

**An Examination of the Role of White Teachers Working in
Aboriginal Communities**

By Brenna O'Connor
School of Education, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, B.C

November, 2013

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THOMPSON RIVERS UNIVERSITY IN
PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

Abstract

Research in education asserts that racism and discrimination in schools and in our wider society are factors that impede the success of Aboriginal learners. White teachers, who currently make up the majority of those who teach Aboriginal students in British Columbia, have a role to play in transforming our schools. This requires them to challenge their own preconceptions and confront structures of power and dominance. Through semi-structured interviews and a focus group session, this qualitative, case study fills a gap in the literature by exploring the views of seven White teachers, working in rural Southern British Columbia. It seeks to understand how they describe their experiences and perceptions of their role in order to learn how they can best be supported to combat the inequity that exists within the system. The findings of the study demonstrate that while some teachers do have an understanding of the impact of race in the classroom, others maintain 'colour-blind' perspectives. Although they expressed the desire to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing in curriculum, many participants felt that the decision to do so was largely left to them as classroom teachers. They also expressed anxiety about doing so in a respectful and authentic way. Relationships with students and community members were viewed as vital; however, those who were new to the community expressed the desire to make stronger connections with both parents and community members. Time living in the community was viewed as an important factor in developing these relationships. Areas where teachers can be supported to work as allies alongside community members towards a more equitable system for Aboriginal students are highlighted through the analysis of the findings of this case study.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all those who helped me along this journey in order to complete my thesis. I am grateful for your participation, encouragement, and support.

This journey began for me after accepting a new position in an Aboriginal community in Southern, B.C where I learned so much from both my students and the members of the community. Thank you for opening my mind and my heart to new ways of approaching my practice as a teacher.

Thank you to my colleagues who were so generous with their time and volunteered to participate in this study. I appreciate your honesty and openness in discussing difficult issues. I have learned a great deal from all of you through our conversations.

I would also like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Wendy Hulko, who has helped me through every step of this project and has given me the support, guidance, and encouragement that has helped to drive me forward. She has helped me with obtaining ethics approval for this project, discussed the data with me at great length to help me develop codes and derive themes from my transcripts. She has also read several versions of this thesis, each time giving advice on ways I could make my work stronger. I appreciate your time, expertise, and passion for this topic.

Lastly, I would like to thank both of my parents and Marie Fossheim for their continued support and encouragement. This includes a very special thanks to my mother who has been very patient and has helped me proofread this thesis on several occasions. Without all three of you, this would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>ABSTRACT</i>	i
<i>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</i>	ii
 CHAPTER	
<i>I. Introduction</i>	1
Situating Myself	2
Research Objectives	4
Framing the Problem	5
Theoretical Perspectives	10
 <i>II. Review of the Literature</i>	12
Critical examination of White privilege	14
Understanding curriculum as a decolonizing force	21
Teachers' perceptions of the students they teach.....	27
Developing partnerships with parents and community.....	29
 <i>III. Research Methodology</i>	32
Purpose of the study	32
Research questions	34
Research design	34
Setting	36
Participants.....	37
Methods of data collection.....	40
Methods of data analysis	42
Ethical considerations	43
Reporting findings	44

IV.	<i>Research Findings</i>	46
	Preparation for teaching in Aboriginal communities in rural B.C.	47
	Perception of the impact of race the classroom	52
	Making decisions about what is taught in the classroom...	64
	Teachers' perceptions of Aboriginal learners	78
	Developing relationships with parents of Aboriginal learners	86
	Building connections with community members	92
V.	<i>Conclusions and Implications</i>	100
	Preparation for teaching in Aboriginal communities in rural B.C.	101
	Perception of the impact of race the classroom	103
	Making decisions about what is taught in the classroom.	104
	Teachers' perceptions of Aboriginal learners	107
	Developing relationships with parents of Aboriginal learners	109
	Building connections with community members	109
	Limitations of the study	110
	Implications for policy	112
	Implications for education	113
	Implications for practice	114
	Implications for further research	115
	Conclusion	116
	REFERENCES	119
	APPENDICES	125
	Appendix A:TRU Ethics Committee Certificate of Approval	126

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer	127
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form	128
Appendix D: Subject Feedback Form	130
Appendix E: Interview Guide.....	131
Appendix F: Code Book.....	132

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In January 2010, I accepted a teaching position in a rural school which enrolls 90 students from grades 8 through 12 on the traditional territory of the Nlaka'pamux people. The school's population is predominately of Aboriginal¹ ancestry with the majority of students coming from the village's surrounding reservations. As an experienced teacher, I did not initially realize that I still had an enormous amount to learn about my practice, my students, and myself: the three ways of knowing identified by Howard (2006) as necessary for White teachers. Having previously worked with Bangladeshi and Somali students in East London, I initially felt that I had learned some teaching approaches that would help me to succeed in this new position but, I struggled to engage my students. I found that I still had an enormous amount to learn and it was necessary to explore new ways of teaching. I have come to understand that there are no "generic" teaching methods that ensure success of students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds and different community contexts. Rather, "instruction for any group of students needs to be tailored or individualized," (Bartolome, 2009, p.339).

¹ Section 35(2) of the Canadian Constitution Act of 1982 defines the term Aboriginal to include Indian, Inuit, and Métis people of Canada. For the purpose of this paper, the term Aboriginal will be used to include ancestors of Canada's indigenous or First peoples, including First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and non-status Aboriginal people (Government of Canada, 1982; British Columbia Teachers Federation, 2012).

My learning agenda had to include more than acquiring an understanding of ‘methods’ that would work with students of Aboriginal ancestry. As a White teacher, I had much to learn about the context of my students, their families, and the social and economic landscape of the community where I lived and taught (Michie, 2007). If I was to be effective in this new role, it was also necessary for me to see myself as a continual learner willing to “unpack” my own privilege (McIntosh, 1990).

Situating myself

I am a White Canadian with both Irish and German ancestry. As a child, I lived with both of my parents in a small community located in the Rocky Mountains of Southern Alberta where I attended both elementary and secondary school. The majority of students I went to school with were also White Canadians. Growing up in a community with little racial diversity meant that, my position of privilege as a white person was never really examined critically and like many other White people I had “little or no experience of thinking [about myself] as having a racial position,” (Mazzei, 2008, p.1125).

My teaching career has afforded me the opportunity to live and work in both culturally and racially diverse settings, including communities in British Columbia on the traditional territories of both the St’at’imc people and the Nlaka’pamux people as well as Tower Hamlets, East London, United Kingdom. Working in these settings, I have struggled in my own teaching practice to make sense of my role as a White educator. Most recently, I struggled with this role

when I was assigned the task of teaching the course English First Peoples 10 where I was required to teach Aboriginal perspectives to Aboriginal students. I worried about doing this in an appropriate way that honoured the diversity of perspectives held by Aboriginal people. My personal journey as a teacher has been one of deep learning where I have found it necessary to acknowledge my own privilege, continually questioning how my assumptions and practices influence my students. For me, this learning has been gradual and has resulted from both the relationships I have made with community members in places I have taught and the relationships I have formed with colleagues who have acted as mentors (Root, 2010).

As a result of my experiences, I have found it necessary to renegotiate how I view my own identity and position of privilege within society. Through learning about how both individual and institutional forms of racism have continued to marginalize Aboriginal people, I have been forced to confront my own preconceptions and assumptions. A critical examination of these perspectives has impacted upon my practice and the way in which I form relationships with students and members of the community (Michie, 2007). As a White teacher, I

cannot work against racism until I understand its place in my life and until I expose the ways in which dominant practices have worked to conceal my own part in racist acts. By uncovering and calling attention to these practices, I hope to create a location from which I can move forward (Norquay 1993 p. 241).

It is from this perspective that I write this paper.

Research objectives

This case study of White teachers working in the small community of Riverview² located in the Southern Interior of British Columbia, the community where I lived and worked from January 2010 to June 2012, seeks to address the question: *How do White teachers working in Aboriginal communities describe their experiences and perceptions of their role?* Similar to the provincial data identifying a lack of diversity in the teaching profession (Stewart, 2006), nine out of the ten teachers working in the local public schools of Riverview during the 2010 / 2011 school year self-identified as White women even though over 90% of students attending school at this time were of Aboriginal ancestry. The objective of this study is to gain an understanding of how to support teachers, who begin working in rural communities with primarily Aboriginal populations, improve their practice and combat the inequity that exists within the system.

This study consisted of both individual interviews and a focus group session. The six themes that emerged from the participant responses included perspectives on: the preparation for teaching in Aboriginal communities in rural British Columbia, the impact of race in the classroom, making decisions about what is taught in the classroom, barriers facing Aboriginal learners, developing relationships with parents of Aboriginal students, and building connections with community members.

² The name of the community has been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Five chapters are included in this thesis. This first chapter situates myself as the researcher, introduces the research objectives, describes the research problem, and summarizes the theoretical perspectives that inform this study. Chapter 2 summarizes the literature that examines the contentious role of White teachers working in Aboriginal communities including the findings of previous studies. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology used to gather and analyse the data. The research findings on the six themes derived from the participant responses are described in Chapter 4. Finally, conclusions and implications of this study are explained in Chapter 5 along with recommendations for policy, teacher education, teaching practice and further research.

Framing the problem

Some of the widely acknowledged qualities of effective teachers include a solid general education background, a deep knowledge of subject matter, familiarity with numerous pedagogical approaches, strong communication skills, and effective organizational skills (Nieto, 2006a). These skills alone are not enough.

They are insufficient because they fail to take into account the socio-political context of education which includes the tremendous diversity of language, social class, ethnicity, and race, among other differences (Nieto, 2006a, p.457).

All too often, asymmetrical relationships exist between Aboriginal students and society (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and power and status relations in the broader society are often mirrored in our schools (Cummins, 1996). Issues of power and

privilege are involved in all aspects of education through decisions about funding, curriculum, class size, testing, and other matters of policy and practice (Nieto, 2006b). None of us enter the classroom with a neutral position and it is essential that we recognize this. We come with assumptions about the “Other” that impact upon our practice. Teachers’ attitudes and belief systems impact how they relate to their students and affect student academic achievement (Ikegulu, 2009). There is the danger of

teachers who see the world exclusively through their own racial, cultural, and class-based lenses; a tendency which may lead them to interact with students and families in detrimental ways (Michie 2007, p.6).

It is important for teachers to “understand how to become change agents to create more inclusive schools,” (McCreary, 2011, p.18).

The achievement gap

Statistics on school completion demonstrate that there is a discrepancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in terms of academic achievement. In the spring of 2012, only 57% of Aboriginal students graduated with a Dogwood Diploma compared with 84% of their non-Aboriginal peers (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2012). Data from Foundation Skills Assessments shows that during the 2011/2012 school year, more non-Aboriginal students were meeting grade level expectations in academic areas than their Aboriginal peers (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2012). Why then are Aboriginal students not experiencing similar rates of success as non-Aboriginal students? Our children,

“as we have seen so clearly through the lens of Indigenous experience, do not come to us with ‘the same stuff,’” (Howard, 2006, p.51). They bring with them the negative influences of our colonial history. Assimilationist policies and practices of the past have had long lasting effects including the loss of language, culture, and spiritual roots (Battiste, 2010; Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010; Neegan, 2005).

It is difficult to compare Aboriginal students with students coming from racial backgrounds whose histories and cultures are vastly different. In making these comparisons, students with Aboriginal ancestry are seen as having to do more in order to combat this disparity (Battiste, 2010). The history of assimilationist practices and residential schooling have produced both inequality and an “erosion of spirit” (Battiste, 2010). The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples concluded that many current challenges in Aboriginal communities can be tied to the residential school experience (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). Unfortunately, public schooling has all too often followed a similar path (Battiste, 2010) with Eurocentric practices which are “often not recognized by teachers who were themselves raised in the Eurocentric system,” (Hatcher and Bartlet, 2010, p.14). Miller (2004) contends that “in many jurisdictions the public school system has failed to learn from the residential school experience of First Nations students” (p.46). It is important for White teachers, who make up the majority of those who teach in public schools across the province of British Columbia, to understand the effects of colonialism and how issues of power can be enacted in the classroom marginalizing Aboriginal

learners. St. Denis (2010) calls on non-Aboriginal teachers to become allies³ in the process of decolonization.

Lack of diversity in the teaching population

In an attempt to begin to decolonize⁴ schools, changes to the B.C. curriculum have included the inclusion of courses such as English First Peoples and First Nations Studies which are meant for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and teachers (First Nations Education Steering Committee, n.d.). These courses offer an opportunity for learners to explore Aboriginal worldviews. The B.C. curriculum has also been changed to include the integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives across all subject areas. According to the British Columbia Teacher's Federation (2001), in 2001 very few teachers in B.C. had Aboriginal Ancestry. A 2006 British Columbia Teacher's Federation (BCTF) survey found that there were 280 self-identified Aboriginal teachers working in B.C., making up less than one percent of the teaching population (Stewart, 2006)⁵. Therefore, Non-Aboriginal teachers make up the majority of those who teach Aboriginal students and are called upon to deliver Aboriginal content and perspectives. A greater focus on the inclusion of

³ Reason, Roosa, and Scales define racial justice allies as White people "who are actively working to end racism and racial oppression" (2005, p.531).

⁴ Decolonization is a response to colonialism that involves a change in thinking "from a culture of denial" to acknowledging the importance of Indigenous understandings and knowledge that shifts "perceptions and power relations in real ways" (Regan, 2010, p.189).

⁵ There is a lack of more recent data on the ancestry of teachers in British Columbia.

Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum is a step in the right direction, but it is not enough.

There is a lack of diversity in the profession with regard to both race and gender (Mazzei, 2008). Unfortunately, the diversity in our student populations is not reflected in those who teach them (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). White educators, however, do have a role to play in the transformation of schools. Root (2010) argues that while White teachers:

do need to be mindful of the pitfalls of cultural appropriation and the pervasiveness of Euro-centrism and White privilege, it is equally important for us not to retreat from the colonial problem (p.108).

Transformation is largely about making changes to classroom practices and the “structures of schooling that have been built on a foundation of White dominance” (Howard, 2006, p.123).

Research points to the fact that it is necessary for teachers to have an understanding of the impact of race on classroom practice (Harper, 2000a; 2002; Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010; Haviland, 2008; Howard, 2006; Mazzei, 2008; Picower, 2009; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Power relations and racism need to be addressed within the classroom context. Although there is tremendous value in the integration of Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum for all Canadians, teachers need to understand how to address this in an authentic manner that goes beyond tokenism which can serve to perpetuate stereotypes (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010; Robertson, 2007; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Pedagogy and relationships in the classroom need to reflect this understanding and a genuine

dialogue, to inform practice, needs to take place between teachers, parents, and community members (Delpit, 1988).

Theoretical perspectives

Critical Race Theory provides a theoretical framework that is useful for examining the impact of structures of power and privilege in society and their relationship with the education system (Ladson Billings & Tate, 2009; Mason, 2008). It considers how structures of power and dominance are powerful determinants of student achievement and therefore has very important implications for non-Aboriginal teachers. Critical theorists point to schools as sites for transformative praxis. Through both action and reflection, it is postulated that it is possible to transform these systems of oppression (Egbo, 2009). Curriculum and inclusive practices that affirm diversity hold “emancipatory possibilities” for our students (Freire, 1970). Critical theory, therefore, allows educators to consider how knowledge and power are created and how they influence each other (Mason, 2008).

Recent discussions among Aboriginal scholars critique critical theory because it fails to recognize Aboriginal peoples as unique (Anglas Grande 2009). Anglas Grande (2009) argues that critical theory is not irrelevant because Aboriginal groups “clearly experience oppression” but also points to the fact that it is also necessary to draw on theories that acknowledge that Aboriginal people are not comparable to other minority groups. Post-Colonial Theory offers an additional perspective as it

situates indigenous education in the context of colonialism and explores the links between colonialism and modern society's perceptions of Indigenous knowledge (Mason, 2008, p.133).

Through this framework, educators can begin to examine how education can be a decolonizing force (Mason, 2008).

It is from both of these theoretical frameworks that I explore the tensions and the understandings that White teachers require in order to engage in education as a “practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994, p.13) working towards system transformation. This study looks at how the structure of schools and the unexamined assumptions of White teachers can disadvantage Aboriginal students, while considering how schools can be places where transformative and decolonizing practices can change the experiences for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

Chapter 2 – Review of the Literature

Ideally, the teaching population should reflect the diversity of the students in our classrooms. Unfortunately, this currently is not the case. Our system has not provided equal opportunities for all of our students. Although they cannot do so without the involvement of community members, parents, and Aboriginal teachers, White teachers do have a role to play in the process of decolonization. Non-Aboriginal teachers along with their Aboriginal colleagues should bear the responsibility of integrating Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum (Robertson, 2007; St. Denis, 2010). Through reflection and action, structures of power and dominance can be addressed within the classroom and wider school contexts (Cummins, 1996). The unique nature of Aboriginal populations needs to be considered in order for decolonization to take place in our schools. What role do White teachers play in this process? How can liberatory pedagogies be embraced so that White teachers working in Aboriginal communities act as allies to transform the system in solidarity with students, parents, and community members? (Freire, 1970). There are four themes identified in the literature that can provide White teachers with an understanding of how to engage the process of decolonization, confronting the structures that disadvantage Aboriginal students.

1. The critical examination of White privilege is necessary. Teachers need to be aware of race and its impact in the classroom. They need to understand how myths are constructed to maintain power and privilege (Haviland, 2008; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009;

McIntyre, 1997; Picower, 2009). Teachers also need to be willing to learn from their students instead of viewing themselves as saviours (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Michie, 2007; Nieto, 2006a/b; St. Denis, 2010).

2. An awareness of the political nature of the curriculum is important for White teachers to have (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Nieto, 2006a; b). Engaging in a critical examination of what is taught and what is not taught in their classrooms is necessary (Battiste, 2010; 2005; Harris, 1990; Kumashiro, 2002). Aboriginal world views need to be viewed as legitimate, taken into consideration when teaching, and taught in an authentic manner (Howard, 2006; Mason, 2008; Root, 2010). Both Western and Aboriginal perspectives should be addressed in order to give students access to the “culture of power” (Ashton-Warner, 1963; Berger & Ross, 2006; Delpit, 1988; Harris, 1990; Howard, 2006) while providing opportunities to learn Aboriginal culture, language and perspectives (Battiste, 2010; Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006).
3. White teachers need to examine their own perceptions of Aboriginal learners, rejecting a deficit perspective and providing opportunities for students to be co-creators of knowledge in the classroom (Bartolome, 2009; Freire, 1970; Fuzessy, 2003; Goulet, 2001; hooks, 1994; Howard, 2006; Hyland, 2009; Nieto, 2006a; b; Orlowski, 2008; Picower, 2009).

4. Finally, it is important for teachers to engage in an authentic dialogue with parents and community members who should set goals and drive the direction of education for their children (Cummins, 1996; Delpit, 1988; Freire, 1970; Harper, 2000a; Harris, 2006; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 2009).

Critical examination of White privilege

“Those with power are frequently least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existence.” (Delpit, 1988, p.282). I did not engage in a personal examination of my own position of privilege as a White person until well into my teaching career. Like many White teachers, I remained unaware of issues of racism until I began teaching in communities that were racially diverse because of where I was raised (Solomon et al., 2005). Since beginning my career as a teacher, I have found it necessary to constantly renegotiate how I view my own position of privilege and assumptions which can impact my students through how my classroom is structured, what I choose to include in the curriculum, and how I involve community and parents of those I teach. It has also continually put me into the position of student as I have had to learn from my own students and community members about their histories and cultural traditions which I had known little about before moving to the community of Riverview.

In her article *Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, McIntosh (1990) outlines the substantial unearned privileges that come with being White. Without acknowledging racism and race privilege, teachers are not able to engage in the

necessary process of decolonizing our schools (Picower, 2009; Schick & Denis, 2005). This entails developing a critical consciousness around their own relationship to the culture of power (Delpit, 1988) and recognizing how this affects curricular practices and relationships in the classroom (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Julie Landsman explains that although many are comfortable talking about the misfortunes of others, they are reluctant to “examine their own advantages as White people in the world,” (Landsman, 2006, p. 15). It is this reluctance that needs to be challenged for teachers to begin to engage in the process of decolonization.

Issues of power are enacted in classrooms, including the power teachers have over students and the power of curriculum in determining world views (Delpit, 1988). Recognizing race allows White teachers greater scope to be critical about resources used in the classroom, expectations held for students, grading procedures and assessment practices (McIntyre, 1997). In many cases differing perspectives and ways of knowing are not addressed and therefore, students of Aboriginal ancestry do not always see their cultural and racial backgrounds valued and reflected back to them in the classroom context (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Schick and St Denis argue that the

construction of racial dominance is a significant part of what students learn in schools no matter who is in the classroom (Schick & St. Denis, 2005, p.298).

Self-scrutiny and the recognition of how dominance plays a role in our schools are essential to the role of the activist teacher, who is an advocate for social change and promotes equity for all students (Howard, 2006; Landsman, 2006). White

dominance is an issue that continues to have a direct influence on the lives of children (Howard, 2006); therefore, as educators we need to both unlearn the assumptions and preconceptions which negatively impact our students and learn to embrace pedagogies that promote equity and inclusion for all learners (Battiste, 2010).

Tools of Whiteness

Dominance is perpetuated through the construction of myths which create reality in ways that maintain power and privilege (Haviland, 2008; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009). These ‘tools of whiteness’ prevent White people from understanding how they benefit from racism at the expense of disadvantaged groups (McIntyre, 1997; Picower, 2009). Notions of colour-blindness, the myth of meritocracy, and the perception that White people are also victims of racism are examples of ways in which myths allow White dominance to flourish. It is imperative that White teachers examine and deconstruct these myths so they do not influence their perceptions and beliefs about the students they teach which can play a powerful role in the poor achievement of certain students (Aronson, 2004).

According to McIntosh (1990), many White people are taught not to recognize their privilege and adopt a colour-blind perspective. For fear of being seen as racist, race is often not acknowledged; however, even though it may appear to be invisible, it is what defines the ‘Other’ (Johnson, 2002; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). The notion that ‘we are all the same’ comes from a “dominance oriented perspective,” (Howard, 2006, p. 57). “We are all the same translates as

‘we are all like me’,” (Howard, 2006, p.57). Notions of colour-blindness prevent us from understanding how past struggles have resulted in the subordination of racialized groups within our society. “Power is effectively hidden in the colour-blind, class-blind and gender-blind discourses in liberal multiculturalism” (Orlowski, 2008, p.114). Hatcher and Bartlett (2010) criticize colour-blind perspectives which they argue are prominent among educators. They contend that it is necessary for teachers to acknowledge power and privilege in order to build an antiracist curriculum that promotes social justice (Hatcher & Bartlett, 2010). McCreary (2011) explains that the discourse of colour-blindness contributes to the silencing of Aboriginal students’ experiences of racism. In the formation of an anti-racist curriculum, one of the greatest challenges for White teachers is in learning that racial positioning matters even if all of the students in a class are White because many schools, despite efforts to make them more inclusive, remain largely reflective of Western influences (Schick & St.Denis, 2005).

It is important for teachers, who were educated in a Euro-centric system, to learn how their privileges are constructed and maintained through the examination of meritocratic myths (Battiste, 2010). This is the belief that we all have the same opportunities and doors open to us regardless of our social location. In her study of White pre-service teachers, McIntyre found that participants felt that racialized groups needed to take “responsibility for the fact that they often times excluded themselves from the mainstream,” (McIntyre, 1997, p.61). It is important for White teachers to recognize that the same opportunities are not available to all and economic disadvantages and the systematic oppression of

groups of people exist in many communities, closing doors for many. Education does not always provide equal opportunities for all students and it is not hard work alone that predicts the degree of success students experience in school. An empirical study of Canadian White pre-service teacher responses to Peggy McIntosh's article *White privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack*, found that significant numbers of people ascribe to the meritocratic view of education, holding the belief that anyone who worked hard, regardless of racial background, would be able to overcome obstacles in their way (Solomon et al., 2005). Solomon et al. (2005) argue that the notions of fairness are part of the social fabric of Canadian discourse, while there are failures to examine policies that oppress minority groups and more specifically Aboriginal people.

Studies exploring the understanding of race held by White teacher candidates, indicate that there is a perception among some White educators that they have fallen victim to incidents of racism and discrimination (McIntyre, 1997; Picower, 2009; Solomon et. al, 2005). Picower (2009) reported that participants in her study often named Whites as victims of "reverse racism". Focusing on perceived notions that Whites experience difficulties with discrimination to the same degree as other races, prevents teachers from understanding that "power is a core variable when we examine the roots and causes of racism," (McIntyre 1997, p.48). Haviland (2008) argues that it is necessary for teachers to be aware of and challenge White educational discourse employed by White people that serves to ignore or gloss over issues of race and power. It is important for teachers to

understand how institutional, cultural, and individual forms of racism can serve to disadvantage Aboriginal students.

The myth of teacher as saviour

Several Hollywood movies including *To Sir With Love*, *Lean on Me*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Dangerous Minds*, *Freedom Writers* and countless others, perpetuate the notion of the teacher as “heroic isolate” (Ladson- Billings, 2006). Through their charisma alone, these teachers are able to single handedly transform the lives of their students. When beginning to work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds, some approach their positions with romantic ideas hoping that they can ‘make a difference’ for their students, undoing the damage of colonization (McIntyre, 1997). The problem is that students need opportunities, not rescuing, and learning with students is a process that happens when mutually respectful relationships are built (Michie, 2007). This is something that takes time. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that some teachers enter the classroom with the belief that bringing goodwill and energy to the classroom will be rewarded with enthusiastic students.

The attempt to restore inequality cannot happen through helping others (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Thira (2005) argues that there is a fourth wave of colonization that further marginalizes Aboriginal people. He claims this fourth wave is the view that Aboriginal people are victims who now require help from the “very colonizers who harmed them,” (p.3). The ‘problem’ is that teachers often address their students in “ways that try to fix who they are supposed to be,” (Kumashiro, 2002, p 12) treating them as people who need to be helped. This

places the White teacher in the dominant position and does not allow for collaborative relationships of power to develop where both teachers and students are empowered (Cummins, 1996). Freire (1970) defines this attempt to soften the power of the dominant group as false generosity. He claims that transformation requires pedagogy to be “forged *with*, not *for*” groups who have suffered oppression (p.48).

Harper (2000b) critiques the construct she coins as “Lady Bountiful”; the representation of teacher as “White missionary”, bringing civilization to the uncivilized. She claims this is a problematic identity that White women may assume in their roles as teachers. The construct of “Lady Bountiful”, much like the myth of teacher as saviour, places teachers in a dominant position where Aboriginal students and communities are seen as in need of help. Harper (2002) argues that the purpose of education and the role of teachers have shifted dramatically and that it should be Aboriginal communities, not White teachers, who make decisions regarding the education of their children. Teachers working as allies towards transforming the system do not view themselves as saviours; instead they realize that they can learn from teaching (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Michie, 2007; Nieto, 2006a; St. Denis, 2010). Teachers need to be willing to release control in their classrooms and be willing to learn alongside their students.

Research demonstrates that often pre-service teachers enter their training without an understanding of their race and its impact in the classroom (Johnson, 2002; McIntyre, 1997; Picower, 2009; Solomon et. al, 2005,). Recently,

education courses offered at the university level offer the opportunity to examine social locations and the role White privilege plays in the classroom and the larger society (Solomon et al, 2005) and in Canadian education faculties, non-Aboriginal teachers are being encouraged to learn about issues relevant to Aboriginal education (Atleo & Fitznor, 2010). However there is little research that examines the perceptions of White teachers who are already working in classrooms. What awareness of race do these teachers have of race and how does this impact upon their practice?

Understanding the role of curriculum as a decolonizing force

The curriculum is not an “ideologically neutral document,” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p.32). Through both the formal and the lived curriculum, teachers often help to shape how their students view their cultural identities (Wihak, 2004). What is taught indirectly and what is not taught constitute the hidden curriculum which can potentially have detrimental effects on students through devaluing Aboriginal knowledge (Battiste, 2010; Harris, 1990). By focusing on only certain stories and perspectives, it is possible for curriculum to normalize and privilege certain groups in society while marginalizing others (Kumashiro, 2002). It is, therefore, essential for teachers to be aware of how Aboriginal paradigms and histories are taught within both the formal and lived curriculums in their classrooms not only for Aboriginal students, but for all Canadians in order to begin to work towards decolonizing our schools. Canada’s education system has been constructed using non-Aboriginal worldviews (Neegan, 2005), having

largely overlooked both Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010). Schick and St. Denis (2005) argue that curriculum is one of the significant discourses [through] which White privilege and ‘difference’ are normalized,” (p.298).

A recent study of social studies teachers found that many did not view the current curriculum as a political document created with an agenda in mind (Orlowski, 2008). The superficial treatment of Aboriginal culture and history in both curriculum and textbooks has resulted in many people being unaware of assimilationist and colonial practices in schools (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010). It is important for White teachers to understand that the curriculum does not represent all perspectives equally. Often times, White teachers bring with them the baggage of what has been learned through a Eurocentric curriculum and they need to be willing to address their gaps in knowledge (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010; Starnes, 2006). Although the curriculum, both formal and hidden, has served to further marginalize Aboriginal people in Canada in the past (Battiste, 2010), it does hold some possibilities for healing in the future.

Freire (1970) argues that curriculum has emancipatory possibilities. Teachers need to be willing to challenge mainstream knowledge (Nieto, 2006a; b) and engage in a process of deconstructing, constructing, and reconstructing the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In this deconstruction and rebuilding of curriculum, teachers need to move beyond viewing curriculum as solely content that needs to be covered. In order to work towards decolonization, we need to do more than add content about the histories of Aboriginal peoples. Including

Indigenous ways of knowing⁶ in what is taught in the classroom is an integral part of this process (Mason, 2008). When embracing liberatory pedagogies, it is necessary for White teachers to critique our current curriculum carefully considering what is being taught in their classrooms and what is being excluded (Battiste, 2005; 2010).

This is a conversation that also needs to happen beyond the walls of the classroom in order to ensure Indigenous ways of knowing are not only acknowledged but also legitimized (Howard, 2006). Mason (2008) argues that “decolonial teaching must be partnered with an awareness of issues of legitimization,” (p. 148). The inclusion of English First Peoples’ 10, 11 and 12 encourages teachers from a curricular level to focus on authentic Aboriginal voices and encourage the use of pedagogies consistent with Aboriginal cultures. Connections between the community and the classroom are promoted as a way of including oral texts and traditions (First Nations Education Steering Committee, n.d.). So that these courses, however, are also associated with academic rigor, the assessment includes a written final exam. This is not necessarily an effective way to address the oral traditions and histories component of the course. In my own school, I have also heard students express a reluctance to take this course as they are not confident that it will be considered to be a ‘legitimate’ alternative to

⁶ Battiste (2005) defines Indigenous ways of knowing as a diverse array of “knowledges that are distinctive to different peoples and to their varied environments” (p.122). “Diversity amongst Western and Indigenous cultures makes it problematic to label worldviews as singular, monolithic categories” (Root, 2010, p.105). For the purpose of this paper, Indigenous ways of knowing will be used to describe the diverse knowledges and worldviews held by Aboriginal people.

English 10, 11, and 12. This issue of legitimacy is one that we need to address so that Western worldviews do not have hegemony over Indigenous ways of seeing the world, perpetuating dominance of one culture over another (Battiste, 2010; Howard, 2006; Mason, 2008).

Educators must undergo a decolonial epistemic shift in their own classrooms by challenging Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge and learning (Mason, 2008, p.148).

Anti-racist discourse criticizes multicultural approaches to curriculum which offer equal time to many different cultural perspectives because they fail to acknowledge the way in which race is linked to power (Ladson-Billing, 2009; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). An anti-racist curriculum and pedagogy challenge White power and privilege and unequal power relations (Dei, 2006). From a post-colonial perspective, however, anti-racist approaches fail to recognize the distinctiveness of Aboriginal people (Battiste, 2010; Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010). The effects of race and racism need to be addressed in schools along with the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing, not just for Aboriginal students but for all (Battiste, 2010). McIntyre (1997) argues that it is important for all teachers, including those working in predominantly White communities, to adopt antiracist pedagogy in order to transform systems of oppression. There is a “need for meaningful Aboriginal content and perspectives that address the ways in which racism and colonialism shape the lives of Aboriginal people” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 314).

Two-Eyed Seeing

Aboriginal content and pedagogies need to go beyond tokenism if the curriculum is to be a decolonizing agent (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 2009; Robertson, 2007; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). *Two-Eyed Seeing* enables students to

see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010, p.16).

It is an approach to curriculum that acknowledges both Western worldviews and Indigenous ways of knowing without placing one as having hegemony over another (Battiste, 2010; Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010).

For Aboriginal students in particular, it is important to include both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum. Delpit (1988) argues that although children should have the right to learn their own language in school, they should also learn the codes to participate in a 'culture of power'.

Teachers have an obligation to expose their students to the very culture that oppresses them. That may seem paradoxical but without the skills and knowledge of the dominant culture, students are unlikely to be able to engage that culture to make meaningful change (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p36).

Similarly, Berger and Ross (2006) assert that it is important for Inuit children to be explicitly taught that attendance and punctuality are important in order to achieve success in the Western domain but that this way of viewing the world should not be viewed "intrinsically valuable or superior," (p.197). Teaching "may be seen as a plank bridge from one culture to another" and the strength of this

bridge is that it allows students to succeed within the dominant culture (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p.31).

Two-Eyed Seeing is an approach to curriculum suggested by both Hatcher and Bartlett (2010) and Harris (1990), providing students with opportunities to learn from both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing. Research demonstrates that Aboriginal students who are fluent in their own language or who have strong cultural identity experience more success in the school system (Goulet 2001; Starnes 2006). The school system also bears much of the responsibility for the loss of Aboriginal languages (Mason, 2008) and should do something “significant” in terms of teaching Aboriginal languages (Harris, 1990). These languages are unique and there is nowhere future generations can go to learn them (Harris, 1990). Involving Elders and community members in the classroom is important so that students to have a greater understanding of the “relevance and utility of their language” (Miller, 2004, p.51).

Dialect differences should also be considered in such an approach to curriculum. Similar to Hatcher and Bartlett’s (2010) *Two-Eyed Seeing* approach, Wiltse (2011) argues in favour of an additive approach to teaching Standard English as a second dialect so that Aboriginal students do not need to eliminate home dialects, which are tied to identity. It is important for teachers to be aware that Aboriginal English dialects should be viewed as legitimate and embraced in the school context while, at the same time, supporting students to develop competence in Standard English which is required to “function effectively in school and in other settings” (Wiltse, 2011, p.66).

Two-Eyed Seeing offers students “more opportunities to succeed in the dominant culture without losing their own” (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010, p.16). It is one way in which White teachers can work to play a role in the decolonizing process. It does, however, require White teachers to utilize the resources within their community, bringing in Elders and community members to help teach Indigenous ways of knowing so this can be done in an authentic way. It is important to recognize that, while it is necessary, including Indigenous ways of knowing in the curriculum needs to be done in a way that honours “those who have nurtured it in the past and will sustain it for the future,” (Battiste, 2005, p.122). This is not an easy process for White educators. A study exploring the experiences of White outdoor environmental educators found that the participants’ expressed “feelings of anxiety and fear of making harmful mistakes and exposing their own ignorance,” (Root, 2010, p.111).

Teachers’ perceptions of the students they teach

Teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about their students are powerful determinants of student achievement (Aronson, 2004; Howard, 2006; Ladson-Billings 2006; Nieto, 2006a). It is necessary for teachers to have high expectations for student achievement and be vigilant to work at improving their own skills (Nieto, 2006b; Howard, 2006). Research indicates discussion about students can begin and end with a deficit discourse where negative assumptions are made about families (Bartolome, 2009; Goulet, 2001; Hyland, 2009; Nieto, 2006b; Orlowski, 2008; Picower, 2009). All too often discussions about

the problem of the achievement gap begin and end in the home where, owing to their lack of education, parents fail to provide the kind of intellectual stimulation needed to put their children on an equal footing with their White, better-off peers (Aronson, 2004, p.18).

It is necessary to adopt a perspective that views all students as having resources which are foundations for their learning (Nieto, 2006b). Teachers who engage in critical and liberatory pedagogies view their students as resilient and capable (Bartolome, 2009).

Teachers, who are working as allies to transform the system, are able to approach their students “with the will and desire to respond to [their] unique beings,” (hooks, 1994, p.13). This requires teachers to reject ‘banking’ methods of teaching and engage in collaborative ways of teaching where students are co-creators of knowledge (Freire, 1970; Fuzessy, 2003; hooks, 1994; Howard, 2006; Hyland, 2009). It also means ensuring that instruction acknowledges and builds on students’ lived experiences and addresses issues that pupils see as relevant (Cummins 1996; Howard, 2006).

When teachers create learning conditions where students can demonstrate their possession of knowledge and expertise, they are then able to see themselves as capable and competent (Bartolome, 2009, p.342).

This requires teachers to be willing to learn from their students so that teaching and learning flows in two directions rather than solely from teacher to student (Bartolome, 2009; Harris, 1990). Teachers need to be willing to become students of their students.

Releasing control in the classroom can put teachers in an uncomfortable position (Ashton Warner, 1963; Harris, 1990; hooks, 1994); however, this is a worthwhile process because students experience greater academic success in classrooms where there are collaborative power relationship, allowing them to participate in the co-creation of a learning community (Bartolome, 2009; Cummins, 1996). Harper (2000a) found in her study of teachers working with Aboriginal students in Northern Ontario, that many felt unprepared for their teaching assignments. Many expressed that they would benefit from further training in English as a second language and special education teaching methods (Harper, 2000a). Further training in methodologies does not necessarily address the issue of achievement with Aboriginal students. All too often teachers look for teaching methods that can be replicated in classrooms to increase the success of Aboriginal students; however, teachers need to address the more deep-seated issue of power and voice in order to create a learning environment that is more equitable (Bartolome, 2009; Delpit, 1988).

Developing partnerships with parents and community

Teachers who wish to engage in liberatory pedagogies cannot do so in isolation. It is necessary to have an authentic dialogue with parents and community members (Delpit, 1988; Harris, 1990; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009). This dialogue is essential to transformative praxis (Freire, 1970). In her article *The Silenced Dialogue*, Lisa Delpit (1988) argues that an appropriate education

can only be devised in consultation with adults who share the culture of the child.

Involving parents and community members

as partners in a shared enterprise challenges [the] societal discourse that [some] cultural, linguistic backgrounds are in some way deficient” (Cummins, 1996, p.9).

It is important to tap into local understandings and traditional knowledge through consultation with Elders (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010).

Harper (2000a) found that teachers working with Aboriginal students in the North had a great deal of uncertainty about the goals and purposes of education for their students. Their discussions did not reflect an understanding of the larger picture of histories of Aboriginal people in Canada and that it should be up to communities and parents to set goals for their children (Harper, 2000a). Pedagogies should be developed with First Nations communities (Harper, 2000a). Dialogue with parents and community members is, therefore, vital because it helps teachers weave Indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum, identify pedagogical goals and purposes, and it holds the potential of providing White teachers with a greater understanding of their own social location.

Authentic engagement with the reality of those whose stories are significantly different from our own can allow us to transcend, to some degree, the limits of social positionality and help us see dominance in a clearer light (Harris, 2006, p.39).

Teachers need to act as allies to/within Aboriginal communities. In order to accomplish this, we need to move beyond the four walls of the school. “From a larger perspective, we cannot eliminate the achievement gap and attain greater

educational excellence simply by looking for solutions and strategies solely within the education system” (Harris, 1990, p.134). Harper (2000a) found that White teachers expressed that they often felt uncomfortable with their position as outsiders in the community. However, in order to engage in transformative practices, it is important for teachers to work to be part of the local community and work in solidarity with Aboriginal people in order to overcome systems of oppression (Freire, 2010; St. Denis, 2010). White teachers cannot work alone to solve problems for Aboriginal students. Working together as allies with community can lead towards “healing responses that we can bring to the educational process” (Howard, 2006, p.26).

In summary, the literature suggests that it is important for White teachers working in Aboriginal communities to be aware of race and its impact in the classroom, engage in a critical examination of curriculum, view students as co-creators in knowledge rejecting a deficit perspective, and engage in an authentic dialogue with community to determine pedagogical purposes and goals for their students. Outside of Harper’s ethnographic study on White women teachers in the north (2000a; b; 2002; 2004) and Roots (2010) study of White outdoor environmental educators, there is little information about how White teachers in Canada perceive their experiences and make meaning of their roles while working in Aboriginal communities.

Chapter 3 Methodology of the Research

Purpose of the study

While previous studies indicate that pre-service teachers do not always have an understanding of the impact of race in the classroom (Johnson, 2002; Picower, 2009; Solomon et. al, 2005; McIntyre, 1997), few studies examine the perceptions of in-service teachers. Root's (2010) study of outdoor educators in Ontario found that participants identified feelings of anxiety and fear of making mistakes when working and learning with Aboriginal people; however, it was through these relationships, characterized by an open and honest dialogue, that they felt deep learning had taken place. In her examination of issues and concerns of women teaching in Northern Ontario, Harper (2000a) found that teachers who participated in her study were struggling to define their work and themselves in relation to the political and social context. She suggested that further research in more communities is required (Harper, 2000a). This research seeks to build on these findings through exploring the views of teachers working in the context of a rural community in Southern British Columbia. To date, there is no research that looks specifically at the experiences of White teachers working with Aboriginal students in the southern interior of British Columbia.

The purpose of this study was to explore experiences of White teachers working with Aboriginal students in one rural community in Southern British Columbia. It is necessary to understand the experiences and perceptions of White teachers in order to begin to combat inequities Aboriginal students face within the

education system. Supporting and developing adequate training for White teachers working in Aboriginal communities requires an understanding of what awareness White teachers have of race and its impact in the classroom, how they make decisions on what is taught or not taught in their classrooms, their perceptions of Aboriginal students, and their perceptions of barriers that prevent authentic conversations between parents and community members.

It is hoped that this study will shed light of how White teachers describe their experiences and construct their identities and roles within the community. Such an understanding is important for transformative practice. From a critical theory perspective, schools can be a place of transformative praxis and it is reflection and action that are required in order to transform systems (Egbo, 2009; hooks, 1994). Viewing the problem from a Post Colonial perspective, it is necessary for teachers to have an awareness of the political, social, and historical context of education for Aboriginal students in order to engage in a process of decolonization, the process of changing a system that emphasizes Western and European ways of knowing to one that recognizes and values Indigenous ways of knowing without one view having hegemony over another (Battist, 1010; Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010; Mason, 2008).

The objectives of this study were to:

- explore how teachers describe their experiences working in Aboriginal communities;
- determine what understanding of race and its impact in the classroom in service White teachers in Riverview have;
- describe how White teachers perceive Aboriginal learners; and
- determine how teachers define pedagogical goals and purposes for their students, make decisions about the content of the curriculum, and involve community members.

Research questions

The themes identified in the literature review helped to create the research questions. The initial questions were:

How do White teachers working in Aboriginal communities describe their experiences and perceptions of their role?

- What awareness do they have of their own race and its impact in the classroom?
- Who makes decisions in classrooms about the content that is taught through the curriculum?
- How do White teachers describe their view of Aboriginal learners?
- How do teachers involve community members in the decision making process of pedagogical goals and purposes? What are the barriers and tensions that arise?

Research design

To explore the research questions, a case study approach informed by critical race theory and post-colonial theory was used. Both semi-structured interviews and a focus group session were used to gather data to examine how teachers describe their experiences and understand their roles working with Aboriginal students in the context of rural Southern British Columbia. Case studies focus on a single unit of analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). For the

purposes of this study, the unit of analysis was White teachers working in Riverview.

Case study methods are used when the purpose of the research is to better understand a phenomenon reflecting the perspectives of the participants (Court, 2003; Gall et al., 2007). Yin (2008) argues that case studies are “the preferred method in examining contemporary events” (p.11) and that the question of ‘how’ generally leads to the use of a case study approach to research. My research focused on the question of ‘how’ teachers describe their experiences. It was my intent to gain an understanding of how their perspectives either serve to combat the inequity that is visible within the school system or how they maintain the status quo. One of the strengths of case study research is that it is grounded in lived realities (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). When considering how best to design training and support to better prepare White teachers to embrace liberatory pedagogies, it is imperative to go beyond what the literature states and consider the day-to-day experiences teachers have and how their perspectives influence practice.

One of the underlying assumptions in case study research is that themes present in participant descriptions can lead toward a generalized understanding of the phenomenon (Court, 2003; Gall et al, 2007). Yin (2009) explains that although results from a single case cannot be generalized to other populations, they can be generalized to theoretical propositions which are called analytic generalizations. As a researcher, I looked for themes present in the description of teachers’ varied experiences (Gall et al., 2007). Although it is not possible to

conclude that the experiences and perspectives of a small sample of teachers working in one unique community in British Columbia can be similar to other White teachers working in very different communities, it is hoped that this study can provide a better understanding and serve to provide important information to help design training to support teachers within this community.

Court (2003) explains that the focus of case study research is outward looking with an emphasis on both better understanding a phenomenon and refining our behaviour. As a White teacher working in an Aboriginal community, this study has provided me with an opportunity to increase my own awareness of issues of power and privilege and has helped me to improve my own practice in order to best support my students. It also began an interesting dialogue with my colleagues about how we can best serve our Aboriginal students and work towards system change as allies within our community. This dialogue did not end with the interviews and focus group session.

The setting

This study was conducted in a small village in Southern British Columbia (Riverview) where the student population is predominantly of Aboriginal ancestry and constitutes over 95% of students at the local elementary and secondary school. In contrast to the student population, nine out of the ten teachers who worked in the community during the 2010/2011 school year self-identified as White female.

Riverview is a village where the impact of the residential school system is directly felt (Loring, 2009). Many of the students who currently attend the public elementary and secondary schools have either parents or grandparents who are survivors of the residential school system. The residential school that was located in the community was not closed until July 31, 1979 (Anglican Church of Canada, n.d.). According to local playwright Kevin Loring (2009), “the legacy of the trauma has been passed on through families for generations,” (p.94).

The participants

Seven teachers, who self-identified as White Canadian, took part in this study. They were selected on a volunteer basis. Pseudonyms for the seven participants are “Diane”, “Rachel”, “Lisa”, “Karen”, “Grace”, “Sarah”, and “Shirley”. These teachers all worked in Riverview during the 2010/2011 school year either at the public elementary or secondary school. This sample included the teachers I was working with at the time. After receiving approval from the Thompson Rivers University Ethics Committee (see Appendix A), recruitment flyers (see Appendix B) were placed in the office mail boxes of possible participants. The secretaries at both the elementary school and secondary school were asked to direct any interest or questions expressed by possible participants to me. This was to help to ensure that teachers did not feel obligated to participate because it may have been difficult to decline had I asked them verbally, as they were colleagues of mine at that time. Teachers who approached me expressing interest were the only participants chosen.

The one Aboriginal teacher working in the community was not included as a possible participant as this study focused on the views and perceptions of White teachers. Out of the eight possible participants, seven volunteered to take part in the study. Data were drawn from semi-structured individual interviews and one focus group session with participants. All seven participants first took part in individual interviews. Following the interviews, six participants also took part in one focus group session where they engaged in a dialogue with one another. One participant was not able to participate in the focus group due to scheduling difficulties. Interviews were held in private rooms at the secondary school and the elementary school during the school day and the focus group session was held after school in one of the teacher's classrooms. Each interview and the focus group session took approximately one hour and all were audio recorded and later transcribed.

The participants ranged in age from 24 to 59 years (average 33 years) and their experience ranged from first year of teaching to over 34 years of teaching experience (average 12 years). Some teachers had taught and lived in the community for less than one year while others had lived and worked in the community for over 30 years. One of the participants grew up in the community and returned to work there and another had recently moved to the community to be close to family who lived in a nearby town. All of the other participants had moved to the area after securing employment in the community. The majority of participants had worked only in the area of Riverview and its surrounding communities, with only two participants having taught in different communities.

Number of years teaching	1-5 years	5 – 10 years	over 15 years
	(3 participants)	(2 participants)	(2 participants)

Age range	24 – 29	30 – 39	50-59
	(4 participants)	(1 participant)	(2 participants)

Number of communities taught in	one community	more than one community
	(5 participants)	(2 participants)

My established relationship with each of the participants was both advantageous and problematic for this study. Because each of the teachers were involved in sharing their experiences and perspectives, an established relationship before the interview helped to enable participants to feel free to speak freely in a way that they might not have felt able to in a onetime interview with a researcher they did not know. This established relationship, on the other hand, may have made it more difficult for participants as there could have been the tendency for participants to say what they felt I wanted to hear causing a social desirability bias. Issues of bias were addressed in the research design in order to minimize this as an issue to the greatest extent possible. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. It was also explained that this process was in no way evaluative. I also kept a personal journal of field notes during the process to help identify personal bias I held as the researcher.

Methods of data collection

In order to ensure the trustworthiness of data in qualitative research, triangulation of data is important and therefore more than one method of data collection was used (Gall et al, 2007). The triangulation of data and verification of data from participants was used to help to minimize the issue of personal bias in the study (Gall et al, 2007). The two methods used in this study to collect data were individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group session.

Before the individual interviews, as the researcher and interviewer, I explained the details of the project to each individual and how both confidentiality and anonymity would be protected, including the use of pseudonyms within the final paper. Participants were given the Informed Consent form (see Appendix C) and the Human Subject Feedback form (see Appendix D). At this time I explained that teachers should in no way feel obligated to participate and had the opportunity to withdraw at any time. Teachers were also informed that they could choose the extent of their involvement in the project taking part in the interview, the focus group, or both.

I first conducted semi-structured interviews using an interview guide where the questions were derived from the themes identified in the literature review (see appendix E) with each of the participants. Time allotted for these interviews was approximately one hour during the school day. These interviews were an initial tool to help provide an understanding of how the participants described their experiences and perspectives, providing opportunities to investigate participant awareness of racial identity and its role within schools as it

has a direct effect on curriculum, teacher perceptions of learners, and relationships with community members. Interviews were audio recorded using a laptop and microphone and transcribed with the permission of participants. Participants had the opportunity to view the transcripts before the data was analysed to determine their accuracy. None of the participants chose to make any corrections to the transcripts.

Following semi-structured interviews, a focus group session was held to give teachers the opportunity to discuss their experiences in a group setting. The main advantage of focus group methodology for collecting information is that it allows for in-depth discussion (Gall et al., 2007). The interaction between group participants can result in increased elaboration on a topic and broader insight into understanding an issue (The Health Communication Unit, 2002). This method was used after individual interviews because of the potential for participants to influence each other's opinions. The importance of confidentiality was discussed at the beginning of the meeting so participants felt free to discuss issues candidly. Time allotted for the focus group was one hour and the same question guide as used in the interviews was used to focus the discussion (see Appendix E). As with the semi-structured interviews, the focus group session was audio recorded and transcribed with the permission of participants who had the opportunity to view the transcript before the data was analysed. As with the transcripts for the individual interviews, none of the participants made any corrections to the transcript of the focus group session.

As a participant researcher, I kept field notes to record my observations after both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group session to record my reactions to participant responses and the dialogue generated by group members. This journal helped to remind me of my own subjectivity and position within this research which are important factors in the study.

Methods of data analysis

Critical Race Theory and Post-Colonial Theory were drawn upon to provide a framework in which to analyse participant perspectives and descriptions of their experiences. Participant understandings of their own relationship to power and the impact of this in the classroom were explored as well as perspectives on the decolonizing role of education (Ladson Billings & Tate, 2009; Mason, 2008). The initial research questions, which was informed by the four themes identified in the literature, provided a beginning framework for overall analysis.

Data analysis activities began with the preparing of transcripts for both semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussion. Transcripts were then shared with participants to verify what had been said. Transcripts were then read and the data was looked at very closely. Through the use of NVivo software, data was coded according to themes that emerged from what the participants had said. Key words and phrases used by participants in the interviews and focus group were used to create codes and a code book was created to show patterns found in the data (see Appendix F). Broad themes and categories informed by the four

themes identified in previous studies were used to further organize codes. Peer debriefing with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Wendy Hulko helped to ensure consistency with coding participant responses. We discussed my code book and themes several times and during these conversations, I gave examples of my codes to justify decisions made. Dr. Hulko advised me to create in vivo codes from wording participants had used in their interviews. The codebook (see Appendix F) includes codes and definitions with examples from participant responses.

Constant comparison was used so that when passages of text were coded they were compared with the other passages that had been previously coded in the same way. Similarities and differences between participant responses were compared. The results were then grouped into themes and described. Understandings provided by critical theory including the importance of understanding racial positioning and anti-racist curriculum approaches as well as the understandings provided by Post-Colonial theory including the importance of the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing in the curriculum and the right to self-determination for Aboriginal people, helped to form the basis for analysis of participant responses.

Ethical considerations

As a female White teacher, I shared a similar point of entry into this research as the participants in the study and therefore, no unequal power relationships were present between the interviewer and the participants.

Riverview is a small community with few teachers who work in the public school system. In order to protect the confidentiality of each of the participants, pseudonyms were used and the community name was changed. The individual interviews and focus group session were conducted in private rooms at the school.

Discussions of race and equity can at times raise discomfort especially when examining one's own role in relation to these issues. During the interview process, I was aware that some teachers may have felt uncomfortable especially when asked about their ideas on issues of race and equity in a more formal setting; these are conversations that teachers do have with their colleagues in more informal situations. The teachers I worked with were aware that I would be working on a study that examined the role of White teachers in Aboriginal communities and indicated interest before the time of recruitment. As an interviewer, I ensured that I was sensitive to the comfort level of participants in the project. They were told at the beginning that there was no obligation to answer all of the questions. Teachers were also reminded that their views would remain confidential and anonymous and that there was no evaluative component of this study.

Reporting findings

I presented my preliminary findings from this study to graduate students at Thompson Rivers University in the EDUC 5040 course in July 2012. In addition to this thesis which has been submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Masters of Education, the research findings will also be presented in a

public forum as one of the requirements for graduation. Research findings will also be disseminated to stakeholders including the participants in the study, the School Board members, and First Peoples Education Committee.

Chapter 4 Research Findings

The six themes identified through the thematic and comparative data analysis process included: preparation for teaching in Aboriginal communities in rural British Columbia; perception of the impact of race in the classroom; making decisions about what is taught in the classroom; perception of Aboriginal learners; developing relationships with parents of Aboriginal students; and building connections with community members.

It is important to realize that there is diversity among teacher perspectives with regard to and understanding of the role White privilege plays in a classroom context, the role of curriculum as a decolonizing force, barriers faced by Aboriginal learners, and importance of building connections with both parents of Aboriginal students and members of the community. By no means do White teachers only fall into one of two groups, either holding negative behaviours that serve to marginalize Aboriginal students or displaying attitudes that lead towards a struggle to confront structures of power and dominance and end oppression. The participants who took part in this study, like the participants in Root's (2010) study, are on journeys that involves learning about decolonization.

Diane, a long time secondary school teacher in the community, expressed the view that racial identity plays a significant and often unacknowledged role within her classroom. She also believes that the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum is important for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. It is not however necessary to be an experienced teacher in order to

work towards combating the inequities that exist within the education system. Grace, a first year elementary school teacher, articulated perspectives that demonstrated a desire to actively work to challenge colonial practices. Other teachers, including Rachel, Lisa, and Karen spoke about the importance of developing strong relationships with both students and community members. For Rachel and Karen in particular, these relationships challenged perspectives they held about Aboriginal students prior to moving to the community. Sarah and Shirley expressed colour-blind views which were contrary to those held by both Diane and Grace. From critical race theory and anti-racist perspectives, these views should be challenged as they ignore the role that racism plays within the classroom. In contrast to Diane and Grace, these two teachers were at different points in their journeys at the time of the study and this does suggest that there is a need for anti-racist education initiatives for both teachers new to the profession and those who have had several years of experience (St. Denis, 2007).

Preparation for teaching in Aboriginal communities in rural B. C.

Although many teachers enter the profession and new positions feeling they have a lot to learn, the feeling of being unprepared is perhaps heightened in the circumstance where White teachers are new to Aboriginal communities. Previous studies indicate that teachers who move to Aboriginal communities often feel that they do not have adequate preparation to work in this context (Berger & Ross, 2006; Harper, 2000a). The participants in this study indicated a variety of reasons for moving to a rural community in British Columbia. For two of the participants, the move to Riverview came out of a desire to be close to family

while other teachers indicated they moved to Riverview in order to secure employment. The majority of participants indicated that they knew little about the context of the community before moving there and in many ways felt unprepared to teach in this setting.

Reasons for moving to Riverview

Teachers end up in rural communities for different reasons, with some seeing it as a necessary starting point in their career as teachers:

It is really hard to find a teaching job in B.C. and I think you have to go to rural places to start and during my first year in Riverview I thought it would be just sort of a springboard somewhere else and five years later I'm still here and I like it (Lisa, Interview).

For others, the draw to find employment in a rural community is to be close to family. Shirley, for example, expressed that she considered Riverview to be her home base: “I went to high school here in Riverview and when I married I came back to the area” (Interview). This was the case for two of the participants in the study while the others had moved to the area to secure employment without previous knowledge about Riverview.

Feeling unprepared to work in a rural community

Many teachers find themselves taking positions in rural communities without awareness of the context in which they will be teaching. As Rachel noted, “I didn’t really realize before interviewing here that the population here was primarily Aboriginal and I was told that in the interview,” (Interview). This

was the case for both teachers new to the community and teachers who had been in the community for several years. Diane, a teacher who had lived in Riverview for over 30 years, also expressed that she knew little about the community before moving there to work:

I knew nothing about the community; I had no idea where it was. And then I stayed... I really like it here (Interview).

Many of the younger teachers interviewed indicated that they felt unprepared to teach in Riverview, feeling they lacked the understanding of the cultural and historical context of the community. As Lisa remarked, “I don’t think I realized exactly how creative you would have to be in order to make it work here” and that discussions and training around Aboriginal education had been a “miniscule part” of her training (Interview). The younger participants expressed that their formal training offered more of a very general view of Aboriginal people and cultures, without providing them an understanding of the tremendous diversity in Aboriginal languages, traditions and cultures and more specifically, the knowledge of local language, traditions, and the historical context of the community that would be required for them to teach in Riverview:

What is really important to recognize is that what you learn in text books tends to be a more generic amalgamation of a lot of the similarities of First Nations communities and they are incredibly different. Each community is very, very different, has a different language, different traditions, different stories (Karen, Interview).

Grace echoed this sentiment when she expressed that before going to Riverview she had taken a Canadian history course that included some Aboriginal content

but that her knowledge about Aboriginal cultures and histories was “very general and stereotypical,”(Interview). Sarah, a young teacher in her second year of teaching, expressed that in some ways she did not feel that her university training prepared her for her career teaching in an Aboriginal community:

University training is very formal and this is the way you do it and I feel that the only thing that saved me was my ability to adapt and that really can't be taught or isn't taught at university (Interview).

She was not alone in feeling that formal university training did not address some of the issues they were now faced with as teachers new to their careers. Grace expressed that issues of race were never discussed during her time in the teaching program (Interview) while Rachel explained that discussions of protocol in Aboriginal communities at the university left her with a degree of anxiety as she did not feel prepared to invite community members into her classroom:

One of the things that we talked about in this little mini unit about this was how to get an Elder to come into your classroom and we talked about how there may be formalities. You may have to bring in sweet grass or tobacco depending on what the Elder would request and it seemed like a very difficult process and a very confusing process. It wasn't clear whether we were supposed to ask the Elder about what they wanted, or ask someone else, or whether we were even supposed to approach the Elders or someone else was supposed to do that on our behalf. It really made me feel, or in university at least, I felt that it was never going to be something that I was going to be able to do (Interview).

Because they had felt unprepared as new teachers to the community, many of the teachers expressed during both their interviews and the focus group session a desire to have a mentoring program for new teachers:

Each new teacher, particularly if they are new to the profession and new to First Nations communities at the same time, that person really needs a mentor teacher who can help them separate what is difficult because you are a first year teacher and what is difficult because you are in a First Nation's community (Karen, Interview).

It was generally felt that teachers new to the community would require support in order to ensure success in the classroom. Some teachers felt that they were “thrown” into classrooms with little support from other teachers or administrators and often teachers needed to use their own initiative in order to get the help they needed:

There is sort of this sink or swim mentality where you just get thrown into the class and you are on your own and you're not really... it's not that you're not supported, but you have to take that initiative to find the support (Lisa, interview).

Grace echoed this desire for support as a teacher new to the community and expressed that she felt a degree of anxiety as a new teacher:

I feel anxious about and I have hang ups about because I do know the past and I can feel a power imbalance. I feel that needs to be acknowledged and the support needs to be there for how do you connect with the parents. How do you encourage certain things to happen at home without telling them what to do and how do you include the language without feeling that you are taking it over? (Interview).

Many of the younger teachers felt the need for greater support as their teacher education programs had not provided them with the understanding of local traditions, culture, and protocol.

Teachers can often come to rural communities with primarily Aboriginal populations without an understanding of the context of where they are teaching, leaving them feeling in many ways, unprepared. The teachers interviewed in this study, particularly those who had recently come to Riverview expressed that their formal teacher training, including courses that included content about Aboriginal education, did not provide them with enough of a background to feel comfortable in their new roles. They communicated that they not only did not have any understanding of local Nlaka'pamux traditions, language and culture but that they were also unsure of protocol, particularly when it came to inviting Elders to the classroom. Similar to the participants in Root's (2010) study, the teachers who took part in this study expressed that they were in search of mentors to support them. Two of the younger teachers also pointed out that they had not had discussions about race during their teacher training and which Howard (2006) argues are necessary so that teachers do not maintain systems of power and privilege in the classroom.

Perception of the impact of race in the classroom

The literature suggests that it is necessary for White teachers to engage in a critical examination of White privilege and to recognize how individual, institutional and cultural forms of racism disadvantage Aboriginal students within the school system (McIntyre, 1997; Schick & St. Denis, 2005). Teachers in this study were asked about what it meant for them to be White teachers working with Aboriginal students during both the interview and focus group sessions. The teachers interviewed in this study were divided on their beliefs on the impact of

race within the classroom. Age or experience did not appear to be a factor in determining teacher perception of the impact of race. The following findings describe this theme:

- some of the participants subscribed to a “colour blind” set of beliefs and felt race had little impact in their classrooms which were comprised largely of Aboriginal students;
- when discussing the theme of race, the term “culture” was used in the place of race by some participants;
- others expressed that they felt race played a significant and often unacknowledged role within their classrooms. Age and experience did not appear to be a factor in terms of the teachers’ beliefs on the impact of race in their classrooms; and,
- the two teachers who were in their first year of living and teaching in the community made several comments expressing that they had become suddenly aware of their White racial identity. This sudden awareness was attributed to their recent relocation to Riverview.

Race has little impact in the classroom

Three teachers, ranging in both age and experience, made comments that suggested they felt that race had no negative impact within their classroom environments. Lisa, who had been teaching in the community for six years, felt that her racial identity did not have a negative impact in her classroom:

I don’t think my race influences my interactions. I think it gives my students the context of what other

cultures are like. But I don't think it negatively impacts on interactions (Lisa, Interview).

She did not deny her White racial identity but appeared not to recognize her own relationship to the culture of power as a White teacher (Delpit, 1988) or acknowledge that racism and colonial practices continue to marginalize Aboriginal students (Battiste, 2010).

Shirley and Sarah, a very experienced teacher and a second year teacher respectively, both expressed that they felt there should be no difference between teaching Aboriginal students or students of any other race, maintaining a "colour blind" perspective. This belief appeared to be strongly held by these two participants who expressed more than once that they felt good teaching was the same for all students regardless of race. As Shirley stated, "In most cases I don't feel that there is a difference for me... children, students, people are people and there's not a real difference," (Interview).

During the focus group discussion, Sarah challenged the notion that race played a significant role in classrooms where White teachers teach both Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students. She expressed that she felt teachers should not make a distinction between Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students in the classroom environment, claiming that all students should benefit from the same "good practice":

I don't like the way this discussion has brought out 'the White teacher'. I personally don't feel like I'm White. The kids have never made me feel like that, I really don't. I feel that all of this discussion is about separation is not useful and every practice that benefits a student can benefit a student, whether

Aboriginal or not Aboriginal (Focus group).

Sarah's comment demonstrates that she is not aware of her own racial identity; similar to the participants in Picower's (2009) study of White pre-service teachers in New York City. The perspective that students should not be viewed differently because of their race suggests that both Sarah and Shirley have not recognized the role that privilege plays in their interactions with students and largely ignores institutional racism that has served to marginalize Aboriginal students (Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010).

In addition to a "colour blind" perspective, Shirley also appeared to maintain a belief in meritocracy where the same opportunities are open to all students, regardless of race. This is a myth that Battiste (2010) argues should be challenged by educators. Shirley appeared to view all students, regardless of race as having equal opportunity as long as they worked hard; however, she seemed to think that her students did not necessarily feel the same way:

I think that they often see themselves as being picked on. They talk about how the Whites did them wrong so they see themselves almost as the lower class and it is really hard to you know, get across that everybody is equal (Interview).

It would seem from her comment, that Shirley viewed her students as perceiving barriers to success in school that she does not believe stand in their way because she saw them as having equality of opportunity.

When asked specifically about racism, instead of addressing how power and privilege result in the marginalization of Aboriginal students, both Sarah and Lisa spoke of racism in terms of how they had been treated as White teachers by

their Aboriginal students. Both of these teachers felt that the students had largely welcomed them into the school and to community and they had not felt discriminated against as teachers by their students because of their own race.

I don't feel like I've been treated as the one White teacher who comes to teach. I think that that is pretty common for them but I feel that they have been very welcoming. They joked about it but I've never felt that they've actually viewed me negatively because I'm White. I don't feel that (Lisa, Interview).

Although she felt that the students had not been “racist towards the teachers” (Interview), Sarah expressed that she felt White teachers had to work harder to develop relationships and earn the respect of their students than their Aboriginal colleagues (Interview). It is particularly interesting that these two teachers both discussed issues of racism and discrimination in terms of how students viewed teachers rather than demonstrating an awareness of White privilege and their relationship to the culture of power. By expressing the belief that racism can be enacted by Aboriginal students toward White teachers, it appears that they did not see power as the core variable in racism much like the participants in both McCreary's (2011) and McIntyre's (1997) studies. Neither of these two teachers brought up the idea that racism could be a larger structural issue within society or that teacher perceptions of students could serve to disadvantage students within the classroom.

Rachel did not discuss the relationship between race and power when she was asked how being a White teacher of Aboriginal students in Canada differed

from her experience teaching abroad in a country where she had also been a racial minority. She explained that she felt that teaching in her native Canada with Aboriginal students was different because she had felt more like an “outsider” while working abroad (Rachel, Interview). Being White in Canada and being White in a different country had different meanings to her as she felt that she had more in common with Aboriginal students in Canada than with her students in Egypt:

I feel like our values are very similar. I feel like we see the world in quite similar ways. I think that we’ve all grown up watching the same news stories, we’ve all grown up you know in the same environment, we’ve all grown up with the same kind of Canadian message (Rachel, interview).

She did not mention that the impact of colonialism may play a larger role in Canadian classrooms between White teachers and Aboriginal students as these are students who still do not receive equitable treatment or have the same degree of agency as their White counterparts. In contrast, there is not a White majority who hold the power in Egypt. Recognizing “White privilege” in Canadian classrooms is important as Whiteness is tied to the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1988) in this context. During the focus group session, however, Rachel did discuss how Canada’s colonial history placed White teachers working in Aboriginal communities in contentious positions, acknowledging an awareness of the role the past plays in our Canadian classrooms (Focus Group).

Substituting the word “culture” for “race”

Schick and St. Denis (2005) argue that a common code for racial

difference in Canada is “cultural difference”. This appears to be true for some of the participants in this study who expressed differences in terms of culture rather than race. When asked the question “What does it mean for you to be a White teacher working with Aboriginal students?” some participants responded by describing cultural differences rather than race:

I think that I definitely have an inherent set of values that are just different because of where I grew up so I think I’ve got a lot of work to do in terms of understanding the culture because it is not inherent to me (Lisa, focus group).

For some of the teachers, it is not clear whether or not cultural differences were described because teachers felt uncomfortable talking about issues of race or whether they did not perceive race and culture to be different from one another.

When asked about whether or not she perceived a difference between race and culture, Rachel expressed that it was difficult for her to unpack the difference between race and culture:

It’s hard to separate those two for me I think because I grew up in a very White community, I grew up in [name of city] which is like... you know there was one Black kid at my high school and there was one kid from Trinidad and that was it, you know that was it. There’s nobody else, everybody else is White middle class kids and upper middle class kids. Part of my experience growing up in Canada has been White Canada so I find it hard to separate the two (Interview).

It does appear that many of the teachers had not been introduced to ideas of antiracist pedagogies during their teacher training. Rachel expressed frustration with how discussions around the use of multicultural resources including using books in classrooms during her teacher training had not gone any deeper in

helping her to understand how to support diversity in her classroom and led to “awkward” conversations (Interview). Rachel’s comments support Hatcher and Bartlett’s (2010) claim that all too often White people feel uncomfortable talking about racism which may be a reason some participants used the word culture in the place of race.

In contrast, Grace, who spoke at length about the power relationship within the classroom, did make a distinction between race and cultural difference drawing a distinction between racial and cultural differences in her interview:

But then I think that there are challenges around race when it is so obvious that there is difference between the teacher and the students, with them identifying me as being different and also the cultural differences that come in with that. I know not all that is tied to race but different life perspectives (Interview).

Grace noted that both racial differences and cultural differences create challenges in the classroom environment. Although it is important for teachers to be aware of the cultural traditions and values of the community in which they teach, it is important not to interchange the term culture for race. Schick and St. Denis (2005) argue that using the word cultural difference in the place of racial difference can be problematic because challenges faced by Aboriginal people may be seen as problems that stem from cultural differences rather than racism.

Race plays a significant and often unacknowledged role in the classroom

The belief that all students are the same regardless of race was certainly not held by all participants. Both Diane and Grace, a very experienced teacher

and a first year teacher respectively, expressed that it was necessary to be aware of the role race plays in the classroom in order to combat inequities and racism within their classrooms. Grace, in particular, acknowledged she worried about what children were learning in her classroom through both what was explicitly taught in classrooms and by what was taught inadvertently by omission. Both Karen and Diane suggested that they felt the impact of race within their classrooms was significant. When asked the question about what it meant to be a White teacher working in an Aboriginal community, Karen responded by laughing and asking whether or not it was just one question (interview). Diane began by remarking:

Oh it is big. It's big. The kids still see White people and they still are hesitant to trust but that is somewhat true for any student but I think more so for our students, I think there's an underlying unacknowledged, stereotype or racism whatever it is that happens (Diane, interview).

In the focus group session, these teachers did not comment on the impact they felt that race had in a classroom context. After Lisa and Sarah expressed that they felt that race did not play a significant role in the school context, it could be that these teachers did not feel comfortable to challenge this perspective in a group setting. Rachel, however, did point out during the focus group that she felt the role of White teachers within Aboriginal communities was contentious one due to Canada's colonial history:

It's a difficult position to be in as a White teacher because of the history that Canada has and the history that White people in Canada have with First Nations people - trying to change First Nations people and make them more White and make them

more European I guess... and so I felt very awkward trying to teach First Nations kids what it was to be First Nations (Rachel, focus group).

In their interviews, both Diane and Grace expressed that they felt a degree of anxiety about the possibility of unintentionally imposing their own values on their students through decisions they make on an ongoing basis by what was said or not said in the classroom:

You've got your own belief system that you are operating from and that is all you have to work from and if that is different and you don't understand the belief system you are in then you've got to learn that. And then you have to decide how much of the belief system and culture that you're in can you accept, acknowledge and appreciate and still maintain your own without judging. I think that is one of the biggest challenges to balance those perspectives (Diane, Interview).

Unlike Lisa and Sarah, Grace felt that the students in her class did notice differences in race between teachers and students. She felt that this was not limited to just teachers but she expressed that she worried her students also noticed that professionals in the community, who held positions of authority, were White. Grace suggested that the lack of Aboriginal people in such positions sent negative messages to the children in her class: "I don't think I've ever had a child come out and say White people are principals or White people are doctors but I think that children are incredibly perceptive," (Interview). Grace expressed a degree of frustration with structures that disadvantages students because of race stating "I don't know if I can compensate for that," (Interview). She also noted that it can be difficult for teachers to not teach children from their own racial,

cultural and class based bias:

You are often making value statements and that can be interpreted by the student as saying that one way is better than the other. You have to be very sensitive (Interview).

Grace was the only teacher who spoke at length about the power relationship in teaching and the privilege she experienced in the community as a White teacher:

I think that it is an absolute privilege to be a teacher. I think that it is a difficult position when you are in a community where there are so few Aboriginal people in that position. I think that it is tricky right because people who are at the quote unquote top of the hierarchy are White I think it sends value messages or messages about who is in a position of power (Grace, interview).

While some of the participants interviewed for this study felt that race had little impact in their classrooms and did not appear to recognize the relationship between race and the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1988), others held the opinion that race played a significant and often unacknowledged role in their classrooms. It is important to note that the awareness of the impact of race in the classroom and community is something that can change over time as teachers remain in their positions and learn from their experiences and interactions with community members. Similar to Root’s (2010) study of White outdoor environmental educators, Karen’s perspective appears to have changed as a result of relationships with Aboriginal people after having lived and worked in the community for a number of years. She expressed that although she had initially felt that all children should be seen as similar regardless of race, she had learned that this was not necessarily a view that was held by the community:

I think it means less to me than it means to the community members and I've kind of had to learn to see it from community members' point of view. I had always figured a child is a child and a teacher is a teacher (Interview).

The role of personal experiences in learning the impact of race in the classroom can change the perspectives of some teachers. It appears that this was an important factor in changing Karen's perspective from one that was colour blind to a view that Aboriginal students need to be recognized in the context of her classroom.

A sudden awareness of White racial identity

Similar to Harper's (2002) findings from her qualitative study of White teachers working in the Canadian North, the two teachers who were new to the community, both expressed that they felt a heightened awareness of their own race and expressed the feeling of being very "identifiable" as White teachers within Riverview (Grace, Interview).

Both of these teachers who were new to the community expressed that they had become suddenly aware of their White racial identity. They were the only two teachers to comment on feelings of standing out because of their race within the community:

Coming into this community was the first time I have ever felt White because prior to living here I have lived in either White communities or I have lived in very multicultural spaces so coming here was the first time I think that I have ever really felt my race (Grace, Interview).

For Rachel this awareness appeared to be accompanied with anxiety about being accepted in her role within the community, feeling that because of her White racial identity she felt as though she “stuck out like a sore thumb,” (Interview). It is interesting that this perception was only noted by teachers new to the community while teachers who had lived in the community for longer periods of time made no mention of feeling aware of their own racial identity as a result of moving to a largely Aboriginal community.

In summary, on the theme of teacher perception of race in the community, the participants in this study differed in their perspectives with some expressing the belief that race did not play an important role in their classrooms and that all students should be treated in the same way, while others acknowledged the relationship between power and race and expressed that they often felt worried about messages taught inadvertently within their classrooms. Although some teachers recognized the relationship between racism and power, others did not. Age and experience was not a factor although one teacher did express that her views had changed as a result of her interactions with community members.

Making decisions about what is taught in the classroom

When considering the role of White teachers working in Aboriginal communities, it is important for teachers to have an understanding of the political nature of curriculum, including both Indigenous ways of knowing and Western perspectives into what is taught in classrooms (Battiste, 2010; Goulet, 2001; Hatcher & Bartlet, 2010). Teachers were asked about the curriculum in their

classrooms including who made decisions about what was taught, what input they felt the community had into the curriculum, and what successes or barriers they faced when including Aboriginal content into what was taught in their classrooms.

Participant responses included the following:

- the two most experienced teachers felt that recently, there had been greater efforts to include Indigenous perspectives and content into the British Columbia curriculum;
- the teachers interviewed acknowledged an obligation to follow the provincial curriculum, but felt that the decisions about what was taught in classrooms largely lie with the classroom teacher and the extent to which the community had input depended on the individual teachers;
- all of the participants in the study demonstrated a commitment to incorporating Indigenous perspectives and world views into what they taught in the classrooms, which required input from community members, placing each of them in the position of learner;
- most participants expressed that they experienced a degree of anxiety around appropriately integrating Indigenous understandings, with the desire to do this in a respectful and appropriate way; and,
- the two participants who had been teaching the longest both spoke about the need to have a balanced approach to curriculum, including both Indigenous ways of knowing and Western perspectives.

There has been a big change in the curriculum

The two teachers with the most experience pointed out that recent efforts have been made by the Ministry of Education to ensure that the formal curriculum, that which is mandated by the province of British Columbia, is inclusive of Aboriginal content and perspectives, stating that “there has been a big change, a huge change,” (Shirley, Interview). Such changes included new teaching resources, the introduction of courses such as English First Peoples and First Nations 12, and as the inclusion of Aboriginal views across other curricular areas including English, Science and Social Studies:

Shirley and I can remember back to a time where there wouldn't have been any First Nations resources, there wouldn't have been any First Nations teachers. You were lucky to find a First Nations resource person let alone all the cool stuff we have to work with now. It's been really nice to watch that whole blossoming of materials and good quality stuff and not more of the old dated, colonial perspective (Diane, Focus Group).

Diane mentioned these changes in both her interview and the focus group session. Having just completed a semester of teaching English 12 First Peoples to a majority of White students in a neighboring community jointly with her students in Riverview through video conferencing, Diane expressed the importance of having courses such as English First Peoples for non-Aboriginal students:

It really helped me to understand that I think there is still a huge place for this course and I think that is what a lot of the curriculum is trying to do is to address issues around respect for First Peoples by providing at least that little bit of background knowledge about that which is necessary to have as a human being living in British Columbia (Interview).

Diane felt that the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing in the curriculum was important not only in classrooms with Aboriginal students but for non-Aboriginal students to help them gain a greater understanding of Aboriginal issues. Her comment demonstrates the perspective that through curriculum, changing colonial perspectives that marginalize Aboriginal people becomes possible.

Despite recent changes, not all teachers felt that the formal curriculum adequately represented the unique views and perspectives of Aboriginal people. Rachel and Lisa both expressed the belief that “as a whole it would only scratch the surface,” (Lisa, Interview). Lisa explained that the Integrated Resource Packages did not provide any “insight on local knowledge of particular tribes or nations,” (Interview). Similarly, Rachel expressed that she felt that these changes did not necessarily go far enough and that she felt curriculum had a decolonizing role to play within the school system:

I think that if we are truly going to go forward with reclaiming some of that Aboriginal history and helping kids connect with their identity and feel more comfortable in school, there needs to be a change to the curriculum because right now the curriculum that we have is, not in all ways, but in many ways irrelevant to the students and irrelevant to the culture of the students and I realize that that’s kind of bigger than just teachers, but it is something that we need to address (Focus Group).

Unlike Orlowski’s (2008) study of social studies teachers in British Columbia, both Diane and Rachel demonstrated an awareness of the political nature of curriculum, viewing it as an agent of social change with the possibility of creating

greater understanding of Aboriginal issues for non-Aboriginal students and helping Aboriginal students to see their own identities reflected in the system.

Teacher autonomy in making decisions about curriculum

All of the teachers interviewed discussed the obligation that they had to follow prescribed learning outcomes set out by the Ministry of Education within the Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) and the provincially mandated curriculum in British Columbia. Some teachers felt that the formal curriculum had more flexibility than others:

The curriculum is mandated by the province but having said that, there is no curriculum cop. You can definitely represent things the way that you want (Sarah, Interview).

Both Sarah and Shirley, who taught provincially examinable courses at the secondary school level, felt there was less flexibility for those classes. One of the elementary school teachers expressed that she felt more compelled to include content that was relevant to the lives of her students than to follow the provincially mandated learning outcomes for her students:

We are tied to the IRPs but sometimes those IRPs are kind of ridiculous when we think about whether or not these kids are going to use that in their lives (Rachel, Focus Group).

It appears that although teachers felt their job was to follow the curriculum as set out by the Ministry of Education, they still saw a great deal of flexibility in what they taught in their classrooms with the exception of secondary school courses that were provincially examinable.

When asked about who made the decisions about what was taught in their classrooms, most of the participants said that they felt that it had been left up to them to make these decisions for their students:

I feel that as a teacher that decision has been like 90% up to me. It has been my job to do that (Lisa, Interview).

Grace, Rachel and Diane also discussed the importance of student interest to drive what is taught in the classroom. Grace felt this decision was one made jointly by her as the teacher and the students in her classroom:

As a teacher I bring my own interests and passions into the classroom and I think that the students bring theirs as well and we often explore things that they are really passionate about, so a combination of student and teacher (Interview).

Later in her interview, she highlighted the example of a time that discovering student interest in eagles led her to develop this as an inquiry topic for her class.

It was also largely felt by the teachers interviewed that the decision to involve and invite community members into their classrooms was up to the individual classroom teacher. Inviting community members into their own classrooms was something that they had done of their own accord:

The community has as much impact as the teacher wants. The community doesn't have a direct impact but if you find community resources and if you know how to access them they can be fantastic and you could have a community person in your class every week (Karen, Interview).

Many of the teachers interviewed spoke about the importance of community contributions to curriculum but expressed that these decisions as being left up to them as classroom teachers.

Diane was the only teacher who spoke about involving the community in the decisions about what is taught to their children in classrooms. She did not feel it was the teachers or the school, but the community who should have ownership and make the decisions about what is taught in the classroom:

I think the community should own the language curriculum, I think they should be there as far as incorporating any kind of cultural, community aspects. I think any community should have some say into making curriculum relevant (Diane, Interview).

It is interesting that Diane was the only teacher who spoke about the importance of involving community in making the decisions about what was taught to Aboriginal students. Like the teachers in Harper's (2000a) study, many of the teachers interviewed did not demonstrate awareness of the historical struggle of Aboriginal people to "secure self-determination" over the education of their people (p.146). As Harper (2000a) noted, the decisions about what is taught in the classroom and the goals for education for Aboriginal students should be made by Aboriginal communities and not beginning teachers from outside the community. Although the teachers interviewed saw value in inviting community members to their classrooms, it is important that this decision is not left to individual teachers alone.

Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into the classroom curriculum

The participants demonstrated a commitment to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into their classrooms. They all spoke about inviting Elders and community members to come into their classrooms to teach the students about

local traditions and knowledge. Such knowledge included ecological knowledge in science lessons, ways of hunting and fishing, preparation of meals, storytelling and talking about residential school experiences. Diane expressed that she felt that incorporating Indigenous knowledge into her lessons had a positive impact upon the students in her classroom:

The kids do appreciate recognizing their culture and learning about it. I've really noticed that this year... that they do enjoy it, they do appreciate it. They appreciate the respect. You get that underlying sense of 'hey, I'm valued' (Interview).

Rachel talked at length about the benefits of having community members teach her students. She noted that this changed the perceptions of her students about what kind of knowledge was valuable by placing importance on Nlaka'pamux and local community knowledge:

Everyone that came in was really knowledgeable and knowledgeable about something that I think the kids believed was not in many ways worth knowing. They weren't coming in to talk to us about math or about a book or about a science topic, they were coming in to talk about their lives and to have that kind of knowledge recognized in the classroom really changed things (Rachel, Interview).

Four participants discussed the importance of placing value on Indigenous knowledge in the classrooms and expressed that it was important for their students to understand that traditional knowledge was not lesser than content traditionally taught at school. Rachel spoke of how having community members share their knowledge in her classroom had helped to shift the perspective her students held about which knowledge had the most worth.

I was hoping to communicate to the kids that this person who has come to speak has knowledge. Having that knowledge is powerful. They are going to teach you something. They are going to teach me something and that is what learning and being in school is all about (Rachel, Interview).

These four teachers criticized our system for not always placing enough value on Aboriginal understandings and perspectives:

In this text book world of education, we need to find ways, we can bring those people in and value what they have to say and give the students marks for it, because this knowledge has value. That type of learning has value (Sarah, Interview).

Grace criticized our current system for placing a higher value on knowledge traditionally taught in school, creating a power dynamic that disadvantaged Aboriginal students. She felt that it was sometimes difficult to incorporate Indigenous understandings in a system that uses standardized testing and methods which she felt were contradictory to Indigenous pedagogies.

There is a value system that is imperative within the education system which includes standardized testing and other things that put the teacher as the expert and as the person who is going to assess students and tell them whether they are good enough or not to move on. There are a lot of systems that build that power dynamic and they are in the school and they are not exactly choice activities. I think that it is really difficult to approach the curriculum in a different way and then put on a different hat on test days and say 'oh so now we need to operate within this other value system that is built in to the way our education system is' (Grace, Focus group).

Incorporating indigenous ways of knowing in an authentic way is important; however, doing this involves system reform.

The teachers who participated in this study expressed that they felt that distinct languages should be included and valued in the school curriculum:

I think in communities where there is a strong Aboriginal population trying to reclaim community like it is here, then learning language should be a huge part of that (Rachel, Interview).

They expressed that some of the difficulties faced by schools included a lack of qualified teachers to teach Aboriginal languages and that efforts to include local vocabulary into their own classrooms were often thwarted by the fact that few people in the community were fluent speakers:

This year we try to do the calendar in the local language which has been difficult without a language teacher in the school because I don't know all the months of the year. I know the days and the numbers, but I don't know all the months. And even today I asked the former [language] teacher, but she is going to have to go look it up (Karen, Interview).

Grace expressed that she felt that it was necessary to incorporate language in an authentic way and as a White teacher who did not speak the local language, she did not feel she had the skills to do that:

I think we need to have the local languages taught in our schools. [Pause, laugh] I don't think I should be the one to do it (Grace, Interview).

Although they placed an importance on incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and distinct languages into the curriculum, the participants explained that they experienced a degree of anxiety in doing so because of their own lack of knowledge and fear of misrepresentation. This feeling of anxiety was not limited to the teaching of Nlaka'pamux language. Many of the teachers interviewed expressed that they worried about how to teach Aboriginal content in an authentic

and respectful way as White teachers.

Anxiety around teaching a culturally responsive curriculum

The majority of the participants discussed that as teachers it was necessary to be in the position of a learner in order to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into their classrooms. They expressed that because they did not have background knowledge on local culture and customs that they had to rely on community members to teach their students:

I don't have an inherent knowledge base. I feel like I'm constantly having to outsource and that is happening to other teachers. I think that is a universal feeling for the other White teachers in this school too. I feel that it is hard for us to come in and provide a program. It certainly would be without using community members as resources. I find them very valuable. Anytime we've utilized a local resource, it has been a more deep learning experience for the students (Lisa, Interview).

Rachel also expressed that as a White teacher, she felt it was necessary to utilize community resources in her classroom placing her in the position of student alongside the children in her classroom:

I am always and will always be in the position of a learner. I can't really claim to teach Aboriginal history and live in an Aboriginal community because the history is all around me. I don't have to teach it per se, I just have to access it and help the kids tap into it (Interview).

All of these teachers felt that they had learned a lot through utilizing community members to share local knowledge and traditions with students including contemporary knowledge.

I think that I am learning quite a bit about the local traditions. I would say that I am learning the contemporary versions of those traditions (Grace, Interview).

Diane, who had spent time working in the community for a band office, expressed that she felt very fortunate to have been taught by Elders and other community members which had enabled her to learn local language and traditions, which she could then share with her students.

Many teachers expressed that although they felt it was important to incorporate Aboriginal content and language into their curriculum, that this may be a role better filled by Aboriginal teachers and that as White teachers they were not necessarily able to adequately and appropriately teach Indigenous ways of knowing:

We obviously have the requirement that we have to integrate Aboriginal resources and knowledge into our practice. And I'm not always the best person to do that – I've had a few comments like 'there's a White teacher who is going to teach us how to be better natives' (Lisa, Interview).

Similar to the participants in Root's (2010) study, Grace and Rachel, who were new to the community, worried about making mistakes and misrepresenting language and cultural perspectives:

I feel a little bit anxious about teaching traditions or customs that I am really unfamiliar with, especially with language because I just feel really uncomfortable trying to speak it and knowing that I'm not doing it right (Grace, Interview).

This was not just a perspective held by teachers new to teaching and Riverview.

Diane, who had lived in the community for several years and had been taught to

speak the local language by Elders in the community, taught a language course at the secondary school. She expressed a degree of discomfort in teaching this course as a White teacher:

I get faced with the conflict of “well, am I the best person to be teaching this?” So that puts me in a bizarre position I mean I don’t imagine there are a lot of White people teaching a First Nations language. There can’t be too many of them kicking around [laugh] (Interview).

This can place White teachers in a difficult position. Although these teachers felt it was important to be able to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing in the curriculum, they expressed that it was important for them to do this in a way that was appropriate, honoring and respecting Nlaka'pamux traditions and perspectives:

It is something that I really want to be able to do but I am concerned that I’m not going to do it correctly or appropriately and I struggle with what is better- Is it better to try to use the language and the terms and the local traditions and to do them incorrectly or to not do them at all (Grace, Interview).

As a beginning teacher, Grace expressed the desire to be supported in how to appropriately include Indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum (Interview). Including Indigenous perspectives and worldviews in the curriculum, does place White teachers in the position of learner in their classrooms and White teachers do not always feel equipped to do this in an authentic and respectful way.

A balanced approach to curriculum

The two participants who had been teaching the longest both spoke about the need to have a balanced approach to curriculum. They cautioned against

including Indigenous ways of knowing and perspectives to the exclusion of other perspectives. Both of these teachers expressed that they felt there should be a “a balanced approach” to curriculum or there was a danger that the students might “miss out” (Diane, focus group). They felt it was necessary for them to be able to understand a Western perspective in addition to their own cultural perspectives (Shirley, focus group). Shirley expressed that she felt students should not be limited by taking subjects that included only Aboriginal content:

When we are only teaching the First Peoples English and they have no other choices, I think we are doing something wrong because they don't get the opportunity to learn about Shakespeare or Chaucer, or something along that line (Shirley, Focus group).

Diane explained that this was something that had concerned some of her students:

With more of an emphasis on First Nations content in the curriculum and I've had lots and lots of kids especially in Grade 11 and 12 say “How come we've got to do all this ‘Indian’ stuff all the time?” (Interview).

Although these teachers had expressed the importance of incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and local knowledge in particular into their curriculums, they acknowledged the importance of a ‘two-eyed seeing’ approach (Hatcher & Bartlett, 2010) where Western perspectives were also taught and students had access to a rigorous curriculum so that they were able to achieve similar standards to students in other geographical locations.

On the theme of curriculum, the two teachers who had worked in the community for over fifteen years expressed that they felt changes in the BC curriculum had taken place to include Indigenous ways of knowing. When asked

about who makes decisions about what is taught in classrooms, teachers acknowledged their obligation to follow Ministry of Education Integrated Resource Packages, but largely felt that many decisions were left up to them as professionals and therefore, the degree to which Indigenous ways of knowing were included into classroom curriculums largely depended on individual teachers. Although teachers felt that many decisions were left up to them, it is important to note that all of the participants in the study demonstrated a commitment to incorporating Indigenous perspectives and world views into what they taught in the classrooms. This, however, was not without challenge for these teachers as five of the participants expressed that this placed them in the position of learner and that they experienced anxiety around appropriately integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and Aboriginal content into their classroom curriculums, with the desire to do this in a respectful and appropriate way.

Teachers' perceptions of Aboriginal learners

From a critical theory perspective, it is important for White teachers to view their students as co-creators of knowledge in the classroom fostering learning environments that utilize their background knowledge (Bartalome, 2005; Cummins, 1996; Freire 1970) and to rejecting deficit views of Aboriginal students (Bartolome, 2005; Cummins, 1996; Hyland, 2009). The participants in this study were asked to describe the students they teach. Upon analysing participant responses, two main findings describe how the participants viewed Aboriginal learners:

- the majority of teachers spoke about the importance of developing positive relationships with their students. One teacher in particular identified that for her, these relationships had changed the preconceived ideas she had about Aboriginal learners; and,
- all of the teachers interviewed addressed a number of challenges faced by their students that they felt impacted upon their learning in the classroom. The number of challenges highlighted by the participants does suggest that it is often easy to fall into a deficit discourse when speaking about issues faced by Aboriginal learners.

Students need to know their teachers care

All but one of the teachers spoke about the importance of developing a positive relationship between teachers and students. It was felt by these teachers that student success was dependent on this positive relationship. Sarah, a second year teacher, felt that beginning teachers who did not work on developing personal relationships with their students would not be successful in their roles:

I really enjoy the students a lot, but I find it very challenging to teach them and if you don't have a personal relationship with them, if they don't feel that you care about them as people - then you are sunk (Interview).

Rachel echoed this perspective, stating that a positive relationship was necessary for student engagement in the classroom. She felt that until her students had gotten to know her as a person, they had not been willing to engage in the content of what was being taught:

Until I developed that kind of relationship with them, it was really hard to get them excited about things. And it is hard to teach when you don't have that momentum of excitement (Interview).

She expressed that the relationships she had developed with her students over her first year teaching in Riverview had challenged the preconceived notions about the literacy levels of Aboriginal students. She claimed that as she developed trusting relationships with students, they were more willing to share their ideas with her through writing and her initial impression had been inaccurate:

When I was asking them to write me a paragraph telling me about 'who you are' and I was only getting one sentence. It wasn't a reflection of their ability, it was a reflection of [laugh] what they thought about me or how safe they felt, which was clearly not that safe (Interview).

The three newest teachers to the community discussed how developing relationships with their students over their first year of teaching in the community contributed to both greater student achievement and their own professional success as teachers.

The majority of teachers expressed that a positive relationship with students was something that took time to develop and that it required effort on the part of the teacher:

You have to prove yourself and prove yourself and prove yourself until finally they think 'ok, I'm going to trust you' (Diane, Focus group).

Shirley suggested that this was something that was important for teachers new to the community to understand (Interview). Four participants pointed to the high turnover of teachers in the community as contributing factor. Some teachers left

the community after a short time to secure employment in a larger centre whereas others through no choice of their own had to leave the community because of factors including declining enrollment and union seniority. It was felt that this “constant rotating door of teachers” (Lisa, Interview) was detrimental in the building of relationships between students and teachers.

Perception of challenges facing Aboriginal learners

All of the participants spoke about challenges they felt were faced by Aboriginal learners in Riverview and how they thought issues impacted student learning and academic success. Issues raised included high rates of poverty due to high unemployment in the community, high absenteeism, social and emotional difficulties, behavioural difficulties, academic difficulties, and a need for self advocacy skills. The number of challenges raised by the participants indicates that perhaps teachers engage in the deficit construction of Aboriginal students and families.

Poverty and lack of employment opportunities in the community were an issues teachers felt were beyond the control of both students and their parents, but that had an impact at the classroom level. It was noted by most participants that a high unemployment rate, meant that many families struggled to provide their children with basic necessities:

A lot of children are coming to school without breakfast and sometimes in the winter, without proper clothes. It changes your role as a teacher and what you have to take care of in the classroom (Rachel, Interview).

These teachers identified having appropriate winter clothing and nutrition as challenges facing the children in their classes resulting from poverty.

The majority of the participants spoke at length about both social and emotional problems that they felt impacted their students' lives. It was felt that many of these social and emotional issues often stemmed "conflicts at home or challenges within families" (Grace, Interview). There was the perception of all four of the younger teachers in the community that many of the students were living in homes with adults other than their birth parents:

Very few of my kids are raised in functional family homes. A lot of them have been raised by grandparents or have been in care and just major life inconsistencies, ups and downs and it is inescapable that that would affect them in a huge way (Lisa, Interview).

Both Rachel and Karen expressed that they felt the emotional needs of their students meant that often their role changed from educator to caregiver for their students:

I think there is a lot more non-teaching. There is a lot more of doing things that we would traditionally consider to be a parent's job when I've been in First Nations schools and a lot more teaching basic skills like manners and responsibility and personal care and I did a lot less of that in the non First Nations schools (Karen, Interview).

There was the perception that it can be difficult to "move forward with the curriculum" when the students were having difficult times with family life (Rachel, Interview). This perspective is in some ways similar to the construct of "Lady Bountiful" identified by Harper (2000b, 2002) identified where White female teachers felt that it was their responsibility to be caregivers for their

students. There are structures in place to support Aboriginal children who are facing difficulties including Aboriginal student support workers employed by school boards and education coordinators employed by bands. It is important for teachers to utilize these support structures instead of feeling that it is up to them to care for the physical needs of their students.

The majority of the participants interviewed felt that their Aboriginal students experienced greater difficulty with academic subjects with higher numbers of students “not achieving grade level expectations” (Lisa, Interview). Both Grace and Shirley perceived that not being exposed to a “literacy rich environment” in the home may impact their students’ academic success:

I think there is a real problem with the reading because I don’t think that at home there are the books, magazines, the stories (Shirley, Interview).

It was felt by both Lisa and Sarah that at times low expectations meant that students were not required to meet expected academic levels and were often promoted to the next grade without having to demonstrate growth in academic skills. Lisa noted that many children “go to the next grade regardless of what they’ve done” (Interview). Both of these teachers expressed frustration with a system that they felt did not support teachers in maintaining high expectations for their students and push them to excel academically.

Lisa expressed that she felt as though she was “perpetually doing catch-up” with her students without “getting ahead” (Interview). Sarah felt that sometimes her students did not attempt activities that required more challenging or critical thinking skills because they had not been expected to do so in the past.

They get frustrated very easily with challenges or higher level processing methods of teaching. They'll often give up when you offer that type of learning experience for them (Interview).

It does appear that both of these teachers felt that their students had the potential to achieve academically but that high enough expectations had not been placed on them. Sarah worried that this meant many students were not able to “handle the rigors of university” once they completed secondary school (Interview). Both of these teachers expressed that they felt greater efforts needed to be made to ensure that their students succeeded academically. “They do need to succeed and that has to be the bottom line” (Sarah, Interview). Both home environments and low expectations for Aboriginal students were posed as possible reasons why Aboriginal students may not experience the same rates of success academically as their non-Aboriginal counterparts. It is interesting that both Sarah and Lisa criticized a system contributing to the challenges experienced by Aboriginal students when these are two teachers who did not recognize the possibility that systematic racism could result in the marginalization of Aboriginal students.

Sarah, Rachel, Diane and Shirley expressed “not understanding the system” created challenges for students in the school environment. Both Diane and Lisa talked about students missing large amounts of school and this affecting their academic success. Similarly in Berger and Ross's (2006) study of White teacher working in the Canadian Arctic, punctuality and attendance were frequently mentioned as an area of contention between schools and students. The authors of this study drew the conclusion that there was a culture clash on ideas of

punctuality and attendance between the school and students and that attendance and punctuality was valued by a Western system. Diane felt that absenteeism could be the result of students who did not “buy into the system” (Interview). She expressed that she felt that it was necessary for students to understand “the game of school” and “how it works” which meant making expectations “clear to them” (Interview). Diane’s perspective is similar to that of Delpit (1988), who argued that there is a “culture of power” and codes or rules for participating in this culture also exist however, not all groups of students are aware of these codes.

Shirley, Diane, Sarah and Rachel all spoke about concerns that they had that their students were not good advocates for themselves within the school system:

I find that a lot of the kids... at least the kids in my classroom are not great advocates of themselves, so if they need something, they are not going to ask for it or sometimes they don’t even know how to ask for it (Rachel, Focus group).

Shirley felt many of the students in her class did not speak up in class or advocate for themselves because in many cases they didn’t “have the self-confidence” (Focus group). On the other hand, Diane and Rachel expressed this may be because the students did not know how to ask for help or advocate for themselves within the system of school. Diane said that she felt this made teachers responsible for working to teach the codes to the culture of school.

The challenge is having the children and their families understand the system to be successful. That to me is a challenge. It needs to be made clear that this is what you need to do to play the game. This is the game and it is a game and let’s just be

honest about that (Interview).

Sarah expressed that her students were often unaware of these systems because the culture of school was different than the culture within the community that her students were coming from (Focus group).

When discussing perceptions of Aboriginal learners, teachers spoke about the importance of developing positive relationships with their students. It was felt by these teachers that these close relationships helped to promote a safe environment in the classroom that helped their students to experience greater success. Teachers also addressed a number of challenges faced by their students that they felt impacted upon their learning in the classroom. The number of challenges discussed by the teachers does suggest that it is often easy to fall into a deficit discourse when speaking about issues faced by Aboriginal learners. It is important to note, however, that some participants pointed to the system of school rather than the students themselves as the underlying factor for some of the challenges they faced which including not have high enough expectations for Aboriginal students and not explicitly teaching the culture of school to Aboriginal learners.

Developing relationships with parents of Aboriginal learners

The literature suggests that fostering relationships that extend beyond the classroom to parents and community is a key component of effective teaching (Cummins, 1996; Delpit, 1988, Goulet, 2001; Harper, 2000a). The participants in this study were asked about the extent to which they were able to involve both

parents and community members in the education of their students. While all of the participants interviewed spoke of importance of building relationships with parents, the extent to which they perceived they had been successful doing so varied greatly. Some teachers felt that they had been able to form strong relationships with many of the parents and community members while others struggled to do so.

Developing positive relationships with parents of Aboriginal students

Teacher perceptions about the extent to which they had been able to involve the parents of the students in their classrooms varied greatly. Both Lisa and Rachel felt that the overwhelming majority of the parents of students in their classrooms were supportive of their children's education and felt that "they want to be part of their schooling," (Lisa, Interview). These two teachers also felt that that they had been able to form positive relationships with these parents although they had often been the ones to initiate such a relationship.

When I have had concerns with students and I have brought them up with parents, they have been really responsive and really helpful but I do find that yes, it has to be initiated by me (Rachel, Focus Group).

Rachel noted in both her interview and the focus group session that although she felt the parents of the children in her class would like to be involved in their child's education, there were some barriers to her communication with them and that often, even though they attended parent meetings, she felt conversations were one sided with her as the teacher doing the majority of the talking:

I never had an issue with getting parents to come in

for learning conversations which is like parent teacher interviews. I had almost 100% of parents show up every time which is great but they would show up and sit silently and not ask any questions (Rachel, Interview).

The feeling that conversations were often ‘one sided’ was also echoed by Grace who felt that she had struggled to involve the parents of her students. Rachel expressed that she was not sure if this was because “didn’t really understand how to get involved or what kind of questions to ask” (Interview), but did not discuss how cultural differences may also have played a role in these types of interactions. Diane addressed this perception in the focus group session explaining that after living in the community for many years, she had learned that silences were part of communication for people in the community.

Expecting other people to talk as much as we like to talk is maybe an unreasonable expectation and like teachers are really good at thinking ‘hey, talking is the answer, that’s how you figure things out’ but there’s a lot of people who don’t figure things out by talking. I sure learned that living here (Focus Group).

Diane expressed that she had experienced the greatest success in involving parents when the students were engaged in leading conversations about learning, stating that “If the kids do the talking, the parents will listen,” (Diane, Interview).

Four teachers in the study described avenues that had helped to foster positive relationships with the parents of the students in their classes. Both Karen and Diane suggested the importance engaging in dialogues with parents for positive reasons rather than contacting them when difficulties with children arose in classroom situations.

I try very hard to make that first contact be positive and try to invite parents to come to parties or things that are going on in the classroom that are just positive that everyone is welcome to attend (Karen, Interview).

Social events in the school where parents and teachers had opportunities to meet in less formal situations helped to develop positive relationships. Karen and Rachel expressed that they had both organized social events in their classrooms as an attempt to create stronger relationships with parents. Lisa, Grace, and Sarah expressed the desire to have more informal and social interactions with the parents of their students. “I don’t think we invite them enough to be social with us in the school,” (Lisa, Interview). Sarah also suggested there needed to be more invitations so that parents felt welcome to come in and participate in the school community.

I think it would be really valuable to have more things for parents to come into the school for and as much as I say ‘oh the doors are open’, there needs to be an invitation (Sarah, Interview).

It appears that these teachers expressed the desire to see social events take place on a more regular basis because they helped to build relationships between teachers and parents. Lisa spoke about the benefit of social media in her class, explaining that through vehicles such as email, texting and Facebook, parents initiated greater contact with her as a teacher:

I’m probably friends with half my kids’ parents on Facebook and while they might not return my calls, they will send me a message and do it that way and I have a mailer that I send out everything to them on email once a month. That is the place where they will initiate it, they’ll send me a message (Focus Group).

Some of the teachers expressed that they had been able to develop positive relationships with parents and that contacting them for positive reasons, involving parents in social events and using social media as a way to connect with parents had helped to cultivate these relationships.

Struggling to connect with parents of Aboriginal students

Not all of the participants felt they had been able to engage in a dialogue with parents of their students regarding the academic progress of the students in their classes. Grace, in particular, felt that it had been very difficult to get parents to come into her classroom:

I would definitely say there are these obstacles that I'm not even really sure what they are but I can feel the difficulty with communicating with parents and even getting them into the school is really challenging (Interview).

She brought up this feeling in both her interview and during the focus group session. The four youngest teachers, including Lisa and Rachel, who had felt able to develop positive relationships, all talked about wanting to see the parents of the students they teach in the school more often:

I'd like to see them here more. I'd like to see parents and community members not just in times of crisis, but I'd like to see them in at other times (Lisa, Interview).

It is, therefore, important to note that even the participants who felt that they had been able to develop good relationships with many parents of their students, felt that they could be cultivated further.

The participants discussed reasons why they felt parents did not come to the school. Grace and Karen discussed transportation difficulties faced by parents who did not have cars and lived geographically far from the school. All of the participants felt that the history of residential school within Riverview and resulting negative experiences with schools contributed to a rift between the school and both parents and community members. “The intimidation of the system and its past history”, contributed to a lack of involvement from some parents (Diane, Focus Group). The multi-generational effect of residential schooling was also discussed by the participants.

Members of the community had a pretty rough go of it with the residential school and although they themselves weren’t necessarily there, the grandparents mainly or even great grandparents were there but because of the generations but it all filters down and the word school is almost a scary place for some (Shirley, Interview).

It was largely felt by teachers that even for parents and community members who themselves did not go to residential school, the effects were long lasting and pervasive. Shirley, who had grown up in the community, expressed that this legacy was important for teachers new to the community to understand (Interview). Grace and Lisa noted this was not something they were aware of prior to working in Riverview:

I think that the legacy of residential school has had impacts that I really didn’t understand how long lasting they were until I came here (Lisa, Interview).

For the two teachers newest to the community, this appeared particularly daunting and in some ways they felt responsibility to “fix” relationships that had been damaged by history, placing parents and White teachers on two opposing

sides of the problem.

I just feel like there is something I should be trying to do as a teacher to fix that right and I don't always know how to. But I do think that the system has sort of set this up, that teachers are on one side of things and parents are on the other side (Interview).

While teachers do play a very important role in ensuring there is an authentic dialogue with parents of the students they teach, perhaps this is a larger issue that requires support from Aboriginal communities, School Boards and administrators. The problem of having a lack of communication between parents and teachers cannot be left to teachers alone to “fix”.

Questions about the extent to which teachers felt they were able to engage with the parents of the students they teach and perceived barriers to communication were explored during both the interview and focus group sessions. Participant responses varied, with some teachers explaining that they had been able to form strong relationships with many of the parents of their students, while others struggled to involve parents the schooling of their children. Barriers to forming such relationships included difficulty with transportation in a geographically large area and perhaps, most significantly, the historical impact of residential schools on parents and community members which have been significant and long lasting.

Building connections with community members

It is important for educators to utilize the resources within the community to incorporate traditional knowledge within the classroom (Battiste, 2010; Hatcher

& Bartlett, 2010). Teachers discussed the importance of drawing from the expertise of community members to include local knowledge in curriculum but often struggled to find out who in the community had expertise and how to invite them into the classroom.

There is value in building connections with community members

As discussed in the section on curriculum, all of the teachers interviewed demonstrated a desire to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing in the curriculum by ensuring opportunities for community members to be involved both in classroom and field trip experiences. Building strong relationships with community members was seen as important to facilitate this process. After having lived in the community for several years and building strong relationships with community members, Diane highlighted a success story that involved increased community input at the secondary level where community members, as a result of working with teaching staff, had been empowered to lead the organization of learning opportunities for the students at the school.

For a couple of years we worked together on putting together a youth conference. Members of the community wanted to lead it together. They had people to present, they figured out a program and so this year when it came time, they just did it because they had already had that past experience of doing it together (Diane, Interview).

Diane explained that she felt developing the relationship and working with community members, listening to what they wanted students to learn, was what allowed the success of this community youth conference.

Warming into the community

A common theme that came up during both the interviews and focus group session was that teachers often struggled to find out who in the community had expertise in different areas that could be utilized in classrooms. The majority of teachers interviewed expressed the feeling that it took time to find out who they could talk to in order to find out about local knowledge. Karen expressed that although community input was valuable in the classroom, connecting and building relationships were necessary to utilize these resources:

If you really want to the community can have a lot of impact, but it takes time to find out who those people are and what resources they have (Interview).

Teachers also felt that in most cases, they had to initiate contact and approach community members and ask for them to share knowledge in the classroom.

Members of the community did not suggest people who had expertise in different areas as valuable resources. Lisa felt that this was an area in which teachers new to the community could be supported:

Community members are not coming to you unless asked. So it would be nice if there were structures and supports in place for new teachers to warm into the community, to find someone who could be their contact person (Interview).

All of the participants expressed that it was difficult, particularly for new teachers to the community because it “takes a long time to establish those connections” (Shirley, Interview) and make contacts as they felt people were often not forthcoming about expertise they were able to share in the classroom. Karen suggested that this might be due to cultural differences:

In many of the communities I've taught in there is a traditional value that you must share the knowledge that you have, but there is also a traditional value that you are not allowed to brag about the knowledge that you have. So you can't tell anyone that you have this special knowledge about weaving, or finding roots, or storytelling or whatever. You aren't allowed to tell anyone that you possess this talent but if they find out some other way, you are obligated to share it (Interview).

Karen expressed that she had “found it was often very frustrating to get to know who had the knowledge” in the community that could be shared in the classroom. She suggested that Aboriginal members on staff and parents could be valuable support for new teachers by helping them to find a network of contacts:

If you're community member working on staff or with a child in the class, it would be very helpful if you say 'hey I know lots of people who have valuable skills and any time you want to know just ask me' (Interview).

It was suggested by Grace, Sarah, Lisa, Rachel, Karen, and Diane that teachers could be supported by communities and school districts working collaboratively to “put together a list of people” that could be contacted to share local knowledge in classrooms (Grace, Interview). Grace expressed, as a teacher new to the community, that she had felt that “within the community that is sort of hidden knowledge,” (Grace, Interview).

In some cases, younger teachers expressed anxiety about approaching community members to come to their classrooms because they were worried about asking in an inappropriate way. Lisa shared:

I'm not always sure what I shouldn't say or should be asking for (Focus group).

Rachel expressed that she “worried at the beginning of the year about stepping on toes” and that she didn’t “know who to ask or how to ask” community members to share their knowledge in her classroom (Interview). She explained that she felt that she would have benefited from some training around protocol in Aboriginal communities:

I wish that there was more education, more resources around how to ask for help because I do feel like at the beginning of the year, I was really nervous about asking people to come in and speak to my class because I didn’t really know who to ask and because in university, I was told that I needed to have tobacco or sweet grass or something to trade you know [laugh] (Interview).

Diane, having taught and lived in Riverview for many years explained that understanding protocol in Aboriginal communities was an important part of asking community members to share knowledge in classrooms. Like Rachel, she expressed that teachers new to the community needed to be supported in making these connections and learning about the protocol around asking for community involvement:

Teaching anything starts with thinking about who is in the community that would support this, that we could work with, who will allow you to work with them, who has permission to share their knowledge. You have to go through First Nations protocol and processes first. If you are a new teacher, you don’t know who all these people are and what they do or how they can help you (Interview).

This suggests that there is a need to support White teachers working in Aboriginal communities in finding community resource people to share local knowledge with students and learning local protocol including appropriate ways of inviting and

thanking community members for supporting the learning of their students.

Becoming a member of the community

It was felt by many of the participants that it was important, as teachers in the community, to also become members of the community in which they taught. Lisa spoke about how it was important for teachers to attend community events to build relationships with members of the community. “I think that going to community events and making outreach that way is really important,” (Lisa, Interview). Rachel, after having completed her first year of teaching in the community, felt that the relationships she had developed with community members over her first year would help her to organize learning opportunities for her students in the future:

Now that I have made relationships in the community and I’ll be able to reach out to those people again and have them come into my classroom in future years and help me teach that content by handing things over to them, letting them teach it, letting them share their wealth of knowledge (Rachel, Focus group).

All of the teachers who participated in this study expressed that time was not the only important factor in developing relationships with students but community members as well. Many felt that it was important to demonstrate that their commitment to the students and community went beyond their job:

I think another way to make the connections is to stick around and to show the community that you are invested in them and the students and you do care about them and it’s not just a pay check to you (Karen, Interview).

Grace noted that her relationships with community members had changed as the year had progressed and after expressing interest in remaining in the community to teach:

I would say that I have had parents warm up to me as I've stayed longer, as I've been here the full year and I've definitely had parents say 'well, do you like it here? Are you going to leave?' In that situation, I think that they are trying to gauge how committed I am to their community and to their children (Grace, Interview).

Unlike the participants in Harper's (2000b) study who viewed themselves as transient, many of the participants expressed the desire to be viewed as members of the community. Time put in to building relationships was seen as important. In both interviews and the focus group session, the participants expressed frustration over the high turnover of teachers that were often not the choice of teachers themselves as job security was uncertain.

From both critical theory and post-colonial perspectives, it is necessary for White teachers working with Aboriginal students to engage in an authentic dialogue with both parents and community members about who should set goals and make the decisions about the direction of education for their children (Cummins, 1996; Delpit, 1988; Harper, 2000a; Harris, 2006; Ladson-Billing & Tate, 2009). Teachers felt that relationships with the community members were important in order to utilize their knowledge and expertise. Barriers to utilizing these resources included a struggle to find out who in the community had expertise in particular areas and the need to learn about protocols; specifically, how to invite Elders and Community members into the classroom and how to

thank them appropriately. Many of the participants viewed themselves as members of the community and expressed the desire to remain teaching in Riverview.

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Implications

It is essential for White teachers to act as allies with Aboriginal teachers, students and communities towards the establishment of a public education system that reflects the unique contributions of Aboriginal people and challenges both individual and institutional forms of racism that continue to marginalize Aboriginal students. A lack of diversity within the teaching populations means that most students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal are taught by White teachers, who make up the majority of the teaching population (BCTF, 2001). The process of decolonization within schools requires White teachers, who were educated in a Eurocentric system, to understand how the influence of our colonial history continues to impact classroom practices and to recognize their biases so that their worldview is not seen entirely through their “racial, cultural and class-based lenses” (Michie, 2007, p. 6). Educators need to work together to transform our system to better suit the needs of Aboriginal students.

The purpose of this study was to explore the question of how White teachers working in Aboriginal communities describe their experiences and perceptions of their role, including their awareness of their own race and its impact in the classroom, who makes decisions about the content that is taught through the curriculum, how they view Aboriginal learners, and how parents and community members are involved in the education of their children. Such understanding is necessary in order to support White teachers to work as allies within their communities; however, there is little information to draw from in

order to provide this support. Previous studies do not explore the experiences or perceptions of White teachers working with Aboriginal students in the context of Southern British Columbia. In this Chapter, I will synthesize the empirical findings of this study to answer the research questions and highlight the findings not reported by other studies. The synthesis of these findings will be organized into the six main themes identified in Chapter 4. Next, the limitations of the study will be outlined. I will discuss the implications the findings of this study may have on policy, practice, and teacher education; and, finally, suggestions for further research will be made.

Preparation for teaching in Aboriginal communities in rural B.C.

The findings of this study indicate that when asked about their experiences, White teachers working in Aboriginal communities feel unprepared for their role. Similar to Harper's (2000a) study of White women teaching in the North, even the teachers who had taken courses in Aboriginal education felt they did not receive enough preparation. The participants in this study identified that they came to the community without an understanding of the unique culture and language of the Nlaka'pamux people, the legacy that the residential school had in Riverview, or an awareness of protocols to invite community members into their classrooms. Because many teachers come to teach in Aboriginal communities without an awareness of the context in which they will be working it is important to ensure that teacher preparation includes discussions and opportunities to gain practicum experience in rural contexts with high proportions of Aboriginal

students. Induction programs may also help to support White teachers to feel better prepared for the specific contexts in which they find themselves working.

Feeling as though they were “thrown” into situations, teachers new to the community expressed the desire to have a mentorship program in order to support their first years of teaching. The teachers who had lived in Riverview also expressed they felt there was a need to better support teachers new to the community. The teachers in both this study and Harper’s (2000a) study of White Women teaching in the north appear to agree that training and induction needs to be relevant to the specific context of the community in which they teach. As Aboriginal cultures, traditions and histories vary so greatly from region to region across British Columbia, this is an area that perhaps is best addressed at the local level. Teachers need to have an understanding of the cultural background of their students and community and are better able to include relevant Indigenous ways of knowing into their classroom curriculums in an authentic manner so their students see their own culture mirrored in what they learn in school.

The two teachers who were newest to the community noted that conversations about race and its impact in the classroom had not happened during their university training. Schick and St. Denis (2005) argue that it is necessary for teachers to acknowledge the role race plays in the classroom in order to promote equity for Aboriginal students and combat the myths that maintain White privilege in the school system. Preparation to work in Aboriginal communities should therefore include the critical examination of White privilege. Participant responses about their own teaching preparation and their understanding of the

impact of race in the classroom indicate that this is an area that needs to be addressed in both in-service and pre-service training for teachers. Participant understanding of race is explored in more detail in the following section.

Perception of the impact of race in the classroom

This study sought to find out what awareness teachers had of race and its impact in the classroom. The findings show that teachers' views on the impact of race in the classroom varied greatly; some subscribed to a colour blind perspective, feeling that racial differences should not be highlighted. One teacher, who expressed that she "did not feel white," (Sarah, Focus Group) demonstrated a lack of awareness of her own racial identity similar to the participants in Picower's (2009) study. Others, on the other hand, felt that race had a significant impact in the classroom and expressed that it was necessary to be aware of personal biases and worldviews as they impact what is taught and what is not taught within classrooms. Age and number of years teaching did not appear to be a factor.

Solomon et al. (2005), found that significant numbers of White pre-service teachers subscribe to the meritocratic view of education where they felt that anyone who worked hard, regardless of racial background, would be able to overcome obstacles in their way. The authors argue that notions of fairness are part of the social fabric of Canadian discourse while there are failures to examine policies that are intend to oppress minority groups and more specifically Aboriginal people. In contrast to the findings of Solomon et al. (2005), only one

of the teachers in this study stated that students had the same opportunities regardless of race. It is interesting that all of the participants in this study spoke of the negative impact of residential school on Aboriginal people. Poverty in the community and not understanding the culture of school were also mentioned as challenges faced by Aboriginal learners. The majority of teachers in this study recognized obstacles confronting their students and did appear to hold the view that success in school was solely dependent on hard work.

Schick and St. Denis (2005) contend that cultural difference is a common code for racial difference and Johnson (2002) noted that issues of race became conflated with culture during interviews. Other empirical studies did not mention whether or not participants used the words race and culture interchangeably as they did in this study; however, it was not clear whether or not the participants clearly understood how culture and race differed or if they used the word culture because they felt uncomfortable talking about race. This should be explored further in future studies.

Making decisions about what is taught in the classroom

The question of who makes the decision in classrooms about the content that is taught through curriculum was investigated during both the focus group session and the individual interviews. The teachers in this study demonstrated a commitment to integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into their curricula, but felt that decisions about what was taught was up to them as teachers. They acknowledged their responsibility to follow the curriculum as mandated by the

Ministry of Education but saw a great deal of flexibility in the curriculum.

Although community members were viewed as important resources within the classroom, the decision to involve them was left to individual teachers. Policy that has been set at the provincial level has ensured that teachers have professional autonomy and the right to make decisions about what is taught in their classrooms. According to the British Columbia Teachers Federation statement of professional rights and autonomy, teachers have “primary control in planning and delivering curriculum” (BC Teachers Federation, 2007).

Similar to the teachers in this study, the participants in Harper’s (2000a) study of White teachers working in Northern Aboriginal communities, felt there was a great deal of professional autonomy in teaching. Harper (2000a) contends that this is inappropriate because teachers should be working collaboratively to develop community based curriculum and pedagogies instead of viewing their role as autonomous. This view is also consistent with Delpit (1988), who argues that an appropriate education can only be devised in consultation with adults who share their culture and race of the students and Hatcher and Bartlet (2010) who write about the importance of incorporating traditional knowledge in the classroom in consultation with Elders. It is difficult to honour efforts at self-determination and involve community members in decisions about curriculum when teachers have “primary control” of what is taught in classrooms (BCTF, 2007). In order to move forward and begin to engage in an authentic dialogue about curriculum with Aboriginal communities, these conversations perhaps need to take place at the provincial policy level.

Unlike Orlowski's (2008) study of social studies teachers in British Columbia, a few of the participants in this study spoke about the political nature of curriculum and its decolonizing possibilities. One teacher spoke about the important role including Aboriginal content in curriculum for non-Aboriginal students as it had the potential to help them gain greater understanding of issues faced by Aboriginal people. Another participant was very conscious of the hidden curriculum and the fact that all too often students learn subtle messages by what is taught or by what they see around them. In order for White teachers to play a role in the process of decolonization, it is necessary to understand the political nature of what is taught. Similar to McCreary's (2011) study of White teachers working in the prairies, some of the participants were unaware of how anti-racist initiatives could help create a more inclusive school culture. Because some teachers do have an understanding of the decolonizing possibilities curriculum holds, mentorship programs that include professional conversations about the hidden curriculum and decolonization as it relates to what is taught may be a useful way to increase understanding among others.

The teachers who took part in this study demonstrated a commitment to incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum, placing them as White teachers in the roles of learner in their classrooms. They expressed the desire to do this in authentic way with many of them feeling "ill equipped" to do so (Lisa, Interview). In Berger and Ross' (2006) study of White teachers in the Canadian north, it was noted that teachers felt that curriculum resources were not adequate in the context in which they were teaching and that there was a need to

adapt those resources to work in the context in which they were teaching. Like the participants in Roots (2010) study, some of the teachers in Riverview felt anxious about teaching Indigenous ways of knowing in an authentic and respectful way. Understanding the extent to which White teachers worry in other communities about appropriately including Indigenous understandings into the curriculum would be an area to research further. This is also an area where it is necessary to support White teachers new to Aboriginal communities at the local level through mentorship programs and by supporting teachers in connecting with Elders. It may also be useful for boards of education, principals and community leaders to support a dialogue between teachers and community members about appropriately including Indigenous ways of knowing into curriculum.

Teacher perceptions of Aboriginal learners

Teachers who participated in this study were asked to describe the students they taught. The findings show that they felt building strong relationships with their students helped to promote student engagement at the classroom level and contributed to their professional success. It was felt that these types of relationships took time to develop and often the high turnover of teaching staff in Riverview made it difficult for students to form these relationships with teachers. The transient role of the teacher tourist is critiqued by Harper (2000b, 2004) who claims that some teachers assume the role of White traveler and adventurer instead of community member with no long term commitment to the community. In contrast to Harper's (2000b, 2004) construct of the teacher tourist, the majority

of teachers who took part in this study talked about the importance of remaining in the community and wished to be seen by both students and community members as invested in Riverview. High teacher turnover was attributed to declining enrollment and issues around union seniority that prevented teachers from attaining permanent positions. It may be useful for school boards to consider ways of retaining teachers who would like to make long term commitments to working in rural communities so that strong relationships between students and community members can be cultivated.

Secondly, this study found that many teachers felt there were several barriers facing the students they taught, suggesting that perhaps they do engage in a deficit construction of Aboriginal learners. It is interesting, however, that many of the teachers criticized the school system as an underlying factor for some of these challenges. It was felt that some students have difficulty succeeding because they do not understand the culture of the school environment. Delpit (1988) argues that there is a “culture of power” and that it is important to explicitly teach students the codes to this “culture of power”. It appears that many of the teachers were aware of some of the barriers that their students faced in the school environment and it may be useful to provide opportunities for teachers, administrators and community members engage in a dialogue about 1) developing strategies to support students in learning what is needed to succeed within the system and 2) what within the system of school should be changed in order to accommodate students and best meet their needs.

Developing relationships with parents of Aboriginal students

This study posed the question of the extent to which teachers were able to involve parents in the education of their children. The findings show that this varied depending on the individual teacher; however, even the teachers who felt that they had been able to make positive connections with parents, expressed the desire to see them in the school more often. The majority of the teachers pointed to the negative experiences of residential schooling in Riverview as a barrier for many parents. The teachers felt that these effects were felt by whole families; not only the community members who had attended the residential school. Unlike the teachers interviewed in Berger and Ross' (2006) study, the teachers interviewed in Riverview identified colonial influences that created barriers to parental involvement. It was felt that teachers new to the community should understand the effects of residential school as it directly impacted the community as a whole. This perhaps could be addressed through local induction programs and mentorship programs for new teachers.

Building connections with community members

Finally, this study explored the extent to which White teachers were able to involve community members and what role community should play within the school. Findings show that relationships with community members were seen as essential to the majority of participants in this study. Remaining in the community for a period of time and attending community events were important to strengthening these connections. Feeling that they did not have the background

to teach local Indigenous ways of knowing in an authentic manner, community members were seen as valuable resources in the classroom context. The majority of teachers did express that it was often difficult, especially for teachers new to the community, to find out who in the community had specific knowledge they were willing to share. These teachers felt that they were placed in the position where they had to continually approach both community members and Aboriginal Student Support Workers at the school level in order to utilize these resources. Teachers who were new to the community also expressed apprehension when it came to inviting members of the community to their classrooms because they were unsure about protocols around inviting and thanking community members. It would be useful to have discussions at the school board level and the community level in developing structures to support teachers to finding community members who are able to share local knowledge, culture and language in the school. There also needs to be support for teachers to learn local protocols so that they are confident that they can invite Elders and thank them appropriately for sharing their knowledge.

Limitations of the study

This is a qualitative study with a small sample of participants drawn from one community, in the tradition of case study research. Participants were only interviewed once and took part in one focus group and therefore, the data collected reflects a moment in time. With small numbers, generalizations about age can be difficult to make. For example the views of the older teacher in the study who felt that race played a significant role in the classroom may be due to

life experiences rather than age. In addition to the limited scope of this study in terms of numbers of participants, it is also important to note that views expressed by participants may not reflect the views of the wider non-Aboriginal teaching population. The teachers who worked in Riverview at the time of the study were all women. It would be interesting to understand how gender might influence participant perspectives as this was not something that came up in either the interviews or the focus group session. It is also important to note that the anecdotal nature of participant responses may be biased and as a result may not represent the “true nature of the situation” (Court, 2003).

Yin (2009) points out that when looking at a single case study, it is not possible to generalize the data to other populations. Instead, it is necessary to generalize the data to theoretical propositions which, for this study, were identified through an extensive literature review (Yin, 2009). Making generalizations from case study research can be problematic (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2001). The community and participants in this study are unique. Because the sample of teachers was small and taken only from one community, there is no way to establish whether or not the views of the participants are representative of White teachers working in different Aboriginal communities across British Columbia. What this study does do, however, is highlight areas where teachers can be supported to work as allies alongside community members towards a more equitable system for Aboriginal students. Further studies with a larger sample representing several communities are necessary in order to make generalizations.

Miller (2004) contends that it is important to for non-Aboriginal researchers involved with research in Aboriginal communities to be concerned about power differentials. There was not a significant power differential within this research because I shared a similar point of entry as the participants. It was the goal of this research to consider how perspectives of White teachers may influence their practice and what perceptions may need to be challenge in order to work towards decolonization within the context of education. When engaging in this work, it is also important to consider the views of both Aboriginal students and community members. In her Participatory Action Research study, McIntyre (1997) addresses the issue of “White on White research”. Although “White people talking about racism is a necessity”, questions are raised about how far we can go in our own critique in the absence of the voices of both our Aboriginal students and members of the larger community (McIntyre, 1997, p.140). In order to get a more complete picture of the issues and tensions that arise from White teachers teaching in Aboriginal communities, it is necessary for this dialogue to be extended to include Aboriginal students, their parents and members of the community. This would be an area to be addressed in further research.

Implications for policy

Currently the British Columbia Teachers Collective Agreement ensures that teachers have “primary control” over the decisions about what is taught within their classrooms which means that the extent to which Aboriginal communities are involved in these decision and Indigenous ways of knowing are included in individual classrooms is highly dependent on the individual teachers

(BC Teachers Federation, 2007). In order to ensure that collaboration takes place between teachers and communities to develop curriculum, it may be helpful to have discussions about implications of professional autonomy to make changes at the provincial policy level.

The participants in this study discussed the importance of building relationships with their students and community members. Although some teachers may wish to remain working in a community for a period of time, this is not always possible as positions are cut due to declining enrollment and union seniority and so this means that teachers can be transferred from other communities resulting in a high teacher turn over. It would be useful for school boards to look at ways of retaining teachers who wish to make long term commitments to communities.

Implications for education

According to McIntyre (1997), it is necessary to engage White educators in self-reflection and discussions about whiteness in order to uncover how they are enacted within education systems to begin to develop antiracist pedagogies that combat inequity and oppression. It did not appear that discussions about anti-racist pedagogies or the examination of White privilege took place at the university for the participants of this study, including the two teachers who had just recently graduated from teacher education programs in B.C.

Opportunities for critical reflection need to be provided so that teachers can gain a greater understanding of how issues of power can be enacted within the

classroom context. Such an understanding can influence teaching practices including choice of curriculum materials, student expectations and assessment techniques employed in classrooms, it is important to provide opportunities for both pre-service and in-service White teachers through both teacher education and professional development programs. The need for White teachers to examine White privilege applies to teachers working with Aboriginal students as well as those who work with in different contexts with populations that belong to racial minorities other than Aboriginal as well as those teachers who work with predominately White students.

The majority of the participants in this study spoke about feeling unprepared to teach in the context of a rural community with primarily Aboriginal students. It would be useful for teacher preparation to include opportunities to gain experience in rural contexts with high proportions of Aboriginal students.

Implications for practice

Induction and mentorship at the local level may help to address training needs for new teachers that are specific to the local context. This learning agenda should include an understanding of the unique culture of the local Aboriginal people, and an awareness of local history and its impact on the community especially in communities where the effects of residential schools are still strongly felt. Teachers also need to learn local protocols to invite community members into their classrooms. Induction and mentorship programs could also include supporting teachers in learning how to appropriately include Indigenous ways of

knowing into their classrooms. In the development of such induction and mentorship programs, it would be important to involve both community members and Elders. It would also be beneficial for school administrators, boards of education, and Aboriginal communities to discuss ways of supporting teachers in finding community members who are able to come to classrooms to share local Indigenous understandings. It may be useful to compile a list of local people who have expertise to share.

Implications for further research

Several research opportunities could be developed from this study. To get a more complete picture of the issues and tensions that arise from White teachers teaching in Aboriginal communities, it would be useful to extend the scope of this study to include other communities. Larger numbers of participants would enable generalizations about how White teachers working in Aboriginal communities describe their experiences and perceptions of their role. This study included individual interviews and a focus group session with the participants. It would be useful to pair future studies in different communities with observations of participants teaching as this may help get a better picture of the true situation and whether or not views expressed by participants are consistent with their practices. It would also be useful to extend these discussions to include Aboriginal students, their parents and members of the community.

Due to high teacher turnover, the demographics of teachers working in Riverview has changed since the interviews took place with several men now

working as teachers at both elementary and secondary levels. It would be interesting to replicate this study in the same community, asking the question of how gender may influence teacher awareness of the impact of race in the classroom, how decisions are made about the content that is taught through the curriculum, how teachers view Aboriginal learners, and how they involve parents and community members.

Conclusion – We need to work on ourselves and we need to work together

Freire (1970) reminds us that we need to work together to culturally confront systems that oppress others. For White teachers employed in rural Aboriginal communities, this means working alongside Aboriginal colleagues, students, and community members towards decolonizing our schools. Our colonial history has taught us that this is not work we can, nor should do alone. In order to begin to engage in this process, it is necessary for White teachers to engage in critical self-reflection, acknowledging how myths are constructed to maintain power and privilege. This study found that while some teachers do have an understanding of the impact of race in the classroom, others still maintain ‘colour-blind’ perspectives. These perspectives need to be challenged in order for us to move forward.

Aboriginal students need to see their culture and language reflected in the curriculum, but at the same time learn the codes of the “culture of power” (Delpit, 1988). A balanced approach to curriculum where both Indigenous ways of

knowing and Western perspectives are taught without one having hegemony over another benefits both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Incorporating Indigenous worldviews in an authentic manner, however, presents challenges for White teachers, who need to become learners in their own classrooms, relying on community members as resources. The participants in this study expressed that they were anxious about doing this in a respectful and authentic way. Although the teachers in this study expressed the desire to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing into their classrooms, they also expressed that they felt decisions about what was taught in their classrooms was largely left up to them. It is important to explore ways of sharing these decisions with both parents and community members.

The relationships between students and their teachers are important determinants of student success. It is important for these relationships to be collaborative with teachers viewing their students as co-creators of knowledge in the classroom context. Although the participants in this study did identify a number of challenges faced by their students, it is important to reject a deficit discourse and recognize the strengths Aboriginal students bring with them. These are strengths that teachers can draw on to support student success.

It is important for White teachers who wish to be allies in the decolonizing process to foster relationships with both parents and community members. The participants in this study expressed that although they wished to invite community members to share local knowledge in their classrooms, they struggled to find these community members. It is perhaps important for Aboriginal communities to

work together with schools in order to facilitate this process. Unlike the participants in Harper's (2000a) study who viewed themselves as transient, the teachers interviewed expressed a desire to stay within the community but were frustrated because issues with union seniority meant that they were not always able to remain in their positions. Time is an important factor for teachers to develop strong relationships with members in the community. It is through these relationships that deep learning occurs that enables White teachers to work as allies in the process of decolonization.

References

- Anglas Grande, S. (2009). American Indian geographies of identify and power: At the crossroads of Indigena and Mestizaje. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (2nd ed., pp. 183-208). New York: Routledge.
- Anglican Church of Canada. (n.d.). Retrieved Feb, 5, 2013 from <http://www.anglican.ca/relationships/trc/histories/st-georges-school-lytton>.
- Aronson, J. (2004). The threat of stereotype. *Educational Leadership*, 62(3), 14-19.
- Ashton Warner, S. (1963). *Teacher*. New York: Simon and Shuster.
- Atleo, M & Fitznor, L. (2010). Aboriginal educators discuss recognizing, reclaiming, and revitalizing their multi-competences in heritage/English language use. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 32, 13-34.
- Bartolome, L. (2009). Beyond the methods fetish: Toward a humanizing pedagogy. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (2nd ed., pp. 338-355). New York: Routledge.
- Battiste, M. (2010). Nourishing the learning spirit: Living our way to new thinking. *Education Canada*, 50(1), 14-18.
- Battiste, M. (2005). You can't be the global doctor if you're the colonial disease. In P. Tripp & L. Muzzin (Eds.), *Teaching as activism* (pp. 121-133). Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press.
- Berger, P & Ross, J. (2006) The predictable influences of culture clash, current practice, and colonialism on punctuality, attendance, and achievement in Nunavut schools. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 29(2), 182-205.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2012). *Aboriginal report 2007/08 – 2011/12: How are we doing?* Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/ab_hawd/Public.pdf.
- British Columbia Teachers Federation. (2012). *Aboriginal education program*. Retrieved from <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/public/AboutUs/ServicesHandbook/1AbEdProgram.pdf>.
- British Columbia Teacher's Federation. (2007). *BCTF statement of professional rights and autonomy*. Retrieved from <http://bctf.ca/AdvocacyAndAction.aspx?id=14384>.

- British Columbia Teachers' Federation. (2001). *Beyond words: creating racism-free schools for Aboriginal learners*. Retrieved from [http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Issues/Aboriginal_Education/Beyond_Words/BeyondWords\(1\).pdf](http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Issues/Aboriginal_Education/Beyond_Words/BeyondWords(1).pdf).
- Court, D. (2003). Ethnography and case study: a comparative analysis. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*. Retrieved April 29, 2013 from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Ethnography+and+case+study%3A+a+comparative+analysis.-a0111848865>.
- Cummins, J. (1996). Negotiating identities in the classroom and society. *Multicultural Teaching*, 15(1), 7-11.
- Dei, G. (2006). Antiracist education – moving yet standing still. *Directions*, 3(1), 6-9.
- Delpit, L. (1988). The silenced dialogue: Power and pedagogy in teaching other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58 (3), 280-98.
- Egbo, B. (2009). *Teaching for diversity in Canadian schools*. Toronto: Pearson Canada.
- First Nations Education Steering Committee. (n.d.) *English 10, 11, and 12 First Peoples*. Retrieved from [http://www.fnesc.ca/efp/Attachments/brochure_efp_10_11_12\(2010Mar11\).pdf](http://www.fnesc.ca/efp/Attachments/brochure_efp_10_11_12(2010Mar11).pdf).
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Fuzessy, C. (2003). An investigation of teachers' role definitions in Nunavik. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 27(2), 195-207.
- Gall, M, Gall, J, & Borg, W. (2007). *Educational research* (8th ed.) Pearson Education: New York.
- Goulet, L. (2001). Two teachers of Aboriginal students: Effective practice in socio-historical realities. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25, 68-82.
- Government of Canada. (1982). *The Constitution Act 1982*. Retrieved from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-16.html#h-52>.

- Harper, H. (2000a). There is no way to prepare for this: Teaching in First Nations schools in Northern Ontario - Issues and concerns. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 24(2) 144-157.
- Harper, H. (2000b). White women teaching in the North: Problematic identity on the shores of the Hudson's Bay. In N. Rodriguez & L. Villaverde (Eds.), *Dismantling White privilege: Pedagogy, politics, and Whiteness*, (pp.127-143). New York: Peter Lang.
- Harper, H. (2002). When the big snow melts: White women teaching in Canada's north. In C. Levine-Rasky (Ed), *Working through whiteness: International perspectives*, (pp. 269-288), Albany: State University Press.
- Harper, H. (2004). Nomads, pilgrims, tourists: Women teachers in the Canadian north. *Gender and Education*, 16(2), 209-224.
- Harris, S. (1990). *Two-way Aboriginal schooling: Education and cultural survival*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press
- Hatcher, A and Bartlett, C. (2010). Two eyed seeing: Building cultural bridges for Aboriginal students. *Canadian Teacher Magazine*, 6(5), 14-17.
- Haviland, V. (2008). "Things get glossed over": Rearticulating the silencing power of Whiteness in education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(1), 40-54.
- The Health Communication Unit. (2002). *Using focus groups*. University of Toronto. Retrieved from http://www.thcu.ca/infoandresources/publications/Focus_Groups_Master_Wkbk_Complete_v2_content_06.30.00_format_aug03.pdf.
- Hodkinson, P., & Hodkinson, H. (2001). The strengths and limitations of case study research. In *Learning and Skills Development Agency conference at Cambridge* (pp. 5-7). Retrieved April 29, 2013 from http://scholar.googleusercontent.com/scholar?q=cache:3bfq-qzzx5MJ:scholar.google.com/+the+strengths+and+limitations+of+case+study+research&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5&as_vis=1.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Howard, G. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hyland, N. (2009). One White teacher's struggle for culturally relevant pedagogy: The problem of the community. *New Educator*, 5(2), 95-112.

- Ikegulu, T. (2009). Economically disadvantaged student failure: The role of non-minority teachers of elementary school students. *Online submission*, Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (1996). *Royal Commission report on Aboriginal Peoples*. Retrieved Jan 3, 2013 from <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ap/rrc-eng.asp>.
- Johnson, L. (2002). "My eyes have been opened": White teachers and racial awareness. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(2), 153-67.
- Kumashiro, K. (2002). Against repetition: Addressing resistance to anti-oppressive change in the practices of learning, teaching, supervising and researching. *Harvard Educational Review*, 72(1), 67-92.
- Ladson-Billings, G & Tate, W. (2009). Toward a critical race theory of education. In A. Darder, M. Baltodano, & R. Torres (Eds.), *The critical pedagogy reader* (2nd ed., pp. 167-182). New York: Routledge.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). "Yes, but how do we do it?" Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. In J. Lansman & C. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers / diverse classrooms*. (pp.33-46). Sterling: Stylus Publishing
- Landsman, J. (2006). Being White. In J. Lansman & C. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers / diverse Classrooms*. (p.11-24). Sterling: Stylus Publishing
- Loring, K. (2009). *Where the blood mixes*. Vancouver: Talon Books.
- Mason, R. (2008). Conflicts and lessons in First Nations secondary education: An analysis of BC First Nations Studies. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 31(2), 130-153.
- Mazzei, L. (2008). Silence speaks: Whiteness revealed in the absence of voice. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies*, 24(5), 1125-1136.
- McCreary, T. (2011). Colour-blind: Discursive repertoires teachers use to story racism and Aboriginality in urban prairie schools. *Brock Education*, 21(1), 16-33.
- McIntosh, P. (1990). White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack. *Independent School*, 49(2), 31-36.
- McIntyre, A. (1997). *Making meaning of Whiteness*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

- Michie, G. (2007). Seeing, hearing, and talking race: Lessons for White teachers from four teachers of color. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 9(1), 3-9.
- Miller, J.W. (2004). *Assessing First Nations language proficiency*. (Doctoral Thesis, University of British Columbia). Retrieved from <https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/17234>.
- Neegan, E. (2005). Excuse me: who are the first peoples of Canada? A historical analysis of Aboriginal education in Canada then and now. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 9(1), 3-15.
- Nieto, S. (2006a). Solidarity, courage and heart: What teacher educators can learn from a new generation of teachers. *Intercultural Education*, 17(5), 457-473.
- Nieto, S. (2006b). Teaching as political work: Courageous and caring teachers. *Online submission*, Retrieved from ERIC database.
- Norquay, N. (1993). The other side of difference: memory-work in the mainstream. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 6(3), 241-251.
- Orlowski, P. (2008). That would certainly be spoiling them: Liberal discourses of social studies teachers and concerns about Aboriginal students. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 32(2), 110-129.
- Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined Whiteness of teaching: How White teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 197-215.
- Reason, R. D., Roosa Millar, E. A., & Scales, T.C. (2005). Toward a model of racial justice ally development in college. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 530-546.
- Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Robertson, H (2007). Decolonizing schools. *Our Schools, Our Selves*, 16(4), 191-195.
- Root, E. (2010). This land is our land? This land is your land: The decolonizing journeys of White outdoor environmental educators. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 15, 103-119.
- Ryan, J., Pollock, K., & Antonelli, F. (2009). Teacher diversity in Canada: Leaky pipelines, bottlenecks, and glass ceilings. *Canadian Journal of Education*,

32(3), 591-617.

- Schick, C & St. Denis, V. (2005). Troubling national discourses in anti-racist curricular planning. *Canadian Journal of Education*, (28)3, 295-317.
- Solomon, P., Portelli, J., Daniel, B., & Campbell, A. (2005). The discourse of denial: How White teacher candidates construct race, racism and "White privilege". *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(2), 147-169.
- St. Denis, V. (2010). Aboriginal teachers face racism, need allies. *Our Schools, Our Selves*, 20(1), 129-131.
- St. Denis, V. (2011). Silencing Aboriginal curricular content and perspectives through multiculturalism: "There are other children here". *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 33(4), 306-317.
- St. Denis, V. (2007). Aboriginal education with anti-racist education: Building alliances across cultural and racial identity politics. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30(4), 1068-1092.
- Starnes, B. (2006). What we don't know "can" hurt them: White teachers, Indian children. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(5), 384-392.
- Stewart, C. (2006). Aboriginal education survey. *Teacher Newsmagazine*, 18(5), Retrieved From <http://bctf.ca/publications/NewsmagArticle.aspx?id=7366>.
- Thira, D. (2005) Beyond the four waves of Colonization. *Online submission*, retrieved Dec. 27, 2012 from <http://edocs.lib.sfu.ca/projects/chodarr/documents/chodarr0255.pdf>.
- Wihak, C. (2004). The meaning of being White in Canada: A personal narrative. *TESL Canada Journal*, 21(2), 110-115.
- Wiltse, L. (2011). "But my students all speak English": Ethical research issues of Aboriginal English. *TESL Canada Journal*, 28(5), 53-71.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Thompson Rivers University Ethics Committee Certificate of Approval



Thompson Rivers University Ethics Committee
For Research and Other Studies Involving Human Subjects

Certificate of Approval

<small>PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR</small> Bramma O'Connor	<small>DEPARTMENT</small> <i>Psychology</i>	<small>NUMBER</small> 10-11-43
<small>INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT</small> TRU		
<small>CO RESEARCHER(S)</small> Wendy Hulko		
<small>SPONSORING AGENCIES</small> 		
<small>TITLE</small> An Examination of the Role of White Teachers Working in Aboriginal Communities.		
<small>APPROVAL DATE</small> May 31, 2011	<small>TERM (YEARS)</small> 1	<small>AMENDED</small>
<small>SUBSEQUENT CERTIFICATE(S) ISSUED</small> 		
<small>CERTIFICATION</small> <p style="text-align: center;">The protocol describing the above-named project has been reviewed by the Committee and the experimental procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 50px;">  _____ Chair, Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects </div> <p style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures.</p>		

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development Thompson Rivers University

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH FOR MED THESIS

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study entitled:

An Examination of the Role of White Teachers working in Aboriginal Communities

The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of White teachers working with Aboriginal students in rural communities. By understanding both tensions and successes experienced by teachers, it is hoped that this research may provide a better understanding of some of the ways that teachers can be supported in their roles.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: take part in an individual interview and/or a focus group (small group discussion with other participants) which will be located at [name] Secondary School. Interviews for elementary school teachers will be held at [name] Elementary. Any views expressed in either/both of these sessions will be kept confidential and your identity will be kept private. Neither the school nor the community will be named.

Both individual interviews and focus group sessions will take approximately one hour. Your participation would also involve reading transcripts from sessions you have directly participated in to ensure that your views are accurately represented, which will take no more than 30 minutes of your time.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

*Brenna O'Connor
MEd Student, Thompson Rivers University
at
250-851-6307
Email: boconnor@gw.sd74.bc.ca*

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethical clearance from, the Research Ethics - Human Subjects Committee at Thompson Rivers University and has been approved by School District 74.

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form



Thompson Rivers
University

900 McGill Road
Box 3010
Kamloops, BC
V2C 5N3
Telephone (250) 828-5000

Informed Consent by Subjects to Participate in a Research Project or Experiment

Note: The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains is given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures, risks and benefits involved in this research project or experiment.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, 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 details, feel free to ask at anytime. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I have been asked by Brenna O'Connor, Graduate Student of the Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development of Thompson Rivers University, telephone number 250-455-2328 who is under the supervision of Dr. Wendy Hulko, Associate Professor of the Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development of Thompson Rivers University, telephone number 250-377-6130 to participate in a research project entitled: An Examination of the Role of White Teachers working in Aboriginal Communities which encompasses the following:

The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of White teachers working with Aboriginal students in rural communities. By understanding both tensions and successes experienced by teachers it is hoped that this research may provide a better understanding of ways white teachers can be supported in their roles. This research will consist of an individual interview and a focus group session. The focus group session will involve an interview / discussion with a small group of teachers. It is not necessary for participants to take part in both of these sessions. They can take part in either one or both. Interviews will be held in the counsellor's office at [name of school]. Sessions will be taped and transcribed. Before any analysis, transcripts will be verified with participants who will have the opportunity to make amendments. Time allotted for both the interview and the focus group will be one hour each. Participants will be asked to review transcripts of any sessions they participate in in order to ensure accuracy. Approximately thirty minutes should be allotted to read over these transcripts and make amendments. For the purposes of confidentiality, participants will only view the transcripts from interviews or focus groups they directly participate in. Data will be anonymized and names will not be used in to protect confidentiality of all participants. Following transcription, the audio files will be stored securely on a password protected flash and locked in the file cabinet in the home office of the researcher. No paper copies will be kept and after seven years, all audio files will be erased from the flash drive. The data will be used only for this study. Neither the community nor the participants will be named in the final paper; pseudonyms will be used. Themes discussed during the interviews and focus group session will be analysed and grouped according to themes. This will be shared with the participants for clarification and further input. This research will be used to complete a thesis that is a partial requirement for the completion of

a Masters in Education degree. The final paper will be available in the TRU library and results will be shared with the participants of the study.

My signature on this form indicates that I understand the information regarding this research project, including all procedures and the personal risks involved, and that I voluntarily agree to participate in this project as a subject.

I understand that my identity and any identifying information obtained will be kept confidential.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw my participation in this project at any time without consequence. My involvement or non-involvement in this project is in no way related to my employment contract or to my status as a teacher.

I understand that I may ask any questions or register any complaint I might have about the project with either the chief researcher named above or with Dr. Charles Webber Dean of the Faculty of Human, Social, and Educational Development telephone number, 250-828-5249TRU.

If I have any questions or issues concerning this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, I may also contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects, telephone number, 828-5000 or see the Subject Feedback form.

I have received a copy of this consent form and a Subject Feedback form.

Name: (Please Print) _____

Address: _____

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

.....
I agree to take part in an interview for the study entitled: An examination of the Role of White Teachers Working in Aboriginal Communities.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

I agree to take part in a focus group session that will include a small group of participants.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

I agree to have audio data to be taped and transcribed which will include my responses to questions. Transcripts will not contain any names of participants. This will be used solely for the purpose of this study. Audio files and transcripts will be kept on a password protected flash drive and locked in the home office of the researcher, Brenna O'Connor. The data will be destroyed in seven years through erasing the memory of the flash drive.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D: Subject Feedback Form



**Thompson Rivers
University**

900 McGill Road
Box 3010
Kamloops, BC
V2C 5N3
Telephone (250) 828-5000

Subject Feedback Form

Dear Participant:

The Research Ethics Committee – Human Subjects Committee would like to thank you for participating in this study.

If you would care to comment on the procedures involved you may complete the following form and send it to the Chair, The University Research Ethics Committee on Human Subjects. Completion of this form is optional, and is not a requirement of participation in the project. All information will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

Name of Principal Investigator: Brenna O'Connor MEd Student under the supervision of Dr. Wendy Hulko

Title of Project: An Examination of the Role of White Teachers working in Aboriginal Communities

Department: Faculty of Human, Social and Educational Development

Did you sign an informed Consent Form before participating in the project? _____

Were you given a copy of the Consent Form? _____

Were there significant deviations from the originally stated purpose, procedures and time commitment:

I wish to comment on my involvement in the above project which took place:

_____ (Date) _____ (Place) _____ (Time)

Comments: _____

Is it permissible for the Research Ethics Committee to contact you regarding this form? Yes ☐ No ☐

Completion of this section is optional

Your Name: _____

Address: _____ Telephone: _____

This form should be sent to Chair, Thompson Rivers University, Research Ethics Committee on Human Subjects, P.O. Box 3010, TRU, Kamloops, B.C. V2C 5N3

Appendix E: Interview Guide

Interview Guide (for focus groups and interviews)

Preamble

Introduce the project and the purpose of the interview/focus group. Review confidentiality, anonymity and reporting. Explain that I will take notes and audiotape the session and that they can leave at any time without any negative consequences. Note that I will transcribe the session and write up the notes, make it all anonymous, then give each of them a copy; plus I will send key themes and the finished report.

Questions

1. Tell me about your background in teaching.
 - a) What brought you to the teaching profession?
 - b) Where have you taught?
 - c) How long have you been teaching?
 - d) What brought you to teach in an Aboriginal community?

2. How – as an educator - would you describe the students that you teach?
 - a) What is their age, gender, racial background, etc.?
 - b) How is teaching Aboriginal students different from teaching non-Aboriginal students?
 - c) What challenges do you face teaching Aboriginal students?
 - d) What are some of the barriers or challenges you feel your students are faced with?
 - e) What is the goal of education for your students?

3. What does it mean for you to be a White teacher teaching Aboriginal students?
 - a) What impact, if any do you feel race has in the classroom?
 - b) How would you define racism?
 - c) Give an example of prejudice, racism or discrimination that you've witnessed.
 - d) Do your personal identity / race influence your interactions with students?
 - e) What challenges do you face as a white teacher in an Aboriginal community?

4. Who makes decisions in classrooms about the content that is taught through the curriculum?
 - a) To what extent do the IRPs influence the content of what is taught?
 - b) What input does the community have?
 - c) Does the curriculum adequately represent the contributions and experiences of Aboriginal people? If no, then do you do anything to compensate for this? Give an example.
 - d) What successes or challenges do you face in including Aboriginal content in the curriculum?
 - e) How should distinct languages and cultures be addressed in your school's curriculum?

5. To what extent are you able to involve parents and community members?

- a) What helps or hinders forming strong relationships?
- b) What barriers, if any, do you face?
- c) How could you be supported in order to foster these relationships?
- d) What role should the parents and community have in the school?

6. If you could do anything to support White teachers working in Aboriginal communities, what would you do?

- a) How has your formal teacher preparation prepared you for the realities of teaching in an Aboriginal community?
- a) What knowledge did you have about Aboriginal culture/ histories before beginning teaching in the community?
- b) What have you learned as a result of your experience?
- c) What kinds of support (including professional development) have been afforded to you? What type of further support do you think would be beneficial?
- d) What kind of support would help you as a teacher?

7. Is there anything else you would like to say about your experiences as a White teacher in an Aboriginal community?

Appendix F: Code Book

Theme	Code	Description
Training and Experience	length of time teaching	number of years teachers have been teaching (in the community or other communities)
	teaching experience	comments related to types of teaching experience including different places teachers have taught
	why Riverview	comments about why teachers chose to teach in the community
	why teach	comments regarding decisions to go into the teaching profession
	I wasn't prepared	comments regarding lack of preparation to work in an Aboriginal community both formal and other <i>example: I took a first year history course at university that was like the history of Canada. ...but as far as... and I would say that my knowledge was very general and stereotypical where totem poles and different things that I now realize are very geographically and culturally specific are not really helpful for here.</i>
	mentoring support for teachers	comments that express the desire to have mentoring for teachers new to the community either formal or informal
Race	race has little impact	comments that reflect teachers perception that the race of the teacher has little impact in the classroom including notions of colour blindness
	a child is a child	all children are similar regardless race and comments that relate to all students benefiting from the same teaching <i>example: To me students are just students and I don't know if I really change my teaching practices for a group of students. I set my bar high and have good teaching practices and that's what I go with</i>

Theme	Code	Description
Race continued...	barrier in the classroom	comments suggesting that race is a barrier in the classroom- either to relationships (teacher / student or student / student) or to student success
	different cultural background	comments related to teachers expressing that their cultural background differs from that of their students (these comments exclude race as a difference)
	conveying my values	comments where teachers have expressed concern that they are either explicitly or unintentionally teaching values in the classroom either directly or by omission resulting from their social location (including race)
	power relationship in teaching	comments that show teachers feel there is a power relationship between teachers and student in the classroom resulting from racial differences
	very identifiable	comments that show that teachers feel they stand out as "White" either in the community or in the classroom <i>example: I mean coming into this community was the first time I have ever felt White because prior to living here I have lived in either white communities or I have lived in very multicultural spaces where there was such a mix of people</i>
	experience less racism here	comments that suggest students experience less racism in the community due to lack of diversity of race or culture in the community
	gaining respect	teachers expressing that they feel it is more difficult for White teachers to gain the respect of students negatively impacting on their classroom
Perceptions of students	range of needs	comments that express that teachers feel the student population is diverse and their learning needs are diverse

Theme	Code	Description
Perception of students continued...	strengths	teacher perceptions of strengths students come to school with
	deficits / absences are an issue	teacher comments on how absences negatively impact students or how absences are greater in the community where they teach
	deficits / economic struggles	comments regarding poverty, low socio economic status, lack of employment in the community
	deficits / physical issues	comments regarding physical disabilities and comments including physical challenges including hunger and illness
	deficits / social emotional problems	comments regarding both social and emotional challenges faced by the students
	deficits / behind academically	comments that students are behind their same age peers in other community, the curriculum lacks rigor, or students express less desire to do well in their studies
	deficits / don't have literacy rich environment	comments that students come from homes where families do not have strong literacy skills, there are few books in the home or teachers feel that parents do not read to their children <i>example: I would say a lot of the students don't have the literacy rich childhood that is available to other students in larger settings or students with a different socio economic status and that is really significant coming into kindergarten or a school setting</i>
	deficits / don't know a lot about heritage	comments that students do not have an understanding of their own cultural background (including comments that express that this could be a result of residential schools)
	deficits / playing the game	teacher perceptions that school has certain "codes" to follow and the students either choose not to follow those codes or do not know the codes to begin with

Theme	Code	Description
Perception of students continued...	deficits / don't speak up	teacher perception that students are not good advocates for themselves or do not express themselves in the school environment
	need to know teachers care	teacher perception that caring and forming relationships with students is necessary to student engagement or success
	the system labels them	teacher perceptions that students do not experience the same rates of success due to stereotyping in the system (curriculum, assessment)
	see themselves as picked on	teacher perceptions that students perceive inequities within the system but believe that the system itself is equitable
Curriculum	IRP (Integrated Resource Package)	comments about the formal curriculum or ministry prescribed outcomes for students
	there has been a big change	teacher perception that recently there has been a greater focus on the inclusion of Aboriginal content in curriculum
	expected to integrate culture	teacher feelings / anxiety around expectations of including Aboriginal content by administration, ministry or community
	completely up to you	teacher perception that the amount of Aboriginal content to be included in curriculum is up to the individual teacher
	appropriately bringing culture in	teacher feelings / anxiety about wanting to be able to teach Aboriginal perspectives appropriately
	Indigenous ways of knowing	teacher comments regarding the importance of including and valuing Aboriginal understandings and knowledge in the curriculum
	distinct languages	any comments regarding the teaching of Aboriginal language as part of the curriculum
	balanced approach	comments that reflect the need to teach both Aboriginal and Western / European perspectives in curriculum

Theme	Code	Description
Curriculum continued...	I'm not always the best person	teacher perceptions that White teachers may not be the best teachers to include Aboriginal content or the feeling that they do not have sufficient background <i>example: I get faced with that conflict of well, Am I the best person to be teaching this? So for me that puts me in a bizarre position I mean I don't imagine there are a lot of White people teaching a First Nations language, there can't be too many of them kicking around [laugh].</i>
	teacher as learner	comments that teachers feel the need to learn alongside the students in their classroom
	using student interest	teachers using student interest to decide on content taught in the classroom / student driven curriculum
	decolonizing role of curriculum	teacher perception that curriculum is plays a role in teaching others about Aboriginal history and knowledge or that it plays a role in reclaiming culture
Parents	parent support	comments regarding the level of parent support in the classroom
	learn from parents	teacher perception that they need to learn from parents
	I'd like to see them here more	teacher feelings that they would like parents to play a greater role in their children's education and come into the school building more often <i>example: I'd like to see them in it more. I'd like to see parents and community members not just in in times of crisis but I'd like to see them in at other times. I think you'd feel that well over half the times we see a parent, it is when something has gone wrong</i>
	ways to involve parents/ social events	social media or social events organized by teachers to increase parent involvement

Theme	Code	Description
Parents continued...	ways to involve parents/ see parents for positive reasons	teacher comments about calling and discussing students success with parents as a way to build a positive relationship
	barriers/ transportation is a hindrance	parents not having access to transportation to get to the school / students coming from far distances to get to school
	barriers/ parent fear of school	teacher perception that parents experience anxiety in the school environment due to negative school experiences (not including residential school experiences)
	barriers/ children know more than parents	teacher perception that students have better literacy / school skills than their parents or that parents may lack confidence in their own academic abilities
Community	community input	teacher perceptions of the amount of input the community has or should have in the curriculum.
	relationship with community	comments about teachers perception about their relationship with the community or ways in which they have been able to forge relationships with community members
	utilizing community resources	comments reflecting the teacher desire to use community members to help them teach about Aboriginal understandings and local knowledge in the classroom <i>example: I think that I tried to balance it this year by having traditional knowledge in the classroom, by giving people in the community who did have an area of expertise an opportunity to share that with the kids</i>
	find who to talk to	comments that demonstrate teachers have a difficult time finding members in the community to help teach local knowledge in the classroom

Theme	Code	Description
Building relationships	trust takes time	<p>comments that building positive relationships with students, parents and community is something that takes time</p> <p><u>example:</u> <i>I had to learn to get not just the child to trust me but to get the extended family to trust me. And that just takes time, being in a community, being committed to a community for more than one year</i></p>
	constant rotating door of teachers	<p>comments about high turnover of teachers either because of a lack of desire for teacher to stay or transfers / lack of positions available due to union issues or declining enrolment</p>
	where they are coming from	<p>teacher belief that in order to form positive relationships, it is necessary to understand the backgrounds- historical, cultural of the community and students</p>
Goals of education	goals of education	<p>comments regarding what teachers feel the goals of education should be for their students</p>
Residential school	residential school	<p>teacher awareness of the negative impact of residential school within the community</p> <p><u>example:</u> <i>I think that the legacy of residential school has had impacts that I really didn't understand how long lasting they were until I came here. That there's just generations upon generations of people who haven't been raised by their parents</i></p>