherspoon (2008) remarks on teachers in Aboriginal communities feeling
resentment towards “coworkers, communities, or administrations that they feel are not
offering sufficient support for their work roles”. Teachers in Zurzolo’s (2010) study
indicated that they engaged independently in integrating Aboriginal perspectives and that
the “mandates, associated workshops and administrative involvement often acted to
constrain and discourage teachers”. Referring back to Fig. 1, it seems evident once again
that the contextual and realities of administrative support very much affect how teachers
perceive of their ability to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. However, as Zurzolo’s
participant suggests, the personal commitments of teachers ‘already doing it’ (or
alternatively, those not doing it) may serve to temper the influence of administrative
powers.

Educational Change and Resistance

Adopting Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum is about as big a change
as can be thrust upon teachers. It may be that noting teachers’ reluctance to change is no
more meaningful than saying that humans are resistant to change, but there it is.
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Though their language often addresses the reluctance of teachers to adopt change, researchers on educational change (van den Berg, 2002; Knight, 2009; Margolis, 1991) suggest a set of requirements that must be satisfied in order to have changes adopted effectively by teachers. They propose that: 1) teachers must feel as if they are a part of the decision-making processes; 2) teachers must perceive proposed changes as powerful and easy to implement; 3) teachers must perceive the changes as being relevant and appropriate to their individual philosophy, teaching practice and environment; 4) teachers must be convinced of the effectiveness and importance of both the content and the delivery of the proposed changes; and 5) teachers must be able to not only observe the changes being successfully implemented, but also to practice the implementation of the proposed changes.

In addition to the challenges identified by Kanu as sources of apprehension, the literature on teachers’ resistance to change may be particularly important to understanding current teacher attitudes towards the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. The best intentioned desire to immediately improve the success of Aboriginal learners may, ironically, hamper the process of doing so: “...policy (well-intentioned and noble as its purposes may be) often becomes a barrier to change rather than a path towards it” (Zurzolo, 2010, p.).

The decision to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into curricula has largely been accomplished from the top down. Following the relatively slow process of exposing the centuries of educational abuse of Aboriginal children, governments, both federal and provincial, were pressured politically into initiating changes to Aboriginal education (Johnson, 1993; Taner, 1999). In a relatively short amount of time, teachers began to
receive directives to include Aboriginal perspectives into their teaching. However, research suggests that because it was not necessarily Canadian teachers making that decision, the project had the potential to run into added challenges. Zurzolo (2010), Knight (2009) and van den Berg (2002) all suggest that when teachers feel as if decisions have been made without them, it is likely to result in resistance. Teachers need to feel as if they have been a part of the dialogue on change, or they are likely to resist it. Their voices need to be part of the narrative.

Though the objectives behind the direction are unquestionably important, it is not evident that the process of implementing such an enormous change in classrooms has been universally and happily accepted by Buffalo Stone’s teachers. It is important to understand how teachers perceive the changes that they are being asked to implement. Again, it seems that there could be any number of factors affecting how a teacher responds to a request to change their practice. In this case, it is not yet evident whether factors such as classroom demographics, teacher preparation or even the manner in which a teacher is introduced to the proposed changes are connected to a teacher’s willingness to engage in change. Research on educational change might help us to understand teachers’ perceptions, their willingness to adopt the changes enthusiastically, or conversely their apprehension or reluctance to do so.

Researchers have suggested that teachers are reluctant to implement change unless the practices are powerful and easy to implement (Knight, 2009). While I personally feel that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives has the potential to be immensely powerful in schools, I cannot speak for the hundreds of other teachers in the Division. I cannot begin to imagine how changes with such political, moral and
philosophical depth can be easy to implement. Considering the many challenges proposed by Kanu, there are a host of factors contributing to the difficulty of implementation, and it seems unlikely that successful implementation can be achieved before addressing those challenges.

Another challenge that may contribute to teacher resistance is the question of whether teachers believe that the changes that they are being asked to implement will be effective. Van den Berg (2002) asks:

> Just how open can teachers be to external expectations that they do not consider completely legitimate to start with? It is exactly this question that, in fact, gives rise to a very important source of existential uncertainty and ambiguity...The question addresses not only the personal capacities of the teacher (can he or she do it?) but also the issue of whether he or she wants to do it.... (p. 599).

It is important to explore teachers’ perceptions of their new tasks because if they do not support the ideas and objectives behind the changes, they are unlikely to bring them effectively into their classrooms. Greenwood, Carta and Hall (1988, as cited in Margolis, 1991) suggest that teachers often feel that proposed changes offer inadequate evidence of effectiveness. Margolis (1991, p.2) states that they may feel that they are not comprehensive enough to resolve what they understand as the current problem, and that many lack the specificity needed to implement them effectively.

So, if teachers feel apprehensive because of their lack of cultural knowledge, because the institutional norms are at odds with some cultural values and/or practices, because there are remaining racist attitudes in their workplaces, and because they lack the
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support that they require, it seems logical that the very institutions encouraging the integration of Aboriginal perspectives address the causes of teacher apprehension. It is evident that this course of action is precisely what they have done. The proliferation of teacher education courses on Aboriginal education, Aboriginal consultant positions and professional development opportunities is evidence enough. However, although the establishment of these potential solutions is encouraging, one must consider the monumental task facing the facilitators of these programs.

Kanu (2005) suggests that except in rare cases, the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in classrooms is not being accomplished. Her list of challenges facing teachers implies that professional development programs on Aboriginal education must allow teachers to gather the cultural knowledge that they feel is needed to include Aboriginal perspectives. They must equip teachers to gather appropriate resources for their classrooms. They must satisfactorily address the potential incompatibilities between school institutions and traditional Aboriginal values. They must address racist attitudes among staff and students, and engage administrators in providing sufficient support to teachers.

In addition, the workshops and courses must engage in convincing teachers that including Aboriginal perspectives is easy, that it is powerful, and that it will have a positive impact on their students.
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CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Background

As covered in the first chapters, a lengthy historical process has left today’s Manitoban schools in an untenable situation. Aboriginal students, in particular, like those across Canada, are struggling to succeed in a system that has not treated them well.

Initiatives at every level of the education system are attempting to end past injustices, to create a ‘level playing field’ for today’s Aboriginal students. In the Buffalo Stone School Division, part of that project is to mandate the integration of Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum. In the case of Grade 10 English Language Arts, this mandate is partnered with course-specific professional development to that end.

Whatever the intentions and objectives of policymakers and administrators, it is ultimately at the classroom level that integration needs to take place. It is up to teachers to bring integration to life, yet surprisingly little research has been dedicated to teachers’ responses to this mandate. This study is intended to contribute to a relative dearth of research on teachers’ perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives.

The main purpose of the study is to explore Grade 10 ELA teachers’ perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. It is important to understand their specific strengths and/or challenges in this domain if schools are going to continue to improve their delivery of socially just education. Though provincial and divisional policies, curriculum and even resources may encourage a teacher to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms, it is ultimately individual teachers who determine how those initiatives play out with students. Their understandings and their strategies for the
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implementation of those initiatives are of great interest in beginning to understand whether or not teachers perceive that the initiatives are or are not achieving their goals.

Context

The Buffalo Stone School Division is the largest school divisions in Cedar Hill. It serves 77 schools and over 32,000 students. It is divided into four districts: A, B, C and D (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2011a). 14 schools offer grade 10 English Language Arts as part of the required Provincial Senior High Curriculum (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2011c). In 2008, voluntary declaration information has shown that 38 per cent of students with a declared ethnicity were Aboriginal (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2010). The estimated percentage of Aboriginal families represented at each school varies significantly, from a low of 14.7% at Cedar Park High School in District A, to a high of 100% at Dogwood High School in the Inner City.

Sample

I used purposive stakeholder sampling (Given, 2008) to come up with a sample of eight teachers, made up of two teachers from each of the school division’s 4 districts (A, B, C, D). After receiving permission through the Superintendent’s Department via the Research Ethics committee, I requested permission to contact teachers from all of the division’s secondary school principals, via e-mail. Upon receiving permission from principals, I contacted individual school’s English Humanities Department heads to confirm the names of those teachers responsible for Grade 10 English Language Arts in their building. I then proceeded to contact the teachers individually via email. The
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request allowed unwilling participants to either ignore my request or to privately decline my request via e-mail. Willing participants were able to contact me directly via e-mail or phone without the knowledge of any other staff. I followed up (via e-mail and then phone calls) with the first two willing respondents from each district, until the desired sample was achieved. In Districts B and D, an inability to schedule a meeting time suitable to the interviewer and volunteer resulted in continuing on to the third respondent. In every case where a volunteer was not included, I sent an e-mail to the teacher explaining why they were not required, and thanking them for their willingness.

The research sample included teachers from the school division’s four districts in an effort to address, in particular, the personal and contextual components of the framework (Fig. 1). The varying districts’ demographics shown in Chapter 2 were expected to yield varying teacher perspectives based on exposure (or lack of exposure) to Aboriginal students and communities on both personal and contextual levels. They are also significant in the types of institutional supports given to areas with more numerous (or fewer) Aboriginal students.

The final sample was comprised of eight teachers who are currently teaching, or who regularly teach, Grade 10 English Language Arts. There are two men and six women. Their teaching experience ranges from four years to twenty-five. Three of the teachers have been teaching for less than ten years, three have taught for between ten and twenty years, and two have been teachers for more than twenty years.

The sample includes two teachers from each of the school division’s four districts, from a total of seven schools. Only the two most experienced teachers have held
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positions in more than one district during their careers. Two of the participants identify themselves as Aboriginal.

Why Grade 10 ELA?

While it is important to understand how teachers of every subject area at every level are responding to the challenge of including Aboriginal perspectives, the scope of this inquiry is much more limited. It is restricted to teachers of Grade 10 English Language Arts (ELA) in the Buffalo Stone School Division for a number of reasons. First of all, my own experience with this subject and grade level offers me a significant understanding of course objectives and expectations.

The flexibility of the process-driven ELA curriculum and its objectives potentially make the integration of Aboriginal perspectives easier to deal with than in courses heavily guided by content. Manitoba’s curriculum objectives, for example, include broad expectations of students listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing to explore thoughts, ideas, feelings, and experiences (Manitoba Education, 1998). While suggestions are made in the curriculum document about what texts (or at least kind of texts) might be included at each grade level, there are no obligatory texts, allowing teachers a freedom (and responsibility) that they do not enjoy in other content-specific courses.

The ELA curriculum documents legitimize enormous varieties of written, aural, oral and visual text, theoretically simplifying the process of gathering appropriate resources either produced by people of Aboriginal descent, or dealing with Aboriginal themes and perspectives.
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Within the Grade 10-specific outcomes of the course are the following expectations:

Students will be able to:

• Connect self, texts, and culture (Specific Learning Outcome 2.2.2);

• Respond personally and critically to individuals, events, and ideas presented in a variety of Canadian and international texts [where I read Canadian as including those of Aboriginal Canadians] (2.2.3);

• Experience texts from a variety of genres and cultural traditions and explore others’ responses to texts (2.2.1);

• Study the validity, accuracy and completeness of information sources (e.g. older texts that do not include Aboriginal history as a significant part of Canada’s past) (3.2.3);

• Use language to show respect, in particular here to study how language, symbols, etc. can be inclusive or exclusive (5.1.3); and to appreciate diversity (5.2.3) (Manitoba Education, 1998).

Objectives like those above may make this course one most open to the new challenge of integrating Aboriginal perspectives. However, it is important to ascertain whether the freedom allowed by the ELA course is enjoyed by teachers, or perceived of by teachers as creating more work, i.e. in deciding on (instead of being told) which resources to use. Put another way: are teachers of Grade 10 ELA today still facing the challenge of inadequate resources? Is their challenge the same as that identified by Kanu (2005), i.e. not enough resources, or is it of a different nature, e.g. the problem of choosing which resources to use?
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The relevance of the high school, or senior years, level is particularly important in trying to gain an understanding of why students drop out of school. Many statistics on high school completion, such as Richards and Vining (2004) concentrate on students who begin high school (say, Grade 8 or 9, depending on the province) so it is appropriate to ask secondary teachers about their perceptions of how the integration of Aboriginal perspectives are affecting their students. Particularly, how do teachers perceive whether the integration of Aboriginal perspectives at this stage in their education is making a difference in the lives of students?

Finally, while the certification years of individual teachers may be significant in determining whether Aboriginal education courses were part of their professional teacher preparation, this particular group of teachers is required by their employer to participate in a one-day professional development workshop which focuses on the delivery of Aboriginal perspectives in the Grade 10 ELA classroom. It is important to gain insight into the effects of this opportunity for teachers to work directly with this issue, one that teachers of other grades and subject areas are not afforded. This distinction alone may begin to help us to understand the impact that mandatory, course-specific professional development (teacher preparation) might have on teacher perceptions.

Participant Variables of Interest

The teachers in the Division teach in different demographic contexts across the city. While I cannot anticipate how teacher perceptions might differ based on the district in which they teach, there are significant differences in the numbers of Aboriginal students that teachers see at schools in various districts. For example, in 2006, in District B, the
estimated percentage of families with at least one child under 18 years of age is 42.9 at Trafalgar High School. By comparison, Dartmouth High School’s percentage is 19.8, the highest in District A (Buffalo Stone School Division, 2007/2008). The limited numbers of teachers involved in the study may restrict my ability to draw significant or reliable conclusions about any differences that I found, but the responses of the teachers who have different kinds of exposure to Aboriginal students may at least lead to further research questions.

Teacher experience also differed among the participants. Only one of the more recently certified teachers had to complete at least one course focusing on Aboriginal Education as part of the requirements of their Bachelor of Education degree in the province⁴, while more experienced teachers did not. They have, however, had opportunities throughout their careers to participate in workshops or courses that dealt with Aboriginal education issues. They may have also been part of ongoing staff discussions in a school division where the integration of Aboriginal perspectives has long been a priority. While the small sample size will again limit the study’s ability to generalize based on its findings, the idiosyncratic experiences that account for the perspectives of individual teachers may indicate directions for further research.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

The arguments for the use of qualitative research in the study are many. Creswell (2012) writes: “Qualitative research is best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. The literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from

⁴ http://webapps.cc.umanitoba.ca/calendar11/Education.pdf
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participants through exploration” (p. 16). The integration of Aboriginal perspectives is, as indicated in Chapter 2, a relatively modern phenomenon, and the literature surrounding the perceptions of teachers engaged in this integration is minimal. While the study has the potential to encourage future quantitative studies, e.g. how many teachers feel that the initiatives are working/failing, etc., it intends to concentrate on how teachers perceive of their roles within the confines of a specific phenomenon, i.e. the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in Grade 10 ELA classrooms in the Buffalo Stone School Division.

Creswell (2012) adds that qualitative research is useful for exploring a particular problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon, in this case the response of teachers to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Such a complex research problem requires an exploration and an understanding of the process of teaching and learning, and the researcher extends his or her understanding of the phenomenon through the participants (p. 16).

Qualitative methods allowed me to ask open-ended questions, thus allowing the participants to voice their own experiences, hopefully with minimal influence from the researcher or from past research: “An open-ended response to a question allows the participant to create the options for responding” (Creswell, 2012, p. 218).

The in-depth nature of interviews began to shed light on what is perceived by teachers as working and what is not, in a way that quantitative research may not address. While years of teaching experience, for example, may be identified as an important factor in teaching Aboriginal perspectives, a quantitative study is unlikely to examine personal relationships with Aboriginal peoples or communities that a teacher may have had. Lifetimes of different experiences with, and exposure to, Aboriginal teachings, may be
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difficult to address in other types of research: “A major strength of the qualitative approach is the depth to which explorations are conducted and descriptions are written, usually resulting in sufficient details for the reader to grasp the idiosyncracies of the situation” (Myers, 2000). Only through the more personal exploration of teachers’ realities that qualitative research provides can we hope to address how teachers come to perceive what they do.

An additional important consideration in choosing qualitative research is tied heavily to the subject matter itself. I would suggest that it is more in line with the philosophy guiding the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. The interviews provide a space to establish a human relationship, to honour and respect the participant as a physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual being:

Holistic by nature, qualitative research is concerned with humans beings in all of their complexities. The design of the study is dependent on the aims of the study, but it always includes an element of time. Contact is personal, lengthy, and there may be multiple meetings with respondents. From my experience, there have been 'aha' moments when I became aware of important components that needed to be examined, but had not been built into the study (Myers, 2000). Because the study is concerned with the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers, I believe that qualitative research is the appropriate methodology for this study.
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Procedures

Semi-structured interviews of between 100 and 120 minutes were held with eight Grade 10 ELA teachers from the Buffalo Stone School Division. They were used to begin an exploration into the real experiences of teacher participants (and by extension their perceptions about their students’ experiences). Creswell (2012) suggests that: “...one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably” (p. 218). Teachers volunteering to participate in the study were, by their very nature, willing and able to share their ideas about their teaching practices and experiences. The intent of the interviews was to gain insight into what happens in classrooms and why, as suggested by Seidman (2006): “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (p. 10). As such, an allowance for follow-up interviews to enhance and/or clarify given responses was built into the consent process.

A 15-question interview protocol (see Appendix E), was used to guide the open-ended questions asked of the participants. Questions were organized according to the personal, contextual and institutional categories presented in Figure 1. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed for additional questions that were recorded and reported on in the data analysis.

Each participant was reminded via a preamble that the study focused on their perceptions about the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in their Grade 10 English Language Arts classrooms. Each teacher was asked questions regarding their own personal experiences with Aboriginal topics and peoples both in and out of the classroom.
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They were asked questions regarding their preparation for teaching, both pre-service and in-service. Further questions focused on Aboriginal cultural knowledge and on their perceptions about what integration does, or would, look like in practice. They were asked to talk about the kinds of resources that they use and the kinds that they would like to have access to. Participants were asked to share their perceptions about the buildings in which they work and have worked, and about the ways in which those settings affect integration. Finally, they were asked questions that dealt with their perceptions about how the larger institutional realities of their school division and province affect the project of integration.

Interviews were recorded using the application Digital Voice Recorder on one iPad2 and one iPad3, and interview notes were written manually by the interviewer. The files were then converted to mp3 format and transcribed into Microsoft Word.

Ethics

The risk to participants in the study was minimal. The relationship between the researcher and participants was that of equal divisional colleagues. The researcher does not occupy any position of authority in relation to the participants. They met one-on-one with the researcher at a time that they had chosen together. Their identity is known only to the researcher and has been replaced by a pseudonym in all recorded data, which was securely stored at the researcher’s residence. Pseudonyms for people and places have also been used to describe life experiences which may have been used to identify certain individuals. The name of each participant’s school was also replaced by a pseudonym. School Districts were randomly assigned A through D letter values.
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In keeping with Division policy, the identity of the Division itself has been masked by assigning it a pseudonym. This pseudonym has even been included to mask the Division’s identity in references.

Participation in the study was voluntary. The only risk to the participants involved any personal discomfort that they might have felt over sharing their personal challenges. To address this possible risk, the participants were informed both on the consent forms and in person that they were able to refuse to answer any questions they chose. They each had the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews before these were included in the study, and all participants were informed that they could remove themselves from the study at any juncture.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using the qualitative research methods outlined by Creswell (2012). I began by assigning each of the participants a pseudonym to protect their identities. I then listened to the interviews a number of times with the literature review close at hand in an effort to pull out dominant themes. As these began to take shape, I also took note of emerging themes that had not been present in the literature review, categorizing these simply as ‘other.’ The next step involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. While I worked with the transcripts, I assigned pseudonyms to the schools and other individuals that were mentioned by the participants. Using the themes covered in the literature review and gleaned from listening to the interviews, I began by copying and pasting relevant passages into a table labeled with the themes. As the information in the table became cumbersome, I created separate files for each theme,
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including both passages from the interviews along with my own thoughts and notes that seemed to connect to passages from other interviews. Many passages were ultimately pasted into more than one themed file.

I read and re-read the separate files as bases for analyzing each theme. I found this particularly effective as each file included passages from all eight participants that dealt with one particular theme. Within the themed files, I colour-coded responses that followed a particular kind of response to the theme and used different colours to code those that presented alternative, or conflicting, responses to the theme being studied. This allowed me to identify ‘sub-themes’ covered by any number of participants.

In working with the ‘other’ themes file, I read and re-read the passages in an effort to either fit them into an existing category or name them in yet another. In the end, three further themes were added to those anticipated in the framework. Though part of the literature review from Chapter 2, I had not included “Student Impact” or “Educational Change/Teacher Resistance” to the theoretical framework diagram. Both will be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Two other additions discuss the impact of other educators’ attitudes and societal factors outside of schools.

Finally, after I was satisfied with my coding and placement of information and data, I re-read the transcripts a final time in an effort to catch any particular themes or data sets that I may have missed in the earlier process.

My groupings will hopefully begin to paint a picture of possible answers to the research question, and provide a basis for drawing conclusions about the perceptions of Grade 10 ELA teachers in the Large School Division tasked with the integration of Aboriginal perspectives.
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Summary

In Chapter 3, I have attempted to provide a brief background of why this study is important at this time and place. In an education system that is evolving its presentation of Aboriginal perspectives, their classrooms are where policies and initiatives reach the students that they are intended to impact. This study proposes to examine teachers’ perceptions of integrating Aboriginal perspectives in those classrooms with those students.

Grade 10 ELA teachers in this large school division have been chosen because they bring a wide variety of personal and contextual experiences to the study. Despite their diversity, they are bound by common institutional realities. They are responsible for the delivery of the same provincial curricula, they are subject to the policy requirements of their employer, they have undergone course-specific professional development in the area of Aboriginal perspectives, and they have been mandated with the integration of these perspectives in their grade 10 ELA classrooms.

The chapter has attempted to explain the process of how the researcher engaged with these teachers in a way that maximizes their protection as research participants. It describes the justification for, and the use of, open-ended interviews. It explains how the participants’ responses were recorded and processed for data analysis, and it has clarified how their responses were analyzed for meaning using recognized qualitative research methods.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This study attempts to tell a story about how Grade 10 English Language Arts teachers come to develop their perceptions of a task mandated by their employers. They are public school educators in a city with a ballooning Aboriginal population, teachers in a wide variety of schools where most Aboriginal children struggle to achieve the success enjoyed by their non-Aboriginal peers. And they have been asked to make a troublesome situation better.

The teachers interviewed come from different kinds of lives and different kinds of schools.

Review of the Framework

The proposed theoretical framework that guided my thinking about the anticipated themes placed into three categories or “dimensions”. The Interview Protocol (see Appendix E) used this framework as a guide and progressed through each theme. I did not alert the participants to the “dimensional shifts” of the questions. Beginning with questions about each participant’s personal experiences, questions then shifted to those regarding the school and community contexts that the participants have been involved with. Each interview finished with questions focused on the larger scale institutional aspects that may or may not affect a teacher’s perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. I did not differentiate on the basis of gender or Aboriginality or experience within the questions themselves. Participant responses often went beyond the artificial ‘barriers’ or titles of each theme and extended both to other themes and across categories.
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The Personal Dimension

The personal dimension includes the experiences and responses unique to the individual participant:

- The Puzzle of Personal Experience— an effort to consider life experiences writ large.
- Professional Teacher Preparation— a look at teacher education and certification.
- The Complexity of Cultural Knowledge— how teachers’ cultural awareness and experience informs their perceptions.
- The Role of Racism— as experienced and/or perceived by each participant.

The Puzzle of Personal Experience. While on some levels it may be entirely meaningless to claim that personal experiences affect a teacher’s perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives in the Grade 10 ELA classrooms, this section seeks to identify the myriad kinds of experiences that either facilitate or hinder that process. Put another way: How do the puzzle pieces of a person’s life fit together to inform their perceptions as a whole?

The sample of this study is particularly important when looking at this theme. On the one hand, all of the participants expressed experiencing apprehension and even refusal among professional colleagues on the topic of integration. Their comments certainly merit a closer look into the experiences of the teachers that are reluctant, a perspective that was not evident in this study. On the other hand, of the eight participants that were interviewed, we have access to the kinds of lived experiences that helped to
foster a deep and meaningful commitment to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in Grade 10 ELA classrooms.

A first such type of experience is context. As already mentioned, two of the participants were Aboriginal. Intuitively, they displayed an innate interest in the integration of Aboriginal perspectives, both feeling as if the stories of their peoples were still struggling to reach parity with those of the dominant (white) culture’s. Two others grew up in, and teach, in areas of the city with the highest percentages of Aboriginal residents. They grew up around Aboriginal people, they had Aboriginal childhood friends, and they shared many of the same social struggles as the Aboriginal people in their communities, e.g. poverty: “… you know we didn’t have a lot of money and I think growing up that way, I appreciate where they’re coming from, you know and some of the things that I have dealt with … certain circumstances and I can relate to them in a way because they go through a lot of similar things” (Nadia). Sam added: “I mean we had all the Aboriginal kids in the neighborhood. I never really thought of them as being different”. Clearly, lives lived among Aboriginal people make these four teachers natural advocates for the people with whom they grew up.

Interestingly, the other half of the participants have lived most of their lives in District A, the one with the smallest population of Aboriginal people and seemingly the district where community and professional resistance to integration is at its strongest. Three of the four expressed not remembering having Aboriginal peers in school. All of them expressed a serious lack of teaching about Aboriginal peoples during their own school experiences. Still, each of these four participants transcended the ignorance of
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Aboriginal issues, or even the negative attitudes that may have easily become ingrained in them, to champion the integration of Aboriginal perspectives.

For Barry and Brandy, the drive has been largely fuelled by their professionalism. Given the Division’s mandate, they set out to do the best job that they could. The result is that each has gone to great lengths to read extensively on Aboriginal topics and to read books written by Aboriginal authors. Both have figured out how to bring Aboriginal peoples, including elders, into their classrooms. As their exposure to these sources grew, so, too, did their appreciation for Aboriginal perspectives. Brandy commented: “… as I gained more knowledge about Aboriginal culture, specifically the residential school system (that was a piece that I was drawn to), it made me want to share that learning with my students”. In other words, given an appropriate chance, Aboriginal perspectives spoke for themselves. They didn’t need to be ‘shoved down the throat’ (an expression used by several participants to describe the way that some PD is done) of these teachers. Rather, their inherent value became evident through personal reflection and study.

Among the non-Aboriginal teachers, personal experiences and relationships with Aboriginal people was confirmed as a factor heavily influencing their perceptions. Sam mentioned often how he had grown up surrounded by Aboriginal peoples and that they remained a part of his support network. Fiona named a handful of people of Aboriginal people that have influenced her thinking. The breadth of their experiences suggests that meaningful personal contact with Aboriginal individuals matters more than the context in which it happens. Professionally, a university professor from a northern reserve really inspired Fiona, as have the elders that she has had visit her classroom. On the other hand, she suggested that a childhood friendship with an Aboriginal girl also affected her
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teaching. Nadia, who admitted that she never thought much about Aboriginal perspectives before arriving in her school, commented that her perceptions were immediately influenced by contact with her many Aboriginal students. Finally, in yet another context, extra-curricular experience with Aboriginal people at a church-run mission woke one participant to the realities of the city’s Aboriginal population, so different from her own. One particular woman there became what she described as her spiritual mentor. She was adamant that her experiences there still very much drive and influence her perceptions on integration.

The experiences of the Aboriginal teachers, while different, still speaks to the importance of key relationships in individual lives shaping perceptions affecting the classroom. Gina remembers being impressed by the passion of a non-Aboriginal woman from the Division speaking to her university classes about Aboriginal education. Speaking of the early years of her career, she spoke of the opportunity to work with a well-known Aboriginal principal who she described as a strong advocate for kids and Aboriginal education: “[She was] … the first native person I’d ever encountered who sat down and said we’re not going to get anywhere unless we stop feeling sorry for ourselves as a culture. And to me that was really shocking because here I was going to save the world”. The names of those two individuals from her past were instantly on Gina’s lips as being instrumental in shaping her views about Aboriginal education, a phenomenon reflected in what Sally had to say about a select few of her own Aboriginal mentors: “They’ve all instilled some kind of ideas or said something at one time or another that stuck with me, that I remember now”.

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While it is clear that meaningful, positive encounters with key people help to shape the perceptions that teachers bring to integration, when those key people are Aboriginal, an important association is made between teachers and the Aboriginal perspectives that they are supposed to integrate into their classrooms. In the case of all of the participants, the experiences that they regard as shaping their perceptions have been positive, making them want to bring a constructive and encouraging set of Aboriginal perspectives to their classrooms to reflect their personal connections to Aboriginal individuals, perhaps even to honour them.

What is impossible to ignore, however, is that the power of their experiences most likely works in the opposite way, as well. If this study’s participants speak both of their own positive interactions with Aboriginal peoples and the negative perceptions of some of their colleagues, it remains to be explored whether those adverse sentiments are also the result of memorable personal experiences.

Professional Teacher Preparation. I anticipated that an individual teacher’s professional preparation would have had a lasting effect on their attitudes towards integrating Aboriginal perspectives in their respective Grade 10 English Language Arts classrooms. The realm of teacher preparation clearly belongs in the personal dimension of this phenomenon. The eight participants had vastly different experiences in learning how to integrate perspectives in their professional preparation.

The province’s inclusion of mandatory Aboriginal education courses for certifying teachers was not a reality for any of the participants in this study. Further
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studies may want to focus on how the inclusion of those courses has (or has not) impacted teacher preparation on Aboriginal topics.

Only the least experienced teacher in the study had taken university-level coursework directly linking Aboriginal perspectives and teaching as part of their teacher certification, most likely a reflection on the very unavailability of this kind of course prior to more recent years. The two most experienced teachers had not completed any formal university coursework on Aboriginal topics. Four of the participants took at least one undergraduate course on Aboriginal topics ranging from art to history. A fifth participant had taken Aboriginal content courses as part of post-baccalaureate studies and a sixth had completed graduate work on Aboriginal topics. In every case, their decisions to include Aboriginal topics as a part of their studies were optional.

That the majority of the participants chose to study Aboriginal topics may be a significant reflection on the sample of this study that informs both the ‘personal experience’ and ‘professional preparation’ themes. Again, it is particularly important to note that the personal dimension of teacher perceptions most likely supersedes contextual or institutional influences. It became clear in talking with the participants that each has taken it upon him or herself to prepare themselves where their formal preparation has left them lacking, as in Gina’s comment: “My teacher education has woefully under prepared me”.

In every single case, teachers spoke of their own efforts to prepare themselves to better carry out the directive of the Division to integrate. The majority spoke of involving themselves in ways that are in no way required by the Division: engaging in their own reading and studying, seeking out any number of kinds of resources for their
own classrooms, sharing and working with colleagues and enlisting the guidance of Aboriginal speakers, as indicated by Sally: “I think that it's just sharing learning with other people and find learning and interests that I want to know about and applying them in my classroom”.

In-service teacher preparation was another topic explored with the participants. As mentioned earlier in this study, this particular group of teachers (i.e. those teaching Grade 10 ELA in the division) is mandated to participate in a mandatory professional development workshop focusing on Aboriginal topics. Each is expected by the division to include, at minimum, a human rights focused unit working with Aboriginal literature.

A number of noteworthy questions and comments arose regarding the mandatory professional development day. Only six out the eight participants in the study had attended the ‘mandatory’ session. While the two teachers who did not attend the session were among the more inexperienced teachers they had both been teaching Grade 10 ELA for at least four years. While thinking through their absence through the lens of the ‘personal’ category, neither expressed deciding to miss the session. Rather, they both seemed unaware, or even surprised, that this professional development day existed. For the teachers that did attend, either a Department Head or administrator had informed them of the need to attend. Participation was not presented as a personal choice.

A detail that I believe is worthy of comment is that the two teachers who missed the compulsory workshop came from the two school environments that seemed to most embrace the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. It seems unlikely in these environments that educators were willingly ignoring the importance of Aboriginal perspectives. It seems more likely that the necessity of attending was simply ‘lost in the
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shuffle’. Further discussion of this detail will be discussed later in Chapter 4 under the theme of Administration.

The six teachers who could include their professional development day with the division all expressed the opinion that, at least in theory, having professional development on integrating Aboriginal perspectives is a worthwhile idea, even essential. Still, only Barry expressed any important personal impact: “I think that had the grade 10 mandate not been in place, I probably would not have explored [Aboriginal perspectives] as much as I have…I don't think it necessarily provided any direction but it provided the impetus and then I sort of did the rest of the exploring”. While the day did introduce Barry to a subject that he has since become passionate about, it did little else: “I think the division could have certainly provided a lot more diverse sources in terms of things to work with”.

Barry’s general feeling of dissatisfaction was evident among the other five participants, as well. Again, while they all agreed that professional development was necessary, none endorsed the manner in which it was executed by the division. Gina’s thoughts were indicative of the others’: “It was the most bizarre compartmentalized day…. This is how you do your medicine wheel, this is your unit … just not useful. It needs to not just be ‘this is your three-week unit.’ It needs to be ‘this is how you can broaden the scope of it’”.

Once again agreeing that professional development was worthwhile, the participants all shared recommendations about how teachers could be better professionally prepared, given their own experiences of under-preparedness. The themes
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of the personal and contextual dimensions displayed some overlap here as each teacher’s experiences in schools informed their counsels. Sam remarked:

I really believe, especially if you are working with younger teachers, it would be good to put them into a school where they've had a history of success so they can see it firsthand. Once you have seen it in action, and you've met the kids and see how they react; now you can ask intelligent questions and this stuff is not overwhelming. That's the biggest problem with the in-services because they throw you in cold and you really can't be prepared for it on that basis.”

The suggestion to allow teachers to visit other buildings was reflected in the comments of several other participants. That professional development should be more experiential, i.e. not having teachers sit in a classroom-type setting, was echoed by the majority of participants. This idea was expanded upon by many of the participants to include real-life contact and sharing with Aboriginal peoples. Fiona, using her own preparation as an example, stated: “… having the Aboriginal elders come in is helpful for me because it allows me to correct some of my own vocabulary and also provides a perspective that I can’t bring by myself to the classroom … getting at those other perspectives from other experts helps to alleviate my own limitations”. When asked to expand upon her limitations it became clear that they were the very kind that teachers expressed concern about under the theme of cultural knowledge. Her comments here suggested (or confirmed) the idea in that section that adequate and appropriate teacher preparation can in fact address the apprehension and limitations that a lack of cultural knowledge seems to create for some teachers.

Suggestions about teacher preparation were made most explicit by Leanne:
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...there could be some exchange between city schools in [the division] and reserve schools. There could be some dialogue ... trying to understand the experience of reserve life? I don't think that one can get that without going there...[teachers need to] get to know some Aboriginal people and go to the Aboriginal Film Festival. Look at the films that are getting made. Go to [the theatre] where Aboriginal students are doing a production...Go to Aboriginal teachers' circle ... Get elders or successful business people into the schools, presenters, guest speakers. Showcase Aboriginal success... I think they should provide more funding for teachers to get real training, experiential training. Good training. Not a day in a building.

All but one of the non-Aboriginal participants identified active, personal experiences with Aboriginal people as part of what had prepared them for teaching. Every participant indicated the importance of having Aboriginal people contributing to the student experience of the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. However, throughout their discussion was the implication that it remained possible to prepare people (who are not necessarily Aboriginal) to better integrate Aboriginal perspectives.

To conclude, Leanne's recommendations were accompanied by an important question that remained largely unanswered by the participants: “You have to get to know Aboriginal people. That's the thing. Lots of [non-Aboriginal] teachers don't know any Aboriginal people. How do you mandate that? How do you mandate someone working on a reserve or even visiting a reserve?”

One thing seems clear. The participants were unanimous in assenting that if the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is to become more successfully implemented by
the city’s teachers, an ever larger group of key Aboriginal resource people will become increasingly important.

The Complexity of Cultural Knowledge. Cultural knowledge was a theme that, as expected, struck at the very heart of teachers’ perceptions about the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. As noted in Chapter 2, Kanu’s (2011) research, for example, suggested that many non-Aboriginal teachers felt their own lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge as an impediment to integrating. Kanu’s research participants also expressed a hesitancy regarding cultural protocols, stating that they were worried by the offense that their own ignorance may unintentionally cause (p. 177).

The same uncertainty about the lack of cultural knowledge also surfaced among this study’s participants. While they differ among the participants, each certainly expressed concerns that were rooted in beliefs about Aboriginal cultures. While the participants displayed confidence where cultural knowledge and/or practice were involved, the legitimacy of their delivery was often called into question. Where the aforementioned protocol was concerned, Sally, an Aboriginal teacher, offered: “…there are just certain things that are not mine to teach. There are certain things that if a student asked me about something I may not feel I have the right to be teaching them about but I will tell them who they should be talking to or I will bring that person to them” (p. 22). She added that she would also advise non-Aboriginal teachers to seek out those same people rather than approach questionable content on their own.

Sally’s comments point to an interesting sub-theme of the cultural knowledge paradigm, namely the significance of one’s ethnic background, or skin colour.
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the non-Aboriginal participants, Barry, for example, explained how, when working with his students, he would make a point of explaining how his whiteness may interfere with his ability to teach Aboriginal perspectives:

…I am a white male so my experience in this, though perhaps more than yours, is still very limited. I have taken classes and I met people and I've learned stuff but my perspective is still my perspective. And I come with biases that I am both aware of and not aware of and we are working through this together. I am not the expert here. And I say quite frankly that ideally you would have an Aboriginal person teaching you this.

Fiona added: “Well, I think there are definitely some limitations that I have, in so far as not being Aboriginal, so I think that's where you bring in help from elsewhere. Every time I've taught the grade tens I have brought in an elder to speak to the class …”

(p. 7). Leanne also hinted that it would be better to have Aboriginal teachers or elders leading some culturally significant activities, yet she adds the suggestion that the integration of the topic and/or activity is more important than her own feelings of inadequacy: “There's no Aboriginal cultural person at Tecumseh … I'm white and I've been to sharing circles and I've participated but there's a big hole here so who's going to do it? So I'm doing it. I feel totally inadequate. Sometimes I feel like a big phony, but it's better me than no one” (Leanne, p. 18).

Their feelings are supported by literature that they may or may not be aware of. Hill (2002), for example, states:

Our stories need to be shared by our own people, in our own words and from our own points of reference. Perhaps it is a necessity to work in Indigenous -- non-
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Indigenous partnerships right now to ensure that the messages being conveyed are understandable to all and leave little room for misinterpretation; perhaps in time the partnerships will be more often freely chosen in respect and right relationship (281).

Gina agrees, but points out that her issue is a matter of vocabulary. When asked if a non-Aboriginal person could teach Aboriginal perspectives, she said:

No. I think that's pretentious. That would be like me teaching an African-American perspective. How the hell do I know? I can teach African-American history. It’s history. Or literature, from a literary standpoint. Can I teach the personal standpoint? Probably not. I haven't had that experience. That doesn't mean I shouldn't teach the history or the literature (9).

Interestingly, several non-Aboriginal participants did imply that given time and/or the right kinds of preparatory experiences, they would in fact feel able to legitimately and effectively lead activities traditionally left to Aboriginal peoples. Nadia stated: “I’ve been in healing circles, sharing circles and I could facilitate one if I were asked. I feel like I could at this point but things like the more traditional sweat type ceremonies, things like that, I wouldn’t be able to. I’m not there yet. Or, I might never be there”. When asked about leading a smudge as a non-Aboriginal teacher, Fiona answered: “Yes, I would and I would be highly criticized by my colleagues. I'd have to do my own research on it and I'd have to make a connection with an elder who would help to teach me but I myself personally would be totally comfortable doing that”.

Brandy, a teacher with less exposure to Aboriginal cultural experiences, echoed Nadia’s feelings. She was adamant that Aboriginal perspectives should be included in her
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students’ education, but she was uncomfortable with thinking about her English Language Arts as an appropriate setting for traditional cultural practices like sweats or smudges. However, like other participants, she was able to imagine that, with the right kind of experiences, she could come to feel comfortable leading/teaching those kinds of activities:

I've spoken with other non-Aboriginal teachers in the division who teach at schools where Aboriginal Ed is a huge focus and they have grown to be quite comfortable doing smudges. It's part of the school culture and part of the daily routine … they don't have elders come in to do it. They've learned to feel comfortable. So I think that if it was a school focus and as a staff we participated in them regularly then it could become a part of our school culture. I think that it could be brought into an English classroom and I would feel comfortable doing so. But at this but at this stage we are nowhere near doing that.

What seems evident is that the “possession” of cultural knowledge is indeed a major factor in how teachers perceive the task of integrating Aboriginal perspectives and that, at least for the time being, it is intimately connected to ethnic background. Simply being Aboriginal, however, did not automatically eliminate challenges that teachers face where cultural knowledge was concerned. Leanne commented: “Aboriginal people struggle with doing the unit as much as anyone else because they've lost their cultural identity. I don't think it's the color of your skin, but experience and knowledge”.

Gina states that she can teach from an Aboriginal perspective because of who she is, but adds that she also sees some problems with the way units on Aboriginal perspectives are often taught:
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There’s this whole thought that if we are going to teach Aboriginal perspectives, we have to keep Aboriginal people in the past” … if you have a class like mine with all these beautiful multiethnic children, then you talk about their cultures and you let them lead. They are the experts, not me. So I might say…this is what I know. It's different from somebody who is an Ojibwe, and it’s different than somebody who is Cree, or Filipino. You put it out there and let you let the kids lead the way. This is their culture. I can't stand there and direct somebody in their culture. And to talk about an Aboriginal perspective means a worldview. That's not building a Teepee.

Gina’s concerns propose a recurring theme from all the participants regarding the nature of the role that cultural knowledge plays in forming teacher perceptions on integration. The complexity of the cultural knowledge question may encompass not only content but also pedagogy; teachers comfort or discomfort arising from the theme of cultural knowledge can be rooted in either or both. More on these pedagogical aspects of the question will be explored under the theme of the relationship between educational systems and Aboriginal cultural values.

The Role of Racism. Of all the themes of the study, racism remains the most difficult to discuss in concrete terms. I suggest a number of reasons for this phenomenon. First of all, I believe that the abstract nature of the term itself makes it extremely problematic to talk about. Individual teachers have very different definitions about the nature of racism. As such, experiences or phenomena that are perceived as racist by one teacher may be perfectly acceptable to another.
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Secondly, no one wants to be perceived as racist. As mentioned in the limitations of the study, this may interfere with participants’ willingness to be completely honest about their feelings and/or perceptions. I would also suggest that our own education as teachers may have been inadequate in preparing us to explore the many dimensions of racism. Many teachers have studied the topic extensively, but the study itself can be flawed. In “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack”, Peggy McIntosh (1989) writes: “I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage”. I acknowledge that my own situation of white privilege may limit my abilities to understand aspects of racist discourse.

That being said, the participants all expressed the existence of racism at different levels of the education system. However, it also seemed to be the topic that elicited the shortest responses. When asked to talk about racism, teachers were unwilling or unable to express themselves as clearly as they had on other topics. The suggestion was made that it was something they “felt” was around them. While they mentioned the lack of representation of ethnic groups on school displays and social groupings that sometimes seemed race-based as visible evidence, it seemed uncomfortable for them to articulate exactly how it was that they were aware of racism around them. Regardless of the discrepancies of meaning, I suggest that if they say that racism affects the integration of Aboriginal perspectives, then in fact it does.

In the personal dimension, racism figured into teachers’ experiences, thereby influencing their perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. Nadia found that students’ expectations were racist based on the teacher’s background: “Sometimes I find
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that with me since I am very much so non-Aboriginal that they tend to prejudge me and assume that I grew up rich and I lived in a mansion and have all this stuff …”. The power dynamic between Nadia and her students was not explored further, but work like McIntosh’s suggest that there is more to be studied in a situation like hers. It is also worth remembering the participants’ many comments linking cultural knowledge and skin colour. Their comments suggest a need for further exploration on issues of race, power and discrimination.

The need for further contemplation and study was confirmed by Fiona, who revealed the ongoing need to educate herself out of racism: “… our vocabulary reflects a history of racism towards our Aboriginal people. It’s important to me that I stay aware and conscious of that”. Both concerns inform the theme of cultural knowledge and the perceived ability of a non-Aboriginal person to possess and/or deliver it.

While Fiona’s comment acknowledged the unintentional racism of an insufficient vocabulary on her part, none of the participants expressed any personal attitudes that I would define as consciously or intentionally racist. Their seeming discomfort on the topic, however, and their collective acknowledgement of racism as an issue suggest the need for increased dialogue. All spoke of the need of teachers and students to work towards the commonalities of people rather than their differences, though none suggested how these type of discourses or actions might be achieved.
The Contextual Dimension

The contextual dimension includes the experiences and responses influenced by the school and/or the community in which a teacher works:

- School/District Demographic Differences.
- The Attitudes of Other Educators (in specific contexts).
- Racism- as experienced and/or perceived (in specific contexts).
- Resources- as access to these differ by context.
- Administrative Support- unique to the context.
- External Factors- unique to the context.

**School/District Demographic Differences.** I anticipated that demographic differences between schools would have some effect on the perceptions of teachers asked to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. The sample represented a total of seven schools. Two teachers from each of the division’s four districts participated. I believe that the sample covers a very broad spectrum of the kind of demographic realities that teachers in the division face, including student bodies that vary significantly based on ethnic background, socioeconomic status, and personal histories (schools in the inner city, e.g., have relatively high populations of immigrant children from war affected countries compared to those in other districts).

Perhaps most importantly to this study, the identified Aboriginal population in the districts and within the schools varies immensely, from Barry’s estimate that five per cent of his school’s population in District A is Aboriginal to Sally’s estimate of close to one hundred per cent in her school in District C. Ideas about the percentage of Aboriginal
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and non-Aboriginal students played an important role in determining how many of the teachers perceive of the task of integration.

As stated earlier, the participants were all adamant that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives was important and necessary. However, questions about demographic realities suggested that these do influence both the manner and the degree to which integration might occur.

The relationship between the integration of Aboriginal perspectives and school demographics was also telling when it involved largely non-Aboriginal school populations. When talking about the district with the smallest percentage of Aboriginal students, teachers expressed powerful impediments to integration on the part of other teachers and even their students’ parents. Gina expressed receptiveness among the students but resistance from parents, a sentiment echoed by Fiona: “My students’ parents don’t want me to take my students to the legislative grounds for a tour of the Manitoba Legislature for fear of the “Aboriginal homeless people” that may do terrible things to their poor children while we walk from the bus stop into the building. And of course that fear is spread to the students as well”. The teachers expressed that attitudes about Aboriginal peoples among their students from this district often made integration harder than they felt it would be elsewhere.

Sally, who had teaching experiences in the same districts, echoed these types of obstacles on a collegial level:

… the students who went there are sons and daughters of upper-class well-known people throughout the city … I do remember having one Aboriginal student there and they were … very low functioning autistic and had FAS as well.
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That was the one Aboriginal student who was in the school. So the comments were all along the lines of, if we don't have any Aboriginal students that are coming to the school, why do we have to know about Aboriginal education? If we don't have any Aboriginal students…what's the point?

She expressed a sense of bitterness among colleagues who felt that integration did not belong at a school with such a small percentage of Aboriginal children.

Despite their perceptions on the ease and/or difficulty presented by demographic differences, the participants in the study remained confident that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives remained important and necessary regardless of the demographic realities. However, they did express that integration seemed easier in the schools with a high percentage of Aboriginal students. The teachers from those schools expressed how important it was to increase the positive perceptions about Aboriginal people in areas where a large percentage of the Aboriginal population lives with the realities of poverty and other social problems outside of schools. Their concerns were voiced by Nadia:

… their needs aren’t the same as students in other places, like they need to learn about their culture. It’s something that’s really important because a lot of times if you have a troubled student, we’ll have healing circles or they’ll be taken to a sweat and these are all things that are going to help them…or they’ll have a smudge … Where we are, they see a lot of Aboriginal people that may not be doing very well and so it shows them that there are actually people of Aboriginal descent that are making something of themselves.

There was no sense, as in District A, of parental or collegial apprehension along the lines of Aboriginal inclusion. Sally added that among many Aboriginal students,
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even something as simple as attendance ended up being a huge factor in their success and/or failure, and that honouring and celebrating their ancestry and culture often made the difference for her students in a way that it may not for non-Aboriginal students.

Further discussion of this phenomena will occur in the section on ‘Student Impact’.

In a final look at the difference that demographics make, Barry made a unique observation that raises an important question. While every participant, at some point in their interviews, mentioned the importance of bringing in Aboriginal peoples as a part of the ‘how’ of integration, he highlighted the significance of demographic differences, particularly the importance of non-Aboriginal educators integrating Aboriginal perspectives in schools where Aboriginal students were poorly represented:

I think it depends largely on who you are teaching. I think that's huge…for the students that I work with it might actually work better coming from me because of the modeling … Because it is much easier to associate with someone who is like you or comes from the same place as you … I think is important in a way that might not work with somebody who is more familiar with the culture, with somebody who comes from the culture … because then that might be a different approach. But I think if you're working with the community of students that self-identify as Aboriginal, I'm not the best person for the job. Because I think that has to be done in a very different way.

Barry’s comment could be perceived as contentious, as it sounds like choosing teachers who somehow reflect the cultural realities of their students. I certainly cannot imagine Barry, or any of the other participants, advocating for this kind of system, though Sam also highlights the idea as important at his school: “… we have a pretty diverse
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teaching staff so students can identify with teachers of different colors and backgrounds and it's never like you are alone and you don't have a touchstone …”. Sam and Barry’s speak to a very real issue based on the varying demographics of a large school division’s schools, one also hinted at by other participants earlier. Both student and teacher demographics do affect teacher-student relationships and students’ sense of belonging.

Finally, teachers’ perceptions of their own abilities to effectively teach (including the integration of Aboriginal perspectives) depends at least in part on their own backgrounds (e.g. ethnic and/or cultural) and at least partially on the demographic constitution of their schools’ student bodies. The role of both student and teacher population demographics cannot be overlooked as it clearly affects the perceptions of teachers integrating Aboriginal perspectives in various schools while also affecting the way that their teaching is received by students.

**The Attitudes of Other Educators.** It has been repeatedly acknowledged that this study’s sample likely represents unnaturally positive perceptions on the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in Grade 10 ELA classrooms. However, the participants also spoke extensively about what they observe and believe about other educators’ perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. It is important to consider how the observations of the participants shape their own perceptions while possibly revealing a more representative look at what a broader population of teachers is feeling.

I also feel that it is worthwhile to note that I did not feel as if the participants were judging other educators. Each acknowledged that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives was a challenging task. The majority went further to suggest that it was, in
fact, a task better ignored than performed poorly, a topic to be further discussed in the
section on ‘Student Impact’. The participants seemed to accept and understand the
challenges that their colleagues may be facing.

The differences in teachers’ perceptions created by the demographic realities of
schools were particularly evident in the way that participants spoke of their colleagues.
In the two schools with the highest populations of Aboriginal students, participants’
observations about other educators reflected their ongoing contact with Aboriginal
students. Sally contrasted her experiences in a mostly non-Aboriginal school, where
teachers were always asking: “Why do we have to do this?” with her experience in her
actual school, where she feels that she and the other teachers are all covering the same
kinds of goals. Nadia repeatedly spoke of the support for Aboriginal perspectives at
every level of her school, support that she did remark on lacking while student teaching
in a different kind of environment.

In schools with less significant Aboriginal populations, the reactions of other
educators observed by the participants were quite different. One observation repeated by
a number of participants was that, where other educators felt either negatively or poorly
prepared to integrate, many simply chose to ignore the Division’s mandate altogether.
Barry revealed: “…this is something that I only know from a secondary source, but there
are many people in our school and in other schools who do not deliver any integrated
curriculum courses that relate in any way”. Fiona suggested that some of her colleagues
simply pretended that the mandate did not exist, while Gina spoke of teachers justifying
their own apprehension by delegating the responsibility for integrating to the Division’s
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Aboriginal high school: “I remember at the time [it opened] hearing- Good, I don't need to teach this Aboriginal stuff anymore. That's what they are for”.

A second reaction born of professional reluctance to act on the mandate was to treat it less seriously than the participants in this study feel it deserves. Brandy and Sally both indicated that strategies used by their colleagues might involve embedding a minimal coverage of Aboriginal perspectives into a larger exploration of human rights or multiculturalism, or simply adding a few Aboriginal symbols (e.g. a Medicine Wheel) into a few lessons. The thoughts of several participants were also reflected in Leanne’s observation: “Nobody else wants to do it in my department. Everybody else wants it out … They give it short shrift. They do it in one or 2 weeks, they just want it done. They just jump through the hoop. As in I’ve done it, I can check it off”.

Despite the apparent negativity associated with failing to adequately integrate Aboriginal perspectives (or at least try to) this study’s participants did provide insight into possible explanations for the reluctance or apprehension of other educators. Their responses propose that many, perhaps even a majority, of teachers in the Division express some level of apprehension about integrating Aboriginal perspectives. Their explanations speak to the participants’ own perceptions about integration in both highlighting what they see as lacking in teacher preparation and in revealing how they feel about integration as it should be done.

A majority of the participants stressed that they believe that their colleagues have the best of intentions. However, they offered reasons for the apprehension that they observed among other teachers. Several participants mentioned the motivation of teachers and suggested that many teachers felt forced by the mandate to do something
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they wouldn’t otherwise do. While Barry simply suggested that it was important to find ways to motivate internally, Gina went so far as to suggest that the resentment born of being forced to do something actually led to an increase in racist sentiments among teachers, i.e. being forced to do ‘Aboriginal stuff’ actually leading to negative feelings toward Aboriginal peoples. Leanne, on the other hand, supported things like the mandatory professional development, arguing that many teachers simply weren’t motivated personally and that integration was too important to ignore.

Leanne’s encouragement of mandatory workshops, however, also addressed what was the single most prevalent explanation given for the apprehension of other educators to integrate. All of the participants suggested, in different ways, that feelings of inadequate cultural knowledge played a role in the reluctance of teachers to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. Sam admitted to being befuddled by the apprehension of others while recommending that they required experiential learning opportunities to counter their feelings of inadequacy.

Fiona spoke extensively of the fear among teachers born of ignorance about cultural values:

Well I think there's a lot of fear of misrepresenting … Some of the teachers have said that because they're not Aboriginal they don't think they should have anything to do with teaching it. They see it as being a matter of respect; that they can't give it the respect that is due and therefore they step back and don't go there … Sometimes I think the P.D. make teachers afraid of doing an injustice. Some teachers are really nervous about making a mistake …
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Interestingly, Fiona’s comments reflect not only the fear that she senses in other teachers, but also the dangers inherent in professional development conducted poorly. Once again, the importance of strong teacher preparation is highlighted as a way of better shaping the perceptions of teachers into the kind that will allow them to confidently address the Division’s mandate, a sentiment echoed by Leanne: “You have to educate the educators. And it's a big process. Look at my process. People haven't gone to sweats, they have no clue and yet they're supposed to teach it”.

**Racism.** Contextually, students’ racist attitudes figured as a factor affecting teachers’ ability to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. Particularly in schools with relatively insignificant Aboriginal populations, there was a resistance among students to ‘buy in’ to Aboriginal content and perspectives that seemed to be rooted in racist dispositions. Barry also expressed concern in these contexts over Aboriginal students feeling singled out when Aboriginal content was being covered: “… it is difficult because of the approach and I think maybe that Aboriginal students in my classes tend to be in a strong minority of students”. Brandy echoed Fiona’s earlier concerns about students’ upbringing influencing their attitudes: “We have … students who in particular see Aboriginal people as more of a negative aspect of society and unfortunately they've grown up with family members who have helped to sort of instil stereotypes”. At another school with a large Aboriginal population, the reverse was occurring: “[The Aboriginal students] think that, well, all white people are bad … I tried to explain that to them but I find that they always lump everybody into one category”.

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The participants from more diverse settings suggested a waning racism among student bodies. Sam commented: “Well in the local level you saw some of my kids ... pretty diverse and none of them felt out of place they were having a good time, so as far as racism around here I don't see a lot of it”. While Leanne commented on many students sitting with students of the same ‘heritage’, she also suggested that socioeconomic differences were more significant divisive factors than race and that she felt that kids were ‘less racist’ than they used to be.

Resources. I suggested in the theoretical framework that while access to resources would vary by context, individual teacher initiatives would mitigate how the access to appropriate resources affected a teacher’s perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. The participants’ comments regarding the resources that they use support that understanding.

Surprisingly, given Kanu’s (2011) sample of teachers who decried lack of resources as a serious challenge to teaching Aboriginal perspectives, the availability of readable, watchable, classroom-worthy resources did not emerge as a major influence on any of the participants’ perceptions. Again, the positivity of the attitudes of the participants may account for the difference. Regardless of the reason, the participants in this study felt that resources were widely available and accessible. Sam, for instance, remarked: “All I have to do is listen to the radio or watch TV or read the newspaper and I can talk for a week on Aboriginal perspectives just off of that”. Nadia added: “

I think it was a little bit more of a challenge even a couple of years ago but …one of our initiatives was to have more Aboriginal resources …we have already done
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that and have a bit of a package or a library for any teacher who wanted some
stuff. Now we have an abundance of Aboriginal novels …I know if I don't have
something then one of the other teachers will have it or has done it.

Almost all of the participants mentioned the wealth of resources easily found on
the Internet as a source for readings, images or film. Sally and Sam both mentioned
YouTube videos, for example, in bringing the voices of Aboriginal people to the class.
The majority of the teachers also added that in most cases, they felt that their students had
reasonable access to electronic resources during class time.

While the ability to find resources was encouraging for teachers, the main concern
was the time involved in finding and collecting the resources that exist. Noting their own
lack of time in collecting resources, Barry and Brandy both suggested that it would really
help him if the school or Division had a means of pooling together great resources and
sending them to each school as a ‘package’, though Barry added that the lack of resources
should never be an excuse for teachers. Sally echoed his sentiment, remarking that even
when budgets for resources were exhausted, personal initiative and the Internet could
always yield more. Brandy remarked that, for her, “… challenges are always time and
resource-based. Giving myself the time. Giving the program the time that it needs …to
continue to learn”. Fiona spoke for a sentiment reflected in almost every interview when
she said:

  The biggest resource is time. I think money is definitely a factor. But with more
time, I could access more money. With more time, I could access more
community resources. With more time, I could do more elaborate planning. With
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more time, I could conference with students and do a better job of assessing for
learning and of learning.

“Human” Resources. Connected to the time issue, the resources most
commonly cited as those that the participants wished they had more access to were
human, rather than material, in nature. Repeatedly, mostly through the participants’
recommendations for how the integration of Aboriginal perspectives could be improved
in the Division, participants expressed the need for more Aboriginal people in their
workplaces. Even Sally, who felt that her access to Aboriginal resource people was
excellent, spoke to the difficulty that she imagined many other teachers had in accessing
those people. She suggested that teachers often don’t know who to contact or worry
about the protocols involved in asking them to come.

Leanne talked about how helpful Aboriginal friends had been, as well as an
Aboriginal Circle of Educators. She could not stress enough how important she felt it
was for teachers to meet more Aboriginal people and learn from them. Fiona hinted at
her own difficulties in finding the people she needed to help. She indicated a binder
including phone numbers that she had been given at one point, but added: “… but phone
numbers change and people move”. Again, teachers expressed the challenge not of
finding resources, but of being able to find them in a timely, uncomplicated manner.
Brandy’s comments on the matter echoed the thoughts of others:

I think it would be really helpful to have, I don’t even know if it's a possibility, but
to have an elder be based out of your school. Almost like a liaison worker. We
have community liaisons for a lot of cultures we should have one for First Nations
people. And knowing that there is a go to person who is open to coming in to team teach with teachers and to just talk to students, to have that connection. I think that would be huge to have that connection right in the building. I think that would be huge. So teachers don't need to go to [a resource centre] for workshops. They have it right at their fingertips. I do think it would be used. I think the resources would be used.

**Training in Appropriate Resource Usage.** While the teachers expressed their confidence in the existence of resources and lamented the time involved in accessing them, one unexpected response to the resource question involved how differently many teachers within the study regarded the same resources available to everyone.

The novel *April Raintree* by Beatrice Culleton has long been a staple of the Grade 10 Aboriginal perspectives unit in the Division. When questioned about resources, it was mentioned by seven of the eight participants as available in their schools. Reactions to the novel, however, included Sam’s “I like *April Raintree*”, Leanne’s I read *April Raintree* when I was 14 and it really touched me and I still teach [it]”, Barry’s “People love *April Raintree* for some crazy reason” and Gina’s “I don't believe in book burnings, but if I did that would be one on my pile”.

The concern over this particular novel was one of approach. Almost all of the teachers admitted that their students tended to enjoy reading *April Raintree*, but that the novel had both positive and negative potential depending on how it was studied. Leanne, a supporter of the novel, argued that literature was a means of opening kids’ hearts, something that she felt the novel does. She was concerned that other teachers she knew
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gave it “short shrift”. Brandy also supported its use, but only “if you can teach it in a way that eliminates the stereotypes that are in some ways embedded in it”. Gina, explaining her earlier reasoning, said: “April Raintree dwells on the negative. It's negative, negative, negative, negative, negative”.

The participants’ responses indicate the need for further exploration of access to resources. While the availability of resources has appeared as a theme in studies like Kanu’s (2005), the impact of resource-specific professional development and training remains to be studied.

**Administrative Support.** The participants in this study were all largely supportive of their own administrators. When asked about the establishment of the “culture” of a school, all of the participants indicated the fundamental importance of the principal. Leanne, for example, remarked: “I really feel like they set the tone” while Sally added that the principal’s actions determine the morale of the staff, which in turn affects the morale of the students: “… when everybody's happy, when things are great and everything straight, our numbers are up”.

Teachers expect administrators to be leaders in establishing the overall “feel” of the school. In the case of this study, that included an openness and even encouragement of Aboriginal perspectives. Nadia and Leanne both talked about the Aboriginal people that the administrator could bring to the school and both spoke of the importance of material present on the school’s walls (e.g. Representations of Aboriginal art and/or peoples).
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The data also suggests, however, that teachers have a relatively narrow corridor within which they want administrators to work. Teachers want to feel supported and trusted. Sam, for instance, said: “… when a principal has the ability to trust their staff to do what is right you get a school that can really grow”. Fiona insisted that a supportive administration made the criticism of other teachers easier to handle, and lamented the loss of an administrator who excelled at finding financial support for her ideas. All of their comments were summed up in Gina’s observation:

You have to have an administration who is going to support - especially for people who are trying to integrate a cultural perspective that is not their own … That you can have an administrator who is going to let you take chances and risks and support you and find you the money your administration is absolutely critical.

Beyond support on the teacher’s terms, however, the participants generally expressed a desire to be left alone to carry out their work. Sam expounded on the idea of trust in explaining the importance of allowing teachers the freedom to teach, free from the interference of the administration. Nadia suggested that her administration should have very little to do with what she does in her classroom, but that she wanted to be able to go to them when problems arose.

Among all of the participants, Brandy best articulated the balance that principals must negotiate to encourage positive perceptions among teachers. She acknowledged the difficulty principals might have in expecting teachers to conform to the Division’s mandate: “… if you push something from the top down and people aren't ready for that
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change, you could create animosity and create a negative climate in the building”. She also suggested, however, that principals risk taking their hesitancy to push too far:

My current administrator is very trusting and he believes if this is a division mandate that we should all be doing it and he trusts that the teachers in his building will be doing that. Having said that, unless it's an evaluation year, the conversation probably wouldn't come up… I don't want to say they need to be more on teachers or more aware of what teachers are doing in their classrooms with regard to Aboriginal Ed, but I think administrators certainly need to take an interest and let the teachers know that they are interested in what's happening and to support them.

The role of an administrator seems to be perceived as acting as a leader in establishing and maintaining a school climate, achieved largely through trusting and supporting the staff. However, as Brandy suggests, leadership cannot allow their trust of teachers to allow them to become passive.

External Factors. While this is ultimately a study about schools, we cannot completely ignore what happens outside of schools. The interviews made it very evident that the realities of students outside of schools play heavily into teachers’ perceptions on integration. Worth discussing here are the comments coming from schools with significant Aboriginal populations in the city’s poorest neighbourhoods. The teachers from those schools deal with issues that simply did not emerge among the other teachers.

For Sally and Nadia, the purposes of integrating Aboriginal perspectives involve the very ability among their students to survive day to day. Before they can even think
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about appreciating culture or celebrating diversity, they need a reason and the means to get to school.

Attendance, or lack thereof, is one of their main concerns, a product of bigger issues. Nadia remarked: “… a lot of really bad things have happened to some of these kids so they can’t be engaged in anything, because they can’t even come to class for a long time so that’s a huge issue. Attendance is a big, big, big issue”. Sally had very much the same to say:

That's when the attendance is terrible and there's really literally nobody there. That's when you are trying to find students. That's when telephones are being cut off and you know there's instability somewhere in their life. And that's when it's really hard to get everybody back together again. It almost snowballs. One person goes missing, and then all of a sudden two more are missing. And then you hear on Facebook something happens and this huge drama breaks out. All of a sudden I have 2 kids in class and stuff outside school is going on.

Both believe that integrating Aboriginal perspectives has a role in making their students feel proud and welcome at school, but achieving that potential is difficult when their lives outside of school interfere so dramatically. Sally commented:

Our school population is made up of a lot of inner-city Aboriginal students who deal with all sorts of issues at home, if they have a home. So poverty, homelessness, hunger, not having their basic needs met. So in turn, that affects our attendance, which affects how I teach. So I think a lot of how I teach is a lot different from other schools that don't necessarily face those exact same issues … You can't be so rigid because things change over time … You also have to be
aware of so many other things that another teacher in another school may not have to be aware of.

The issues facing the students not only makes day to day teaching more challenging but can also affect overall planning. The lived realities of students in these areas can even have regressive ramifications for lessons that the teachers thought they had successfully accomplished. Sally stated: “[A student] got into a fight or someone died and everything you taught them… They forget. I find that a lot. There are deeper problems than school. That really upsets me because I feel like I really got to them in class and then I know that, not for all of them but for a lot, they leave and it is all washed away”.

Sally also admits that sometimes it is difficult not to let all of the negative realities get to her. She struggles with the conflict between the perceptions of the young people she works with in the school and the images of those same young people prevalent everywhere else in society:

…it bothers me sometimes for sure when some of the things I hear about our students doing or even hear them saying or the way they are... a lot of them have kids or they're pregnant and I see this and it bothers me. And the things you hear on the news are always negative and a lot of times the students are involved. And when our school breaks for instance like spring break or on a long weekend something bad happens. Sometimes it is a death so it's not hard to prejudge … If I were like walking by them on the street I would say: “Oh, don't make eye contact” but then I see these guys and girls in school and they are so nice, so friendly.
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These kinds of external factors interfere with the perceptions that teachers bring to their task by making what is already a challenging mandate that much more difficult.

The Institutional Dimension

The institutional dimension includes considerations of the many factors that influence teachers on divisional and provincial scales. As such they are likely to affect a much greater number of teachers:

- The relationship between school culture and Aboriginal cultural values- On a systemic, rather than localized, level. This includes classroom size, questions of cultural surrender, assessment and authenticity.
- Racism- As systemic.
- Teacher resistance and professional development- The challenges and opportunities facing policymakers and administrators.
- Student impact- How teachers perceive of the effects of integration on students.

The Relationship Between School Culture and Aboriginal Cultural Values.

Chapter 2 reviewed Kanu’s (2005) theme studying school structures as incompatible with Aboriginal cultural values. The data in this study both supported and added to Kanu’s findings.

Time. The participants identified time as a significant source of conflict between schools and cultural values, though they did it in a number of ways that were different than the direct cultural conflict identified by Kanu (2005) (i.e. schools rigid approaches to time versus a “looser” concept of time among Aboriginal cultures). In discussing school
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changes that would help her to integrate Aboriginal perspectives, Leanne suggested that
the time constraints of individual classes (“No bells”), due dates and even school terms
(“No time limits”) interfered with delivering Aboriginal perspectives in the way that she
would like to. Barry, too, struggled with the limitations imposed by timetables, which he
described as Western and as interfering with integration done authentically.

Another dimension of the incompatibility of more Western notions of time and
those of Aboriginal cultures was the time allowed to an individual to achieve a goal
and/or learn. Leanne commented:

The whole idea of the Aboriginal perspective of learning compared to the Western
European way of learning - which is do it till you get it right. We don't have time.
We have this whole thing of shame that says you should get it in the first try and
if not the first try, definitely the second try. I have 17 or 18-year-olds in my grade
10 class but if it was an Aboriginal classroom, that would be fine. You can
graduate when you're 25 - without shame. And I try and say that. It's not a race. I
say you can graduate when you're 20.

The lack of time to really explore Aboriginal perspectives and give them the time
they deserved was echoed by the majority of the participants. Leanne’s comments, of
course, also have implications for the statistics used to measure the success of Aboriginal
students, a driving force of the mandate itself.

Classroom Size. Teachers perceive of classroom size as important in facilitating
or hampering their efforts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. The participants
generally agreed that integrating Aboriginal perspectives involved developing trust and
more deeply personal connections with their students. Fiona expressed dreaming of a world where her class sizes (she would be happy to have 20 students or less) would allow her to integrate in a more personally satisfactory way. She would have more time for each student. Sally commented that she needed to build trust first and Leanne implied that too many students made that difficult.

*Cultural Surrender and Assessment.* A common slur threatens to label young Aboriginal people “Apples: Red on the outside, White on the Inside”. Sally, who teaches in a school with a large Aboriginal population, noted how success in schools is often perceived of by Aboriginal communities as a relinquishing of one’s Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal students often have to deal with pressures from their communities, who feel that they have to give up a part of who they are to fit into the system:

So some may say that you have to sell yourself out to get to that position. You have to walk the “white” way. You have to let go of all your traditions, start speaking a different way, dressing a different way, acting a different way, carry on a new set of beliefs, make a new set of friends. You have to do all that to get there. So in this new program that I teach part of it says that you don't have to do that in order to get there. You can still be true to who you are and be a doctor.

As long as schools only measure success along the lines of factors like percentages or letter grades, they risk the continued alienation of young people struggling between what their two different worlds (i.e. the world of school and the world of their community) expect of them.
Every participant indicated the disconnect between assessment tools like report cards and Aboriginal perspectives. A majority indicated turning to more reflective types of student self-assessment as one means of coming up with the numbers required by school institutions for reporting, but they also spoke of that seeming artificial. As already mentioned, all of the teachers described the successful integration of Aboriginal perspectives as yielding results far more difficult to numerate: tolerance, respect, being a “better person”. Fiona indicated that sometimes things like this could be assessed by a teacher “just by making eye contact with a student”. Sally added that in her school, where many Aboriginal students are struggling, success might mean: “If they can learn how to solve their own problems and be independent, how to think critically, those keywords that you always hear these days … But it's true. I think if they can learn to teach themselves, and to be independent, that's the important thing … curriculum is almost an afterthought”.

**Authenticity.** Though several teachers indicated a struggle between Western and Aboriginal educations, Barry voiced the problem of trying to force Aboriginal perspectives onto a framework on which it doesn’t really fit:

The educational system that we are part of is very western, very linear, it basically supports the western paradigm so to then be discussing a different kind of world view in that situation is it doesn't match up. You know, to talk about something in that way it is very different then to live it behaviourally … you can't get past the feeling of this feels forced in a lot of ways.
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Dealing with this sort of dichotomy was also mentioned by Leanne as problematic when trying to prepare teachers. Since the entire basis for how educational leaders are valued varies so greatly between the worldviews (e.g. professional credentials and education for a leader in today’s educational institutions vs. the cultural and spiritual authority given to an Aboriginal elder) it complicates the establishment of professional development opportunities that might better serve teachers:

[To] get teachers to have “real” experiences with Aboriginal people. How do you do that in a system like ours? The elders are “uneducated”, credential-less, etc. How do you fund it? How do you “mandate” getting to know people, listening to their stories…how do you make people go out and have these authentic experiences?

**Racism: Systemic.** I was surprised that in a setting that has pushed the Aboriginal perspectives mandate as it has, it was still (unintentional) kinds of systemic racism that seemed to have the greatest impact on perceptions about integration.

One such concern reflected an inability of current models of teaching to adequately deal with Aboriginal perspectives. Barry expressed a fundamental discord between the intent of the process and its implementation: “… what I mean is that the educational system that we are part of is very western, very linear, it basically supports the western paradigm so to then be discussing a different kind of worldview in that situation, it doesn't match up”. Gina’s thoughts echoed a concern over the dichotomy between intent and implementation:
The whole “we have to mandate this” because “we know” what needs to be done … yeah, I think there's some racism there. On the part of the teacher … I think it really depends on the way it's driven and the danger in having a mandated unit is that you put it on people and there's the resentment built in. And is it racism or is it just resentment? …The resentment turning into racism potentially…And not even racism -that’s not the right word- but manifesting itself as racism yeah. I have to teach this Aboriginal stuff whether it's what you really believe or not …”

In one final way, systemic kinds of racism were mentioned as problematic when resources were discussed. Echoing Gina’s concerns about stereotypical scenes of Aboriginal girls in buckskins, Fiona talked about the lack of positive Aboriginal images on popular Internet search engines: “She [the student] had to look through 20 pages on Google images before finding one picture of an Aboriginal woman with a baby. And that was really enlightening for me to see how difficult it must be to live in a world where you're not represented. And when you are represented, it’s usually a negative stereotype”. Again, the inherent inequality in available resources reflects the kinds barriers formed by (hopefully) unintentionally racist phenomena.

Final note: On a still more fundamental or philosophical level, a question arose among the participants about the very nature of integrating Aboriginal perspectives. While it is certainly rooted in the exploration of racism, I believe it merits a separate treatment as an emerging theme of this study.

The Institution of Public Schools and Aboriginal Perspectives. An emerging theme related to the theme of racism is perhaps important enough to shake the very
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foundations of not only this entire study but of the Division’s mandate of integration itself. In short, it is a thoughtful questioning of the very philosophy that drives the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Mentioned in various ways by the participants was the possibility, often put forth as a question, that the nature of policies based on ethnic background is inherently racist, and therefore, problematic.

The topic is obviously sensitive and steeped in both emotional and political complications. It is worth noting that on this particular topic, I felt that the participants displayed an uncertainty not displayed elsewhere. They took longer to phrase their answers and struggled to put their thoughts into words. On the one hand, there was the acknowledgement that in a country that has abused its relations with Aboriginal peoples for so long, reconciliation cannot ignore that which makes Aboriginal peoples unique. They possess collective histories and cultures intimately tied to this place that simply cannot be ignored. On the other hand, there was the question of whether further actions that maintain a separation, or even segregation, based on ethnic or cultural backgrounds are ultimately detrimental to healing, or progress, or unity.

The reasons for establishing programs based on Aboriginality have been extensively covered in this paper. What are presented here are participants’ statements regarding the second question.

Concerns over the identification of lessons, stories, perspectives and/or policies as Aboriginal could be grouped into three categories. First, there was the concern that at times, regardless of the school, the label ‘Aboriginal’ immediately erected barriers and/or resistance to listen or learn. Barry talked of non-Aboriginal students arguing that [Aboriginal perspectives] had nothing to do with them, while Nadia remarked: “... I even
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had a student say to me ... I don’t want to do all Aboriginal stuff. I AM Aboriginal ... I get it. So why do we have to do all this stuff? And so that’s why I think I just try not to go crazy with it but sometimes they want to just do regular, everyday high school student things”. The teachers seemed to be suggesting that labeling content as Aboriginal carried its own challenges, mostly from students.

A second concern voiced by two participants was that the focus on Aboriginal perspectives could be construed as unfairly favouring one particular group over another. Fiona highlighted the spiritual dimension of Aboriginal perspectives, a dimension that she felt was given unique treatment among spiritual beliefs in schools:

I do think it's very difficult because you certainly can't do it with Christianity and it gets highly criticized. And similarly in a largely Christian society, a non-Christian spirituality in the classroom becomes criticized because it's not Christian … we had an Aboriginal drummer at Wentworth the other day and she did a lot of talking about Aboriginal spirituality and the other teachers were critical … ”.

Brandy echoed Fiona’s concerns over one group receiving what could be construed as ‘special’ treatment that other groups were not afforded. She proposed that a school needs to be “careful” about immersing the school in any particular culture, worrying that it might “feed animosity between different cultural groups”. She suggested that a school should not highlight one cultural group more than any other.

While these two concerns were acknowledged by other participants, all but one also confirmed elsewhere that the mandate and policies that do highlight Aboriginal perspectives are timely and appropriate, if not necessary. Sam praised the Division for allowing Aboriginal students in particular to experience the pride born of the validation
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of their cultural background. Sally mentioned that the focus on Aboriginal perspectives allowed some of her students to not “sell themselves out”, something that she mentioned many Aboriginal youth are accused of doing by their families and friends when they succeed in school. Leanne stressed that Aboriginal stories and perspectives needed to be given back to Aboriginal students because many of them have lost them. In every interview but one, any dangers that came from singling out Aboriginal perspectives were overshadowed by the potential positive impacts of doing so.

A third concern involved the kind of critical look at racism that many people may not even consider. Only one participant went so far as to suggest that the mandate was indeed problematic based on its inherent racism, in this case the paternalism of a dominant culture trying to fix things for the marginalized one. That participant said:

I'm going to phrase this very carefully. I don't think the intention of the Division, even the province, is to be racist but I think that any policy that creates “other” is racist and I said this so many times but we need to move away from the label ‘Aboriginal perspectives’ and work on a cultural inclusion. I hate to use the word inclusion because it's been beaten so badly in our division but we focus on commonalities instead of differences. So do I believe the intentions are good? Yeah. Do I think that there is still a smidgen of paternalism and racism going on?
Yes, absolutely.

While it is impossible to say whether the sentiments of this study’s participants reflect the perceptions of teachers across the Division, the eight participants confirmed that the racial foundations of the Division’s mandate as worthy of ongoing consideration.
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Teacher Resistance and Professional Development. The section on educational change in Chapter 2 suggested that in order for teachers to readily adopt change, they had to feel as if they had been part of the decision to change. They had to feel that the change was meaningful, they had to feel able to implement the changes without great difficulty and they had to feel supported in implementing those changes. The participants in this study present an interesting case when observed through the lens educational change theory. Although the study’s questions did not directly inquire about resistance to educational change, the participants’ responses provided a wealth of data confirming the kinds of theories put forward by van den Berg (2002), Knight (2009) and Margolis (1991).

None of the participants felt as if they had been part of the decision to mandate integration, yet every one of them accepted that its adoption was necessary and meaningful. Furthermore, their insistence that their continuing efforts have been largely self-initiated suggests that, for them, the meaning and importance attached to integration was enough to overpower the difficulties inherent in the task.

The data also suggests, however, that they are the exception rather than the rule. The participants’ observations of other educators support the very kind of resistance expected. Many teachers felt as if the task of integrating Aboriginal perspectives had been forced on them rather than chosen. Fiona argues that integration was just one of many ‘additions’ that the Division has added to the demands of teachers, without ever removing any previous demands. Brandy simply stated: “I think as educators a lot of the time we see things being pushed upon us or rammed down our throats”.
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Exclusion from the decision-making process and/or an inability to reconcile themselves to the importance of integration was also noted by the participants. Sally recalled colleagues at a school with a small Aboriginal population angrily questioning the requirement to integrate. Brandy finished off her earlier thought with:

I think the only way really to have my colleagues want to do it and want to take part in it, they have to somehow believe it enough to … I've met a lot of colleagues, probably too many colleagues, who simply don't buy into it … if people feel forced into it and don't buy into it, it's going to be an ineffective experience for everyone.

Sam also observed teachers who simply ‘went through the motions’ as a result of not becoming engaged with the importance and meaning behind the mandate: “I think there're still so many people who never take their thinking to that next level. Who treat this like a job... Who will go from day today and when they are given a mandate like integrate Aboriginal perspectives they think ‘Oh no, it's just one more thing I've got to do’”.

The Division’s access point to Grade 10 ELA teachers is, of course, professional development. In the personal dimension, we saw how teachers felt about their own professional development. Seen here through the lens of resistance to educational change, the data suggests how institutional decisions can shape teacher perceptions related to integrating Aboriginal perspectives.

Implementation may be one challenge. In addition to the participants who had not attended the mandatory workshop, others referred to colleagues who had never attended. The majority of participants suggested that more regular professional development was
needed. Gina found the one day of professional development mandated by the Division far too compartmentalized, while Fiona found herself wanting more ongoing support through professional development.

The participants also spoke at length about more common forms of professional development, where teachers find themselves in a room at a school or other Division building, at worst listening, and at best, participating in discussions on whatever the topic happens to be. Sally suggested that sometimes the best learning was a result of simply listening to the stories of an Aboriginal person. Both Sam and Leanne were very vocal about the potential benefits of more experiential professional development experiences. Sam proposed allowing teachers periods of time in school environments where the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is seen to be working well (e.g. having a positive impact on students). Leanne, as mentioned earlier, encouraged the kinds of experiences outside of Division buildings that would not only allow teachers to meet Aboriginal people, but also to better understand the significance of highly valued cultural activities (e.g. sweat lodges, healing circles). They felt as if these kinds of experiences would connect teachers to Aboriginal people and cultures in a way that would make integration more meaningful for them.

**Student Impact.** I believe without a doubt that how teachers perceive of integration impacting their students is the single most important consideration of this study. If the eight teachers all agree that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in Grade 10 English Language Arts is timely and necessary, then they simply must imagine that said integration is having a positive impact on their students. While the data suggests
that this is in fact the case among the teachers interviewed, it also suggests that it is only true where integration happens in an appropriate manner. Where inappropriate, the same data proposes their concerns over integration’s potentially damaging effects.

The Impact of Integration Gone Wrong. Several teachers felt that resource selection could create a negative impact among students. Returning to April Raintree, Leanne voiced her concerns over the results that can be a product of the book’s study:

… it makes me worry about teaching the unit. Because my Aboriginal students feel bad. I had one who wrote that he feels exactly like April, that he feels ashamed that he is Métis and doesn’t want people to know that he is Métis. He feels ashamed of that side of his family because of the choices that they are making. So they feel exactly like April. So at the end of the unit he says well April should not be ashamed but he doesn't recognize that he shouldn't be either … he can't make that change for himself.

While Leanne talked about working as a teacher to get students past these sorts of feelings, the concern remains that the very study of the novel and its content will create negative, or at the very least, false, representations of Aboriginal peoples. Her concern is echoed by Fiona, who addressed why some teachers are worried about including it: “I think there's a lot of fear of misrepresenting … April Raintree is a perfect example of that. I love that book … but interpretation does allow for misrepresentation. So that's the fear”.

Of greater concern to the participants were efforts to integrate that failed to accomplish the goals of the Division and province. In most cases their concerns were centered in their perceptions about how integration was approached. Carried out poorly,
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the integration of Aboriginal perspectives had the potential to make the lives of Aboriginal students worse while strengthening the negative stereotypes belonging to non-Aboriginal students. Fiona proposed:

The danger with that is that you're going to be teaching stereotypes, you can't help it. And so kids are going to be learning stereotypes - they're going to be internalizing them. The Aboriginal kids are going to be turned off. Or insulted, or embarrassed. You're going to see blank looks, the crossed arms, the head on the desk sleep things. The lack of connection. And none of it will be retained, unfortunately, except the stereotypes because what our mind grasps.

Brandy also commented on colleagues who rush through their ‘Aboriginal’ unit while maintaining that it took a significant time commitment to have students develop an empathy and cultural sensitivity towards Aboriginal issues. She, too, voiced concern over the potential of a poorly taught ‘Aboriginal unit’ to reinforce negative stereotypes among her students.

_The Impact of Integration as Intended._ Thankfully, the participants were far more vocal about the positive impact that they felt integration could have on their students. Every participant ultimately argued that they believed the integration of Aboriginal perspectives could make their students better people.

Speaking generally of students, Aboriginal or not, Gina said that the integration of aboriginal perspectives allowed students to learn “Tolerance, compassion, understanding, history”. Fiona added that students became “… more tolerant, more compassionate, more confident, more driven, more responsible, less racist, less hateful”. Barry
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remarked: “I think for me integration of culture, discussion of culture, whatever it means
is about sort of bringing it to that common human element. So the sense that maybe
people are leaving the classroom feeling a little more human than when they came in”.

Finally, Brandy spoke of how the impact on students would be carried onward to a larger
environment: “I really believe that if I can integrate some Aboriginal perspectives into
my program and perhaps change some of the negative stereotypes that students come
with, that will snowball into a better [city]”.

When the discussions turned to the impact of integration for Aboriginal students,
participant responses proposed that the Division’s mandate is, at least in places, achieving
many of the things that it seeks to do. While it may be impossible to generalize these
kinds of results, Nadia noted the positive impact of integration for one specific
Aboriginal student: “I have a student who would rarely show up but now she comes
every day because she is actually engaged which is awesome”. Sam talked about positive
role reversals that resulted for Aboriginal students: “…all of a sudden the Aboriginal
ones are the empowered ones and the others are trying to see if they can buy into it”.
Fiona supported his sentiment: “… because the Aboriginal population is very low, my
Aboriginal students get the opportunity to be the leaders in the classroom for this unit.
Their role in the class changes. They are suddenly the kid that has all the right answers
and has the prized unique perspective”.

In a school with a much higher Aboriginal population, Sally also sees positive
impacts when Aboriginal perspectives are valued:

… you see them holding themselves a little higher and may be not thinking so
down of themselves … any student could have come to our school in grade 9, 10,
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11 or 12 and have not known anything about themselves or their culture or who they are and get all of that. Even if they came just for one year, there are so many teachings. They're surrounded by it. We have cultural advisors. We have pipe ceremonies, feasts, different ceremonies that take place. Students really find out who they are, when they come to our school.

While official documents from the Division and province often focus on more traditional measures of success (e.g. graduation rates), the data in this study indicates other kinds of successes that seem, as Barry suggests, more human. The participants in this study believe in the positive impacts, for all of their students, borne of integrating Aboriginal perspectives in their Grade 10 ELA classrooms. Gina says it clearly: “It changes them … I think it has a profound impact everywhere”.

Summary

While I acknowledge that the size and nature of the study’s sample is limited, I am confident that the story told by this study is important. Looking back at the theoretical framework, I am convinced that it is sound as one way of looking at the phenomenon of how Grade 10 teachers in this school division perceive of integrating, or trying to integrate, Aboriginal perspectives into their ELA classrooms.

I still think that it is reasonable to include every factor that affects teacher perceptions under a widely defined ‘personal’ category, as it remains clear to me that the billions of personal experiences that make up a teacher’s life ultimately work together to determine any teacher’s individual relationship with Aboriginal perspectives. The participants confirmed the importance of personal relationships with Aboriginal peoples and teacher preparation in forming their perceptions. They also confirmed that those
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pieces all fit together to determine their perceptions regarding their own mastery of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Finally, the teachers all verified that their own personal experiences affected their ability and willingness to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in their individual classrooms in ways that were very different from their colleagues.

The data also supports the idea that contextual, or demographic, classroom realities absolutely influence a teacher’s perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. As much as people want to look past it, the colour of both teachers’ and students’ skin affects the way that they interact. So does cultural background. So do the beliefs of parents and community members. So, too, does socioeconomic status. Very obviously, all of these factors vary greatly at the classroom, school and district levels, clearly impacting a blanket mandate set out for teachers across a large division in a whole series of different ways.

Finally, the data confirms that in perhaps a less significant manner, broad scale institutional realities also have the capacity to influence teachers’ perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. In establishing curriculum and policy, administrative bodies ultimately determine sets of expectations for teachers. They are seen as facilitating and/or complicating the tasks daily performed by teachers all across the division and/or province. And, while it is ultimately individual teachers in individual classrooms who interact with the entire focus of the project, i.e. the students, it is institutions writ large that determine the larger social appropriateness of what they do with those students. It is also, at least in theory, these institutions that have the power and resources necessary to implement the changes recommended by the teacher participants.
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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

On the story, furthered

This story is far from over. There is much work left to be done.

When I began this journey I will admit that I was sceptical. Like the other Grade 10 English Language Arts teachers in this study, I felt that I had embraced the Division’s mandate to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. And I felt fairly alone in that embracing. I don’t feel that way anymore. As I write this, I know that the conclusion of this study is not the end. It may not even be an end.

I am a teacher who could easily have more than two decades of teaching left in him. The possibilities of what I will see are exciting and staggering. Two decades ago, the school division that I work in did not even have an Aboriginal education policy. Two decades ago I graduated from high school without ever having knowingly spoken with an Aboriginal person. I had never read a novel written by a Métis woman. I had no idea that there were any number of First Nations in my province and I did not know what a residential school was. I had never been moved by the Drum and had never sat in a circle of healing.

I imagine that two decades ago, Aboriginal students at the schools I went to felt alone. I am almost certain that they did not see themselves represented on the school’s posters. They did not read about people like them in their school novels.

Twenty years later, I cannot imagine that any of my students can make any of those claims. That makes me feel hopeful. And impatient.
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On the morning that I wrote this page, I picked up a magazine-sized insert from the city’s newspaper showcasing expensive new homes in the city’s most desirable new neighbourhoods. There are pages of beautiful wooden floors, sweeping fireplaces, glistening bathrooms and kitchens. The lawns are immaculate. One development is even advertised as “A Good People Neighbourhood”. Aside from three people that most of us would qualify as ‘Asian’, every single person shown over the publication’s one hundred and forty-seven pages is Caucasian. Does that mean that good people are white?

Twenty years ago, I would never have asked. I would never have critically associated the lack of representation of other peoples as racist (intentional or not). I am confident that, given a simple instruction of looking critically at this publication, many of today’s students in the school division would.

While I am frustrated that publications like this one are still commonplace, I am also confident that they are less and less so. More and more of our students are changed in the way that Gina’s are, more and more are becoming the better citizens that Brandy aspires to in her teaching. And I am also confident that mandates like the one instructing teachers to integrate Aboriginal perspectives are a part of that change.

However, like everything, the mandate needs to evolve. The study’s teachers have developed their own perceptions on integration through a lifetime of experience inside and outside of classrooms. If the study can accomplish anything, I hope that it is to act as the voice of a group of teachers eager to make the integration of Aboriginal perspectives even better.
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Discussion

The data collected in this study exposed a host of factors that contributed to a positive adoption of the school division’s mandate to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into Grade 10 English Language Arts classes. It also supported earlier research (e.g. Kanu (2011)) that identified many of the challenges inherent in the task. As such it serves to reveal several strategies to promote more positive perceptions of said mandate by other teachers in the division, many of whom are observed to express negativity where integration is concerned.

Personal Dimension

Cultural Knowledge. While most of the study’s participants did not feel that they possessed a satisfactory level of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, their discussions did reveal reasons for optimism. Skin colour and/or ethnic background play a significant role in how teachers perceive of their abilities to acquire cultural knowledge. As such, it is common for non-Aboriginal teachers to consider their own skin colour or background as a hindrance in integrating Aboriginal perspectives. It is evident that non-Aboriginal teachers typically display less confidence in their abilities to pass on cultural knowledge to their students.

There is a particular kind of apprehension surrounding the kinds of activities perceived as more culturally sacred, perhaps more accurately those that involve a spiritual dimension (e.g. smudges and sweats). The data suggests that the participants are sensitive to the Aboriginal cultural phenomenon that there are stories/ceremonies, etc. that belong to certain Aboriginal individuals or groups, and that their assumption by
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others can be insulting and/or hurtful. Aboriginal teachers are not immune to this apprehension as it can be also influenced by factors such as age and/or experience. The result of this apprehension for some is to avoid those aspects of Aboriginal cultural realities altogether. It was even suggested that some teachers use this apprehension (often the result of misconceptions) as an excuse not to integrate Aboriginal perspectives.

What is encouraging is that, despite this apprehension among many teachers, several of the non-Aboriginal participants in this study indicated confidence that, given the proper circumstances, they could develop the confidence to teach using smudges, for example. Still, only one non-Aboriginal teacher in the study currently felt as if they had sufficient experiential training to engage in those sorts of cultural activities.

Professional Preparation. The consideration of the data collected in this study related to cultural knowledge suggests that the professional preparation of most present-day teachers is, as Gina suggested, “woefully inadequate”. Courses in Aboriginal education were only mandated recently, meaning that many of the Division’s teachers (particularly the older ones) have never taken a course on Aboriginal topics. Even those who had taken university-level courses on Aboriginal topics felt under-prepared upon completion of the courses.

While teachers who find themselves in a Grade 10 English Language Arts class in the Division are supposed to be supported by a full-day workshop on integrating Aboriginal perspectives, several problems arise. First of all, it would seem that many Grade 10 ELA teachers either never hear about, or never attend, that workshop. Furthermore, the workshop may or may not actually assist the teacher who does attend.
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While some teachers find it useful, particularly as a starting point for integration, others do not. Perhaps most significantly, the data suggests that the one-day workshop is in no way an adequate stand-alone solution to preparing teachers to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in their Grade 10 ELA classrooms.

Most of the teachers felt that the professional development mandated by the division was important, even necessary, but none felt as if it was adequate. Suggestions included ongoing professional development on Aboriginal perspectives and changes to the ways that the professional development is delivered. Leanne, for example, convinced that authentic cultural experiences with Aboriginal people would be a preferable use of teacher time, pointed out the many hurdles that suggestion would face. Elders, who may be the “leaders” of this kind of session, may be perceived as credential-less by people at any level in educational institutions. It might also be difficult to schedule these kinds of activities into the kind of timeframes currently allowed for professional development.

Racism

While racism is tending to invisibility in many of the schools in the Division, it does still rear its ugly head from time to time. An always shrinking minority of racist students resist learning about Aboriginal perspectives or a small group of Aboriginal students resists the instruction of a white teacher. A handful of parents interfere with learning because of the stereotypes that they hold. While the issue should never be
ignored, its significance is wonderfully limited by its inherent unacceptability in most classrooms.\(^5\)

The inability, or at least reluctance, of teachers to articulate their experiences involving racism suggests that it remains a topic to be confronted whenever possible. Teachers need to be able to speak intelligently about the topic for the sake of their students.

**Contextual Dimension**

**Cultural Knowledge.** The main addition to the earlier exploration of cultural knowledge from the personal dimension involves the role played by the contextual realities of schools that can increase the cultural knowledge of teachers. Teachers who teach at schools with significant Aboriginal populations, or at schools that have embraced Aboriginal perspectives (as part of their school culture) generally feel that their school experiences have helped them in their teaching. Not surprisingly, environments that celebrate Aboriginal culture tend to have teachers who have more positive perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives in their grade 10 ELA classrooms.

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\(^5\) Despite my optimistic outlook, and that of the study’s participants, it is not at all inconceivable that our positions of privilege (be they based on our skin colour, education, socioeconomic status, or other) blind us from the realities of today’s students. However, as this is a study of teachers’ perceptions, that will remain the focus.
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**Administrative Support.** Administrators must walk a fine line to assist in the promotion of positive perceptions on integration among their teachers. They must work to establish a school culture that encourages and celebrates the integration of Aboriginal perspectives by ensuring the representation of Aboriginal cultures and peoples in the school building. They must be clear in their support for the Division mandate by providing access to resources (including Aboriginal community members) and to professional development opportunities. They must allow teachers to take risks in their classrooms and stand behind them in times of trouble.

However, they must do all of these things without crossing a line, most likely established by individual teachers who sometimes perceive that mandated courses are forced upon them. The challenge is not insignificant.

**School/Classroom Demographics.** The schools in the Division reflect enormous demographic differences, both at district and individual school levels. Teachers who teach at schools with significant Aboriginal populations generally demonstrate more positive perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. In this study, the difference was not obvious among the teacher participants themselves, but was remarkably present in their observations of their colleagues.

While all of the participants in the study had a positive outlook on integration, those that came from schools with small Aboriginal populations observed much more negativity towards integration. This finding is consistent with Kanu’s (2005) observations about schools with majority-cultures that are not Aboriginal. Many teachers in those schools felt that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives was unnecessary.
because of their own lack of Aboriginal students, suggesting that among many of the Division’s teachers, integration is seen as serving only Aboriginal students. Among another group, the participants felt that teachers’ own feelings of under-preparedness, ignorance or inadequacy related to Aboriginal perspectives yielded the same kinds of results. While it is impossible to comment on whether teachers with negative perceptions on integration are still able to integrate to the satisfaction of the Division, their negative perceptions render them unable to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in a way seen as acceptable by the participants of this study. Because of the risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes and racism, their suggestion remains that it is in fact better to ignore integration altogether than to engage in it poorly.

In the schools with small Aboriginal populations, teachers who demonstrate negative perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives may see the mandate to integrate as a burdensome addition to their teaching duties. They may try to rush through a unit on Aboriginal perspectives or try to satisfy the mandate by including a few token Aboriginal resources in a program that otherwise ignores Aboriginal perspectives. They may ignore the existence of professional development on the topic. They may also be vocal among colleagues in their negativity. Given the number of schools with small Aboriginal populations, these kinds of attitudes and actions remain as a significant hindrance to the Division’s efforts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in Grade 10 ELA classrooms.
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**Access to Resources.** While it often seems to me as if the lack of resources is a universal teacher complaint, the participants in this study presented a timely look at the issue (pun intended). In the seven years since Kanu’s (2005) research participants claimed a lack of appropriate, Canadian Aboriginal resources, there has been a shift as access to Internet-based information has increased. With various web-based estimates guessing up to five million new sites per month, teachers are using online resources to fill the kinds of gaps that existed such a short time ago. While resources may still be hard to find for other types of courses, the Grade 10 English Language Arts in the study did not feel that a lack of resources in itself contributed to negative perceptions on integrating.

On the subject of resources, there were still two major concerns. The first, slightly different than a want of resources, was the time required to access and gather the kinds of resources required. While the teachers felt that the resources were out there and that they could find them given the time, they did feel as if the time required in that endeavour was lacking.

While it always sounds wrong to me to refer to people as ‘resources’, most significant was the recurrent referrals to Aboriginal resource **people**, particularly elders. While a few teachers (most commonly those at schools with a majority of Aboriginal students) expressed a relatively effortless ability to access a variety of Aboriginal people to invite to their classes, bounce ideas off of or learn from, this was not the case for the majority of teachers. While every participant mentioned bringing people into their classes, the majority lamented the lack of an easy ‘go-to’ person for their needs related to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives.
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Racism. The people at schools with diverse populations seem to exhibit less racist behaviour than those in more homogeneous settings, a reason for optimism, as the schools across the Division are increasingly diverse.

Again, I was unable to achieve the kind of responses on the topic that I had hoped for. Teachers acknowledged racism at their schools, yet did not seem keen on discussing it thoroughly.

External Factors. Many students in the division face realities outside of school that ultimately affect teachers’ perceptions on integration. On the one hand, the behaviour of those Aboriginal students assailed by poverty, for example, may serve to reinforce negative stereotypes about Aboriginal students among teachers. On the other hand, the goals of integration vary among teachers in the division based on their own experiences with, in particular, Aboriginal youth.

In the more affluent districts with small Aboriginal populations, the educational outcomes (i.e. students knowing content) are coupled with the more values-based descriptors used by the teachers (tolerant, respectful, etc.). In the districts with higher Aboriginal populations and a significantly higher prevalence of poverty, teachers were more likely to measure the success of integration against attendance, punctuality and the ability of students to make better decisions. Schools are fairly limited in their ability to impact the external lived realities of students. Some schools may address some of the issues by helping to feed or clothe students, or by supporting young mothers, for example, with in-school childcare programs.
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Institutional Dimension

Systemic Racism. It is widely held that where racism tends to exist at any level of the institutions of education, it is unintentional. Implied by several teachers were the dangers inherent in what challenges remain. Regardless of their best intentions, schools focusing on one group (e.g. ethnic, cultural, religious) risk alienating other groups and breeding feelings of resentment. Also, efforts to increase the success of, or better the lives of, Aboriginal students/peoples may be construed as a paternalistic legacy of colonial attitudes (“we will help you”). These phenomena may affect a teacher’s perceptions on integrating Aboriginal perspectives. In a particularly unconstructive way, teachers may use these challenges as reasons not to engage with the Division’s mandate. On the other hand, as in the case of at least one participant in this study, these kinds of philosophical considerations may actually motivate the teacher to do a better job of presenting Aboriginal perspectives in a culturally sensitive, deeply and critically considered manner.

The Relationship Between Institutional Structures and Aboriginal Cultural Values.

Various levels of institutional realities were discussed as they related to teachers’ perceptions on integration. At the school level, teachers mentioned class sizes, physical spaces and scheduling as potential challenges. Not exclusive to integrating, teachers simply feel that the larger a class is, the more difficult the task of the teacher. Deepened (even ‘spiritual’) personal connections, individualized valuations of students and trust are
valued highly in many Aboriginal cultures, and large class sizes impede a teacher’s ability to develop those kinds of relationships with students.

Rectangular, artificially lit concrete classrooms may be at odds with a host of Aboriginal cultural values. It is not always easy to employ culturally-important circles, for instance, within those physical spaces. It is not often easy for teachers to engage their students in more natural spaces valued in Aboriginal cultures.

Differing concepts of time are also often mentioned as problematic to the relationship between ‘Western’ institutional realities and Aboriginal cultural values. Rigid start and end times and due dates are inconsistent with the way many Aboriginal groups traditionally functioned.

At the school level and beyond, many institutionalized assessment practices were also mentioned as being at odds with Aboriginal cultural values. At one extreme was a way of looking at assessment where failure is recognized as an opportunity for spiritual growth. On a more quotidian level, many of the assessment practices that we often relate to classrooms were at odds with the participants’ comments about the outcomes of integration. While teachers still used tests, oral and written assignments, and student reflections of various kinds to satisfy the formal assessment requirements of the Division and province, the outcomes that they turned to as meaningful were very different.

Increases in compassion and empathy were mentioned. Students were informally assessed (during the interviews) as having ‘changed’, becoming ‘more human’ or ‘better people’. While I fully embrace these outcomes, it is difficult to imagine how they might be included on a recently introduced provincial report card or even how they might be objectified to satisfy institutional expectations of assessment.
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Finally, the institutional structures guiding professional development hinder the ability of teachers to engage in the kind of personal and/or professional development that the participants imagine will aid them in integrating Aboriginal perspectives. Teachers are relatively constrained by budgets of both time and money, making it difficult, if not impossible, for them to engage in the kinds of experiential gatherings that they felt would assist them and their colleagues to better carry out the Division’s mandate.

Recommendations for Practice

Whether it is ironic, simply interesting or troublingly problematic, the power to implement many of the strategies to be discussed rests in the domain of the Institutional Dimension identified in this study. While recommendations ultimately need to be carried out or acted upon in the personal and contextual dimensions, it is difficult at those levels to initiate the actions necessary for meaningful change beyond a single classroom.

Given that the participants spoke extensively of their lived authentic and experiential learning opportunities, individual teachers should be encouraged to seek out those occasions. They should engage in dialogue and sharing with as many Aboriginal people as possible. They should continue to expand their learning on Aboriginal topics.

Individual teachers should constantly question and challenge their assumptions and biases as they relate to groups of people. Both pre-service and in-service, they should be expected to read, study, and watch films that explore racism and they should engage with colleagues, guest speakers and their students on the topic. Exploration of complex issues such as race and privilege should be integrated into their ongoing professional development.
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If teachers and students are prepared to acknowledge the existence of racism in their communities and in their schools, they also need to be willing to actively engage in its termination. It is important that all of the people who spend time in schools have the opportunity to speak openly about racism and privilege. It is important for them to be able to learn from each other. The participants in this study, while willing to admit the existence of racism in their schools, displayed a discomfort in exploring the complexities of racist discourse in the interviews. That apprehension is indicative of a need for spaces that challenge not only students but also educators in exploring racism.

Where racism involves Aboriginal peoples, its abolition becomes particularly important in the context of this study. The participants’ suggestion that non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people spend more time together is likely the best way to address the challenge. Educators at all levels have a responsibility to ensure that the time spent together is respectful and fruitful. Educational institutions need to, like individual teachers, be ever vigilant in critically examining and reflecting on their own policies and practices. They should strive to celebrate unity in diversity.

They need to support, encourage and create opportunities for dialogue and meaningful interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In Buffalo Stone, that will mean to continue to mandate integration. It will mean to continue with their support of Aboriginal schools and with their hiring policies that benefit potential Aboriginal employees. It will mean funding field trips and school projects that bring diverse populations together. Finally, it will mean being open to flexible systems within school buildings that allow minority values to be considered.
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The province needs to continue to make Aboriginal education courses a requirement of teacher training programs. Given the sentiment of those who had taken university level-courses, it seems prudent to recommend an increase to required coursework in this domain. Where the professors responsible for those courses are able, they should encourage both the participation of Aboriginal peoples in delivering the coursework and the inclusion of experiential learning activities.

Individual teachers should make whatever efforts possible to attend professional development opportunities to increase their understandings or Aboriginal perspectives and Aboriginal cultural knowledge. They should seek out opportunities to interact with Aboriginal peoples, particularly in those settings with, for lack of a better term, significant cultural capital. The learning potential inherent in smudges, sweats, powwows and healing circles, where teachers could be not only present, but fully engaged with Aboriginal peoples, cannot be dismissed.

School staffs should make a concerted effort to embrace diversity, including Aboriginal perspectives. They should work towards fair representation on posters, murals, newsletters and school events. They should work to positively support those making efforts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. They should encourage the participation of all of the peoples from their communities, but especially of Aboriginal peoples whose historical relationship with schools was so damaging. Schools could work to make significant Aboriginal cultural realities more visible and participatory for their students by, for example, inviting in Aboriginal storytellers, hosting powwows, and engaging elders in healing circles in school cases of behavioural problems or conflict.
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Administration need to act as leaders in establishing welcoming and supportive school cultures and in supporting teachers trying to fulfill the Division’s mandate. They should try to inspire their employees to do better to serve the needs of all of their students. They should work towards staffing their buildings with a diverse and representative group of people, being especially conscious of the current under-representation of Aboriginal peoples. They must strive to support the needs of teachers in integrating by accessing resources and resource people and by standing behind the efforts of their teachers.

Where possible schools should work to train or hire a portion of their staff able to act as resources for the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Schools should also engage the community to establish a working relationship with members of the larger community willing to work regularly with the school in that capacity. It is not a new idea. Dewar (1998) suggests: “By making more funding available for resources in Native Studies, especially honorariums for elders and other Aboriginal community spokespersons … students and teachers will have increased access to a knowledge of Aboriginal cultures” (p. 212). Though a few teachers mentioned having access to money resources, it is important that either more teachers know about money that might already exist to bring in Aboriginal people or that more money be set aside by the Division for that purpose.

Educational institutions should work to create both physical and figurative spaces within which staff and students can engage with each other in ways that honour Aboriginal cultural values. Physically, further considerations may lead to sweat lodges being erected at some schools while traditional Aboriginal gardens grace others. Perhaps
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circular spaces with proper ventilation for smudges will be created. They should allow schools to make decisions at a local level, in collaboration with their communities, about how issues of “time” are addressed.

Figuratively, release time should be provided to teachers interested in spending time in schools where integration is celebrated. Or perhaps they will participate in teacher exchange programs with schools on northern reserves.

Projects and funding should exist for teachers to engage their students in experiential learning opportunities with the province’s Aboriginal communities.

School divisions should make a conscious effort (as many already are) to hire Aboriginal staff. They should continue to mandate professional development on Aboriginal topics for all staff and they should work to create new kinds of ongoing professional development opportunities that allow teachers to engage more closely with the province’s Aboriginal populations.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study’s limitations recommend a number of avenues for further research into teachers’ perceptions of integrating Aboriginal perspectives. First of all, a study representing a greater population of the Division’s teachers could either verify or challenge the study’s results. A larger sample might be achieved more easily using different methods. This study’s results could be used to formulate a series of questions to be used in a teacher questionnaire, for example. This could be completed by large numbers of teachers.
Acknowledging the bias of this study’s sample, a different sample of teachers would also be helpful in attempting to provide more of a balance of perspectives. Studies where the researcher spends both longer and more frequent periods of time with the participants may serve to increase trust between the researcher(s) and the participants. Studies conducted in this way may exploit the opportunity to study the colleagues that this study’s participants believed held negative perceptions of integration. It would be extremely valuable to consider first-hand accounts of those teachers who struggle with integration.

A more longitudinal study of perceptions is also worth considering. While this study provided a snapshot of teachers’ perceptions at one moment in time, studies conducted over longer periods of time could be instrumental in tracking how changes over time affect and/or impact teacher perceptions on integration. The changes, of course, might include all of the realms included in this study: teacher training, demographics, resources and administrative structures, etc.

A more longitudinal study may also serve to establish a deeper, more trusting relationship between the researcher(s) and participants. Such a relationship may prove to facilitate a much more meaningful exploration of the more sensitive themes studied. The issues surrounding privilege, power and racism, for example, are difficult to explore in the very limited time afforded in this study. I might also suggest that a longer term of study may allow for the evolution of understandings of racist attitudes and privilege, for example, as the time spent discussing these themes was followed by time to reflect on them before further rounds of discussion. A maturity of exploration might be achieved that was impossible in the present study.
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Since the ultimate goal of integration is to improve the well-being of students, it would also be worthwhile to study the impact of integration on students over an extended period of time. If more teachers were properly trained, developing the skills and ‘cultural comfort’ with integration recommended by this study’s participants, it would be valuable to know whether their change in perceptions and abilities also impacted students.

**Reasons for Optimism**

I am incredibly encouraged that many of the recommendations resulting from this study are already well underway. Though it seems to be in our nature of impatience to lose sight of improvements, a step back reveals much to be heartened by. Teacher training programs at the province’s universities now all have mandatory Aboriginal education courses. Increasingly they are populated by students who have either considered Aboriginal perspectives as high school students or are themselves Aboriginal. At the very least, as the province’s Aboriginal population grows and school populations diversify, it is becoming increasingly unlikely that they do not know Aboriginal people. Every school year there are more and more Canadian Aboriginal resources immediately available to teachers and students on the Internet.

Initiatives to increase the number of Aboriginal teachers and support staff in the Division have done, and continue to do, just that. More and more students experience relationships with Aboriginal staff members, and Aboriginal students see themselves represented among staff across the Division. Professional development that focuses on Aboriginal perspectives in mandated for portions of the Division’s staff.
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To be continued…

This story is far from over. There is much work left to be done.

Every day, more people have heard this story or one like it. And so this one will wrap up with the wise words of a man whose stories have changed me, Thomas King (2003). Take my story, and his advice:

It’s yours. Do with it what you will. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it.

But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now (29).
Appendix A

Fig. 1: Factors Affecting Teachers’ Perceptions on the Benefits and Challenges of Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives in Grade 10 English Language Arts
ON INTEGRATING ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES

Appendix B

Letter to Request Permission of School Principals

Ryan Wiens

Date

Re: Permission to contact teachers

Dear (principal’s name),

My name is Ryan Wiens. I am a teacher at _____ and a Master’s student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to ask your permission to contact the Grade 10 English Language Arts teachers on your staff for research related to the completion of my Master’s thesis.

The working title of my paper is “On Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives: The Perceptions of Grade 10 English Language Arts Teachers in a Large Urban School Division in Western Canada”. The paper’s purpose is to explore how teachers are responding to the mandate to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms, including how their life experiences may have informed their perceptions, and how they perceive of integration’s impact on their students.

I plan to contact teachers via e-mail, and hope to enlist eight willing teachers (two from each district). If they are willing to participate in the study, they will contact me directly via my private e-mail. We will decide on a time and place to conduct one interview not exceeding two hours in duration.

As you would expect, before contacting you, I have been granted research approval by both the University of Manitoba’s Research Ethics Board and the school division’s Research Ethics Committee. The regular safeguards will be in place to protect the teachers’ identities, including the use of pseudonyms to identify both teachers and their schools.

I have attached a copy of the consent form that teachers will sign before participating in the interview process. You will see that it covers issues of confidentiality and risk to participants.

If you are willing to grant me permission to contact the teachers in your school, please sign the attached form and return it to me in a way that is convenient for you (e.g. scanned and e-mailed, through the division courier or faxed). I would also be more than willing to come to your school and retrieve the signed copy, should that be more acceptable.

Thanks you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With warmest regards,

Ryan Wiens
ON INTEGRATING ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction to Teachers

Ryan Wiens

Date

Re: Participation in research

Dear (teacher’s name),

My name is Ryan Wiens. I am an English Language Arts teacher at ____. I am also a student in the Masters of Education program at the University of Manitoba. I have received permission from the division and your school’s principal to contact you with a request to participate in research that I am doing to fulfill my degree requirements. Your participation is voluntary.

As you know, teachers across the division have been tasked with integrating Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms. As a Grade 10 ELA teacher, you are also been expected to have participated in professional development to that end specific to Grade 10 ELA, one of the main reasons why you are part of the research sample that I have chosen.

The purpose of my research is to explore teacher perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal perspectives, including professional and personal reactions, and how these may have been informed by various life experiences (including teacher preparation). I am also interested in how teachers perceive of the effects of integration on students.

Your willingness to assist me in my research would be greatly appreciated. Your participation would consist of one interview made up of open-ended questions lasting between one and two hours, at a time and in a setting that we have agreed upon. Pseudonyms will be used for teachers’ and schools’ names to protect your privacy and identity. The school division will be referred to only as a large urban school division in Western Canada.

The consent form that you would need to sign, should you volunteer to participate in the study, is attached. It further explains the procedures of the study as well identity protection, risk and dissemination.

If you would be willing to participate in the study or have further questions, please contact me directly at _____.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Ryan Wiens
Certificate of Ethics Approval

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

April 3, 2012

TO: Ryan Wiens
Principal Investigator

FROM: Stan Straw, Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB)

Re: Protocol #E2012:035
"On Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives: The Perceptions of Grade 10 English Language Arts Teachers in a Large Urban School Division in Western Canada"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board, which is organized and operated according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:
- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to the Office of Research Services, fax 261-0326. Please include the name of the funding agency and your UM Project number. This must be faxed before your account can be accessed.
- If you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba Ethics of Research Involving Humans.

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Appendix E

Research Instrument: Interview Protocol

(These questions are intended to GUIDE the interviews. They should not be read as a formal script)

Preamble: Welcome. Thank you so much for volunteering your valuable time to my research efforts. I know that you have already read the brief outline sent to you. I just wanted to remind you that this interview is really about exploring the realities of today’s teachers, particularly in the realm of the task of integrating Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms. Ultimately, for me it boils down to the fact that, like me, you have been given this mandate to integrate. While I struggle personally to make sense of that, my conversations with other teachers suggests to me that there are many different ways that teachers HAVE made sense of that task or mandate. I am really looking for a more formal, systematic exploration that might begin to tell a story about how teachers do react, and even why people might respond in different ways. I am also interested in how teachers perceive of the integration of Aboriginal perspectives affecting their students…acknowledging that a more formal look at whether it actually is or not would be a very different research project. For me, it boils down to the fact that whatever the policies or motives or initiatives of whatever level of administration, ultimately it is in classrooms, between students and teachers, that integration takes shape (or doesn’t).

Main questions are numbered, further prompts indicated by bullets:

1. I wonder if, to start, you could tell me about your teaching.
   • How did you come to be a Grade 10 ELA teacher in the school division?
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2. What experiences would you say have shaped the beliefs and/or dispositions that you bring to Aboriginal issues?
   • Have experiences in the community outside of schools been important?
   • What sort of communities have you been involved with that you feel affect your dispositions or beliefs regarding Aboriginal peoples/communities?
   • Overall, what kind of adjective would you use to describe your relationship to Aboriginal peoples (e.g. something like ‘embracing’, ‘tolerating’ or even ‘unsure’)?

3. How would you define ‘Aboriginal Perspectives’?
   • Can you give an example of an Aboriginal perspective that could be integrated into an ELA classroom?
   • Conversely, could you give an example of a kind of perspective that is more difficult, or even impossible, to integrate?

4. How were you introduced to the idea/directive of integrating Aboriginal perspectives in your practice?
   • Can you remember what your reaction was?
   • Has that initial reaction evolved or changed at all? How or why?
   • Sitting here today, how important do you think that integration is?

5. What has prepared you to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into your grade 10 ELA classroom?
   • What role have different aspects of your life played in that?
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- Personal relationships
- Teacher training (pre-service or in-service, self-driven or mandated…)

6. What does it/would it look like in a classrooms when the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is working?
   - What is the teacher doing?
   - Students?
   - What is being learned? By whom?
   - What kinds of resources are being used? How were they accessed?
   - What kind of assessment is happening, or could happen?
   - *Can you describe a time in your own classroom when you have seen it work?
   - When it’s working, what impact do you see it having on students?
     - Aboriginal? Non-Aboriginal?

7. What do you see as the factors that help it work?
   - Please explain: In school/ outside of school

8. Opposite question: What does it look like when it’s not working?
   - Teacher
   - Students
   - Lack of resources and issue?
   - Learned?
   - Assessment?
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• *Can you describe a time when you’ve seen integration fail in your classroom?

• When it does fail, what impact does it have on students?
  o Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal?

9. What do you see as the factors that work against integration?

  • Please explain: In schools/outside of schools

  • What role, if any, does RACISM play?

  • How?

10. What role does a school’s administration play in integrating Aboriginal perspectives into your grade 10 ELA classroom?

11. What kind of demographics have characterized the schools where you’ve worked?

   In these schools, were Aboriginal perspectives explored? Why do you think that this is so?

   • How important is ‘school culture’ to the success of integration?

   • How do you see a school culture coming about?

   • Is racism an issue at the school level?

12. For you personally as a teacher, what opportunities does the integration of Aboriginal perspectives present? What are the possible benefits?

   • What challenges?

   • Are there any drawbacks?

13. What about at a school level? What kinds of opportunities does integration present?

   • Challenges? Drawbacks?
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14. And finally, same question, but on an institutional level (i.e. divisional or provincial or curricular). What are the opportunities inherent in this project?
   - Challenges/drawbacks?
   - Does racism factor in on an institutional level?

15. On all of those levels (personal, contextual and institutional), what do you see as a future direction or objective?

16. Anything else that you would like to add?
ON INTEGRATING ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES

Appendix F

Consent Form for Participants

Research Project Title: On Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives: The Perceptions of Grade 10 English Language Arts Teachers in a Large Urban School Division in Western Canada

Principal Researcher(s): Ryan Wiens, graduate student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Study to satisfy requirements of Masters of Education Thesis. Contact:

Research Supervisor: Dr David Mandzuk. Contact:

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

1. The purpose of the research
   In light of the focus on Aboriginal education in Canadian schools, it is hoped that interviews with secondary English Language Arts teachers will provide some preliminary understanding of how teachers in a large urban school division are responding to the relatively new challenge of including Aboriginal Perspectives in their grade 10 ELA classrooms. The study may also explore how teachers came to perceive integration in the way that they do, and how they perceive of integration impacting their students.

2. Procedures
   All participants will have received a preliminary e-mail regarding the nature and the study. You will have replied indicating your potential willingness to participate. I will have contacted teachers like yourself by e-mail and, assuming consent, by telephone regarding the nature of the study. I will have asked you and them to participate in one approximately 60-120 min. interview during their free time. During this interview I will ask open-ended questions. After transcribing the interviews, I will verify your answers with you to ensure that they have been fairly recorded. Using qualitative research methods, I will attempt to pull out patterns of meaning in a qualitative-type research paper.

3. Potential Risk to Participant
   As this study is conducted between willing professional peers, and the results will remain confidential, there is no foreseeable risk to participants in this study.
4. **Recording Devices**
   A Sony digital voice recorder will be used to record the interview, which will then be transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Only the primary researcher and his advisor, upon request, will have access to the recordings, which will be deleted once transcribed.

5. **Confidentiality**
   I will be the only party with access to the primary information collected. School information will be omitted and a pseudonym will replace your name in the transcribing of the information. Recordings will be stored in a secure location (a locked cabinet at the researcher’s personal residence) and destroyed upon completion of the study. You will be asked to verify a transcription of the recording sent to you via e-mail as a Microsoft Word attachment within two months of the interview date.

   You will receive a summary of findings via e-mail by August 1, 2012.

   You will not be paid for your participation.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management / Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education and Nursing research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant’s Signature ________________________          Date ________________
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References


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