An Exploration of the Experiences of Non-Aboriginal Teachers

Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives into the Manitoba Social Studies Curriculum

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers who are currently in the process of integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curriculum in Manitoba schools. This research aims to richly describe and understand the experiences of teachers, and then examines that description of experience through a theoretical lens that respects a commitment to social justice and advocacy for students and teachers. The research consists of the first-person accounts of teachers reflecting on their experiences, their identity (personal and professional), and their perceptions and attitudes of integrating Aboriginal perspectives during two semi-structured interviews.

The research specifically highlighted teachers’ pedagogical resources (structural, curricular, relational and personal) and the challenges that subverted or submerged their attempts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives successfully in their classrooms. This research attempts to understand the teaching experience and what it is to integrate Aboriginal perspectives and what it means for a non-aboriginal teacher. This information was used to develop a working definition of what it means to integrate Aboriginal perspectives and provided a starting point to interpret this experience.


Research Background

Despite efforts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into curricula and classroom practices many sources indicate that Canadian students – non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal - still graduate high school with less than adequate levels of information about Aboriginal people in Canada (Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies [CAAS], 2002; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People [RCAP], 1996; Silver, Mallet, Greene & Simard., 2002). The inadequate level of knowledge is evidenced most dramatically by a CAAS study conducted in secondary and post-secondary institutions across Canada. According to the study, Canadian students lack basic knowledge related to Aboriginal history, culture, or nations in Canada. One consequence of this is that Aboriginal students experience a sense of alienation from school and a school curriculum that is “refined by and for a White, urban, middle-class culture” (Frideres & Gadacz, 2001, p.107) and a second consequence is that that same curriculum ensures that non-Aboriginal students will likely continue in ignorance and intolerant attitudes, greatly limiting their effective participation in a just society (Freire, 1972; Graveline, 1998; RCAP, 1996; Young, 1993).

The success or failure of efforts to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum depend largely upon individual classroom teachers, and in this regard, Kanu (2005) has argued that while there is an “expressed openness among teachers to include Aboriginal perspectives into the school curriculum, in practice little headway was being made except for a few unique cases” (Kanu, 2005, p. 57). Often a teacher’s own lack of knowledge about Aboriginal content and lack of familiarity with Aboriginal approaches to teaching and learning were reported to be a particularly serious impediment to integration and topped teachers’ lists of challenges. As a result, much of the responsibility for breaking
down the barriers of stereotypes and hegemony in schools lies in the hands of often unprepared and reluctant teachers (CAAS, 2003; Kanu, 2005; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; RCAP, 1996; Sleeter, 1992; Solomon et al, 2005; Taylor, 1995).

What remains to be explored are the specific experiences (including innovations, perceived challenges, emotions and relationships) that non-Aboriginal teachers have when integrating Aboriginal content into the social studies curriculum. This study aims to contribute to closing the gap of knowledge about teachers’ experiences in relation to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. This article focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers as they describe what it means to integrate Aboriginal perspectives. In the process the teachers in this study have created a starting point to further analyze and discuss this phenomenon.

Education is a critical learning site, a place where “young people can learn to examine social relations and learn to act collectively to create a more just social system” (Sleeter, 1992, p. 42). This claim is supported by Alladin, (1996); CAAS (2003); Graveline (1998); RCAP (1996) Solomon et al. (2005). The current literature examining the success of reforms and innovations of education cite teachers as having a major role to play (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1998; Kanu, 2005).

With this in mind, understanding teachers experiences, in relation to the current movement of integration Aboriginal perspectives and cultural knowledge, is paramount to understanding the reasons why this integration is currently failing to make a difference in the level of knowledge attained by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Teachers are the agents of educational change and it seems that until they are compelled to enact change and interrupt business as usual in schools, current reforms will be
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impeded (Alladin, 1996; Graveline, 1998; Solomon et al., 2005). The suggestion from some educational researchers is that reform must go beyond the limits of multicultural education (Dixson & Rouseau, 2005; Sleeter, 1992; Solomon et al., 2005).

Research Question

The major question that this study explores is: “What are non-Aboriginal teachers’ experiences when integrating Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the Social Studies curriculum in Manitoba schools.” This study focuses on the personal and professional experiences of teachers in order to both highlight their pedagogical resources and explore ways their pedagogical efforts are supported and/or “subverted and submerged” (Carson, 1996, p. 121). These categories of experience are a response to and representative of the foci of much of the research related to teaching for equity and social justice in schools which often explores “emotional experience”, “attitudes” and “actual practice” (Alladin, 1996; Anchan & Holychuk, 1996; CAAS, 2002; Graveline, 1998; Kanu, 2005; Sleeter, 1992, Solomon et al. 2005; Taylor, 1995; Young, 1993) and research related to the success of school reform initiatives which according to Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) and Kanu (2005) are related to teacher perceptions and attitudes about change.

Three subsidiary questions guide the exploration of professional and personal experience. The primary goal of this research is to understand the lived experiences of teachers. However, it is also necessary to have a point from which to delimit what the study is actually examining. Initially, the definition of Integrating Aboriginal Perspectives used in this thesis was the Manitoba Education and Training (2003) version.
Yet the operational definitions given by teachers differed from this version. This study does not aim to evaluate how well teachers follow curricular/departmental directives nor does it aim to evaluate the correctness of one version over the other. However, it is the aim of this study to gain insight into the reasons why certain practices are followed and certain beliefs are held. An iteration of the teachers’ definitions allows for an examination of how teachers understand the phenomenon, what they actually do, and what they perceive as challenging and/or supporting the fulfillment of integrating Aboriginal perspectives.

Consequently, a framework for how to integrate Aboriginal perspectives is crucial, and in this regard the following questions are an important starting point.

1) What are “Aboriginal perspectives”?
2) What does it mean to “Integrate Aboriginal Perspectives”?
3) What is the significance of being a non-Aboriginal teacher integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curricula?

This study also shifts the focus, from the problematic school environment for Aboriginal students to a school environment that is problematic for all students. So, while the failure of the school system in its attempt to provide adequate education for Aboriginal students is well documented, this study supports the idea that the school environment is problematic for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, thereby reaffirming the idea that an understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures benefits all students in a pluralistic society (Manitoba Education and Training, 2003; Nieto, 2000).
To address the research question, a qualitative methodology composed of semi-structured interviews was used. Each participant was interviewed twice, with the initial interview setting up the protocol for the second interview. This research is concerned then with understanding the experiences of select classroom social studies teachers. According to Clandinin & Connelly (1994) “when one asks what it means to study education, the answer is to study experience” (p. 415).

The research data consists of the first-person accounts of teachers reflecting on their experiences (structural, curricular, relational and personal), their identity (personal and professional), and their perceptions and attitudes on such matters as equity, social justice and antiracism. Within these conversations the teachers and the researcher began to explore how the social and cultural conditions related to their teaching in the way that they do. By approaching the research from this perspective, I hoped to learn about the teaching experience and what it means to integrate Aboriginal perspectives; specifically what it means for a non-aboriginal person.

The research participants consisted of 5 non-aboriginal social studies teachers from different public schools in Winnipeg. Teachers shared the following characteristics: a) they are social studies teachers at either the junior or senior high level. b) they are public school teachers with experience in the city of Winnipeg, and c) they identify as non-Aboriginal (although in this study it does not necessarily mean “white” or “dominant culture”). In this study Mala self identified as a minority and not white.

The majority of the participants in this study were “known” to the researcher either through working together on human rights education projects, antiracism workshops, or by their professional reputations. Many of the participants were identified
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by colleagues as integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curriculum. These five participants were intentionally selected as they represent a variety of different types of engagement in the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Therefore each teacher is engaged on some level in the phenomenon in question. The participants share common elements but are also intentionally selected because of their representation of particular differences. Participants address different types of experiences, locations, positionality, challenges, and commitment that are present in relation to teachers vis a vis the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum. The five participants were given the following pseudonyms, Mala, Laura, Matthew, Ritchie and Diego.

The nature of the conversations with the participants was very personal, however as Piquemal (2005) reminds us “raising these questions shows that it is important to balance our perceived claim to advocacy with our duty as researchers to understand the contextual factors that shape a teacher’s stance” (p. 129).

The data analysis consisted of reading through the interview tapes and identifies emerging themes. These themes were then analyzed for common meanings and common practices among the teachers. The themes were then used to address the common threads of experience, practice and perceptions and attitudes among teachers. Themes were also identified that addressed important differences between the teachers that defined their practices and level of engagement in integrating Aboriginal perspectives. In the end, one of the goals of this research is to provide teachers with meaningful and useful information for their own practice.
Analysis and Discussion

This section begins by providing operational definitions of the notion of the “integration Aboriginal perspectives” into the curriculum, specifically as it is understood by the teachers who participated in this research. The definitions consist of statements from the teachers that summarize their understanding of the phenomenon of integrating Aboriginal perspectives, gathered from their reflections and responses to questions on the matter. The primary goal of this research was to understand this phenomenon by examining the lived experiences of teachers, and also to have a point from which to delimit what this phenomenon is actually examining. Initially, the definition of integrating Aboriginal perspectives used in this thesis was the provincial Department of Education’s version of the concept (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2003), but I discovered that the operational definitions given by teachers differed from this version. This study does not aim to evaluate how well teachers follow curricular/departmental directives however it is worth mentioning the ways in which teachers perceptions differ from department perceptions. This study does not aim to evaluate the correctness of one version over the other, instead it is the aim of this study to gain insight into the reasons why or why not certain practices are followed and certain beliefs are held. It also allows for a more clear understanding of what teachers perceive as challenges to integrating perspectives, as a direct comparison can be made between how teachers understand the phenomenon, what they actually do, and what they perceive as challenging and/or supporting the fulfillment of integrating Aboriginal perspectives.
What are Aboriginal perspectives according to the teachers in this study?

Teachers’ found the phrase integrating Aboriginal perspectives problematic, and it was clear from interviewing the five participants that this term is not well defined in teacher’s minds or in school/professional development settings. It was a source of frustration for one teacher in particular who said:

Because I think when you look at incorporating Aboriginal perspectives and I’m not, I know that’s the terminology that is floats around. I’m not comfortable with that. How I can I introduce Aboriginal perspective? I’m not an Aboriginal person, so I can have Canadian perspective. I guess, I can teach them about historical events, but I don’t know if I have the perspective, because I’m not really comfortable with that term. And I know they attach that to everything.

Specifically they called into question the existence of an actual “Aboriginal perspective”. Teachers understood Aboriginal as referring to many nations, and believed that a Cree perspective would differ from a West Coast perspective, and an Inuit perspective. Despite this ambiguity, teachers had a working definition of “Aboriginal perspective” which was used to meet the requirements of integrating. Teachers’ explained it as: a presentation of issues, culture, and spirituality by Aboriginal people about Aboriginal people. They identified a shared point of view and perhaps a shared experience not nation specific but as a disadvantaged group of people experiencing marginalization, assimilation, racism and oppression.

Ritchie said:
I think books are getting a lot better, and I think they’re incorporating a lot of articles, and I think there are articles solely written from the Aboriginal perspective… the partial definition of the aboriginal perspective, it’s finally that these people are, putting it on paper, they’re getting published and they’re being seen as equals in terms of historical documents, like, this is an event that occurred… let’s look at the policies of the Aboriginal people that were here and how they were affected by this, what, where did they go, why did they decide to go there and what was their choice?...And a lot of that’s not even really dealt with….

So, Ritchie identified the need for history written from an Aboriginal perspective. He also notes that the way that Aboriginal history is told in textbooks or articles can be problematic and one sided.

*What does it mean to integrate Aboriginal perspectives?*

The teachers’ in this study conceived of integrating Aboriginal perspectives as an inclusion of Aboriginal content (history, myths, current events) in curricula (topics of study/resources/assignments/exam questions) and also a commitment to providing the story from the viewpoint of Aboriginal people. Many of them attempted to find resources that would provide an Aboriginal voice and a version of history not from the European perspective. As Mala explains here:

There is a real desire within the English department and History department - we are a small school and we are close - to incorporate a valid Aboriginal perspective and not outdated ones. You know, *April Raintree* is a great book, but it was a
push a couple of years ago, to find other novels, like why is April Raintree the only Aboriginal novel we have. Surely there’s got to be something else.

The teachers all believed that better resources were needed and many had sought out resources to supplement the textbooks they were using. Three teachers in particular had a critical perspective of resources they used and addressed these shortcomings to varying degrees. Laura said:

If I can provide students with the ability to ask questions about the knowledge they are seeing. The reason I say see is because in Canadian history I teach with the video series. Canada: A People’s History… students are pointing things out to me that I don’t see the first time around. They’re right back there and today we did George Simpson and they spent- now I time all these things and I don’t tell them ahead of time….then they spend this much time on the Métis women. You know three sentences. They will now stop it [and ask] why? Why is that there?

Integration also according to the teachers meant including Aboriginal voices and content. While there was overlap in many areas, namely choices of topics namely: Residential Schools, Treaties, Land Claims, Myths and the Urban Experience, there were differences in the way they approached the topics, namely length of times spent on the topics, and the teaching methodology used to cover the topics (fact based vs. discussion/analysis methods). All of the teachers voiced that they believed Canadian history was built on three pillars or founding nations (English, French and Aboriginal). What Mala says here echoes what the other teachers believed about the foundation of
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Canadian history and says,” It’s not just about French and English; it’s about Aboriginal and other cultures. I spend more time on the three founding nations.”

Ritchie’s comments concur with Mala’s summation:

That’s a common thread throughout the whole course and that’s very different than what other people do. They will take it as a unit but I’ll try to incorporate it into every section. I’ll try to do something… You take that seriously. I’ve raised the three pillars.

Laura said:

How can you ignore, close to 3,000 years of history. And how can you ignore ….

How can you ignore? What’s Canada now, 150 some years old and the Aboriginals (civilizations) are old. Montreal celebrated its 350th birthday, and we’re teaching the last 180 years?

Two of the five teachers (Matthew and Diego) taught the Aboriginal history and content in a separate unit of study. So while teachers identify themselves as “integrating” Aboriginal perspectives, often they “add” Aboriginal perspectives without changing the structure of the curriculum. It is interesting to note that the inclusion of Aboriginal voices was identified by as a key part of teachers understanding of integrating Aboriginal perspectives, however actually consulting Aboriginal voices/organizations was not something that teachers did very often.
What is the significance of being a non-Aboriginal teacher integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curricula?

In light of teachers beliefs that: a) they could not provide an Aboriginal perspective and b) that many of them were uncomfortable discussing/accessing information about complex/risky topics like spirituality, land claims and treaty rights how they were able to continue to pursue the responsibility of integrating Aboriginal perspectives. As one teacher says:

Definitely, going into it you’re scared, because you don’t think you’re going to do it justice. Because, I’m not Aboriginal. So, obviously, I’m not going to be able to give them that perspective…That would be great. So you always have that fear about not doing it justice because I am not Aboriginal.

Another teacher echoes this by reflecting on her concerns when the child of the Aboriginal Liaison Worker in her school division was her student. While teachers identified that there was a discomfort in getting something wrong, they also were adamant that they were capable of teaching about Aboriginal topics/content. The reasons they believed they were capable varied from a level of professional development opportunities, to the results of their own self directed studies. Teachers delimited the characteristics of their practice - while no-one said they could present the “Aboriginal perspective” given their non-Aboriginal identity- they did believe that they could confidently pursue and incorporate Aboriginal history, current events and antiracism education focused on the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationship in the Canadian context. However, many were doing so without much input from Aboriginal voices.
Making a space for Aboriginal voices in their classrooms, pedagogy and schools was a complex issue for teachers in this study. It was complex because while teachers admit that they are unable to give an “Aboriginal perspective” that reflects the true beliefs and experiences of Aboriginal people and communities, and believed that Aboriginal people should speak for themselves, many did not make this space available or were highly critical of the voices that did speak. Some teachers did not give an actual reason for not including speakers into their practice but perceived limits to their ability to invite in speakers as one teacher says, “it would be really nice to have an Aboriginal person come in, I would love for the resources to be available that I could call someone and say, “you know what, I’m doing this and this and this, could you come in to my school and give them the perspective of an Aboriginal person”. One teacher reported that he did not know where to access Aboriginal speakers, others said that they were dissatisfied with the quality of the presentations, and with the Aboriginal Liaison staff. Mala had good experiences when she invited Aboriginal speakers into her classroom, specifically with Residential school survivors. Yet others seemed not to see the value in having speakers in and felt comfortable presenting the topics themselves.

To summarize from the participants answers, integrating Aboriginal perspectives in practice involves including more Aboriginal content and the point of view of Aboriginal people were possible, resources that include or are written by Aboriginal authors. The teachers in this study conceived of integrating Aboriginal perspectives as an inclusion of Aboriginal content (history, myths, current events) in curricula (topics of study/resources/assignments/exam questions), a commitment to providing the story from the viewpoint of Aboriginal people, and an inclusion of Aboriginal voices in their
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classrooms. So it is with this understanding of integrating Aboriginal perspectives that we begin to understand what supports and what subverts/efforts. This definition is a starting point in understanding the phenomenon and the attitudes, beliefs and perspectives teachers hold about this current reform initiative.

Recommendations

Schools are often criticized as being “ideological processing plants” and only socializing students to fit into the existing social order. While this idea may have some acceptance: it is also important to recognize that teachers and students have agency and that they are not completely victims of the social, political and economic structures. Based on the experiences of the teachers in this study one can see that many teachers are working towards becoming effective multicultural educators and this includes the integration of Aboriginal perspectives. While Aboriginal perspectives are not the same as multicultural perspectives there are shared characteristics between the two as similar methods of curricular reform and effective teaching practice. Most teachers are concerned about their students and want to provide them with a good education (Kanu, 2005; Silver et al, 2001, Nieto, 2000) but many are limited by a number of factors: a lack of preparation, knowledge and experience with/about diverse cultures, a lack power in the face of developing policies and practices in schools. Teachers are “products of an educational system that has a history of racism, exclusion and debilitating pedagogy” (Nieto, 2000, p. 5).

Through the exploration and examination of the experiences of teachers engaged in integrating Aboriginal perspectives one comes to understand a complex and intense process involved in this phenomenon. It was clear that while the field of education will
benefit from these teachers’ insights and experiences, teachers themselves benefited from having the space and opportunity to take a breath and really think about what they are doing. The intensity and pace of school life typically does not give teachers this much needed time and space. According to the teachers in this study, questions that they might not have considered became useful to reflect on their teaching practice. It was clear that teachers believed this kind of talking benefited them.

This recommendations of this study are that teachers should be encouraged to: a) be part of and/or create a teaching community to discuss pertinent issues, b) encouraged to engage in ongoing and authentic experiences that would be “transformational”, c) encouraged to continue to practice within a flexible curriculum

*Community of Teachers*

Teachers should be provided with a “safe” space to interrogate their own practice, beliefs, attitudes and identity about equity and social justice with a group of like minded professionals. This could take the form of a discussion group or cohort of teachers embarking on the same journey; improving their efforts at integrating Aboriginal perspectives and/or multicultural curricular reform. Such a journey would not be solely focused on the acquisition of certain resources; rather it would involve a shift from a focus on resources to a focus on beliefs, attitudes, with an effort to clarify and examine their own beliefs and to learn the theory and language of the issues that face them in schools.

According to CAAS, (2002), Nieto,( 2000), Solomon et al.(2005) it should be a priority to provide a place of reflection and discussion where teachers can learn to take responsibility for their own actions, challenge the actions of school and society and help
bring about positive change. Educational researchers support building a teaching community where professionals can come together to research, learn, discuss and receive support. (Carson, 1996; hooks, 1993). Giroux and McLaren emphasize that critical thinkers must combine “theory and practice in order to affirm and demonstrate pedagogical practices engaged in creating a new language, rupturing disciplinary boundaries, decentring authority, and rewriting the institutional and discursive borderlands in which politics become the condition for reasserting the relationship between agency, power and struggle” (as cited in hooks, 1993, p.129).

Creating a teacher “community” would require teachers to be committed to talking, collaborating, and creating space to try new things and solve problems. Bringing teachers together would be a starting point in connecting between teachers, community members of minoritized groups and other stakeholders in education. This sort of community would require structural and administrative support, as teachers would greatly benefit from release time and professional development funds.

In an educational and political climate where the allocation of funds is minimal and the time pressures put on teachers is intense, it is imperative that a reflective practice is also practical for teachers. The nature of teacher education should engender a reflective practice and give teachers places and spaces to give thought to their practice and to their own identity, beliefs and attitudes related to race, ethnicity and culture. While teacher education is full of examples of students being asked to reflect in the form of journals, these exercises are usually reflected on as tedious and ineffective methods of self understanding. Authentic reflection could be used for real problem solving and used as practical feedback from colleagues and/or mentors.
Transformational Experiences

Teachers in this study complained that often professional development did not meet their needs. They also complained about being isolated from the Aboriginal community. These two challenges were indicators to me that teachers were not having the transformational experiences that they desired and that would support an effective teaching practice. Teachers seem to be in need of long term, authentic and relational experiences. Connections and activities that take place at a one day workshop or weekend event are good starts, but overall they fail to provide what teachers need in the long term.

To address the professional and relational deficiencies of professional development in the area of integrating Aboriginal perspectives a variety of relational interventions could be useful. Relational interventions could take different forms, including: belonging to an Aboriginal education organization, being in contact and collaborating with Aboriginal teachers, developing a relationship with an Aboriginal Elder, Aboriginal education consultant or other mentors, and providing space for Aboriginal voices in the classroom (parents and others).

This recommendation is not meant to suggest that artificial or contrived relationships and connections should be made with people from Aboriginal communities. Rather it is a suggestion for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people alike to foster professional and personal connections and to work together to address the issues facing all teachers in the school system. These issues include lacking traditional knowledge, historical knowledge, a real understanding of the Aboriginal issues, and lack of knowledge of Aboriginal pedagogy and ways of knowing. Together teachers, parents and students can address and
Flexible Curriculum

It became obvious in this study that teachers who believed that they had curricular choices were more likely to take risks, and to make changes to the curriculum and to their classroom practices. The recent changes to the provincial social studies curriculum document will hopefully provide a beneficial structure and a direction for teachers, specifically novice teachers, in the area of integrating Aboriginal perspectives. However, real possibilities are also created when teachers can critically examine and analyze with students what is being learned, a breaking away from the curriculum in a sense. The new social studies curriculum seems to provide flexibility based on its open design of skill outcomes. The curriculum focuses on four areas of instructions which are directive but also provides some flexibility in how a teacher can go about addressing the requirements. Some critics believe that the current move towards a standardized curriculum and pedagogy is problematic (Solomon et al., 2005) and consequently it is a move away from a flexible curriculum that can provide opportunities for critical examination and student centred learning (Alladin, 1996).

In this regard, Indigenous scholars have discussed the importance of including indigenous knowledge as important and necessary information for challenging imperialism, oppression and domination in education (Smith, 1999). Curriculum in the classroom and the responding pedagogy should leave room for these knowledges and voices to be integrated so as to better meet the needs of students in local specific contexts. Just as the teacher student relationship should be understood as multilayered and multidimensional, teachers use and adherence to the curriculum document should be
understood as complex. This seems necessary if teachers are to meet the needs of diverse students in their classrooms and to engage in a practice that acknowledges them as individuals. The integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum could be one of the “exits” from a system of oppression (Freire, 1972) and a site of possibility (Alladin, 1996) and perhaps part of the body of knowledge that can inform students and challenge racism in schools. According to Solomon et al., (2005) “with the introduction of this new information, the way in which the information is heard, understood and interpreted differs for many groups.” (p. 155).

This information can sometimes challenge the reality of some teachers and students and this might result in uncertainty, guilt and at times anger. A shift in focus from the individual to a focus on the system, a society and many institutions, which replicate racism, is imperative to free up space and energy to address the needs of other groups who are suffering of oppression and inequity. (Solomon et al., 2005). It is also necessary for all students to learn about these issues and to examine their place in their community and society, non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal.

Therefore, the teachers in this study are a good example of the positive ways that teachers can use the notion of a “flexible” curriculum to their advantage. Many of the teachers in this study explained that they added, took away from and created their own pieces for curriculum. The acquisition of a strong social science and pedagogical knowledge combined with pedagogical skills that allow teachers to make effective instructional decisions and to formulate and devise a range of teaching strategies and activities that will facilitate the academic achievement (Banks, 2001) will likely lead to consciensization of students from all cultural backgrounds (Freire, 1972).
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curriculum. This article focused on how teachers experienced this fairly new responsibility and answered three subsidiary questions 1) What are “Aboriginal perspectives?”, 2) What does it mean to “Integrate Aboriginal Perspectives?”, 3) What is the significance of being a non-Aboriginal teacher integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curricula? Teachers responses defined what this meant in terms of an operational definition, a starting point for understanding how teachers actually do practice this phenomenon and what their experiences have been as non-Aboriginal people.
References


