

Integrating Indigenous Perspectives: A Study in Elementary Teacher Practice

by

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Abstract

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of elementary school teachers integrating Indigenous perspectives and content into their practice. Semistructured interview questions were used to collect data from six participants working in the Delta School District in British Columbia, Canada. Teachers were asked to share their understanding of Indigenous perspectives and to describe teaching experiences where they had felt successful with integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice and what they believed had contributed to this feeling of success. They were also asked what types of resources they found useful in the classroom and what supports they believed teachers needed to strengthen their understanding of Indigenous perspectives. This study found that teachers are committed to incorporating Indigenous perspectives into their teaching practice, view this work as challenging and necessary, and see their learning and practice as a continuum of understanding. Further research is needed to verify the findings of this study.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Brief Overview of Study

In this study I sought to explore the experiences of elementary school teachers in the Delta School District of British Columbia (BC), Canada, in relation to integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice. In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of my background and educational context and how this relates to my research question. I identify my positionality within my research and the challenges of that positionality. I then explain the purpose and justification of the study, give a brief overview of how I answered my research question, and finally provide a definition of terms used throughout my thesis. Chapter 2 reviews the literature surrounding Indigenous education, including past and present thinking and policies. The chapter also explores research focused on teaching strategies and teacher practice, then suggests areas of further research and discusses gaps in existing research. Chapter 3 outlines the research and data collection methodology used in this study and provides justification for these choices. Chapter 4 presents the themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with the six participants. Finally, in Chapter 5 I discuss the study significance and connect the themes with the literature. I also discuss the limitations of this study and provide suggestions for further research.

Background

I grew up in Fredericton, New Brunswick. There are four reserves in the surrounding area, there were several Indigenous students in my classes throughout my public school experience. Long before I had any understanding of my own privilege as a white person or systemic racism, I could see that there were differences between my reality and the reality of the Indigenous students in my classes in regard to my neighbourhood and the reserve. My neighbourhood was not close to the reserve. In her book *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo (2018)

challenged white readers to think about the messages they received in childhood about race and geographic location. She described the mixed message she received as a child: “Television shows like Sesame Street told me explicitly that all people were equal, but we simply do not live together across race” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 36). This message normalizes racial segregation as “it must be normal and natural to live apart ... and at a deeper level, it must be righteous that we live apart because we are better people” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 36). She noted that white people receive this message through the ways white neighbourhoods are described. Words such as “good,” “safe,” and “sheltered” are often used. In contrast, “other spaces (not white) are bad, dangerous, crime-ridden and to be avoided; these neighborhoods are not positioned as sheltered and innocent” (DiAngelo, 2018, pp. 36–37).

DiAngelo’s (2018) analysis is helpful in unpacking the racial messages I received as a child. I lived in a predominantly white neighbourhood. Although I had Indigenous friends, there was an unspoken understanding that I should not go to their homes. I also received racial messages about Indigenous Peoples at school. There were more Indigenous students in the remedial-level courses in my high school, and although I was aware that many of those students dropped classes or did not graduate, I had no understanding of why this happened, or the discriminatory education policies and practices in place that created this inequity. Dion (2007) argued that this “luxury of not knowing” (p. 331) allows non-Indigenous people to live in a state of not recognizing their role or obligation in understanding what they know or don’t know, and this shapes their ideas of Indigenous people and their lived experience. Reflecting on my memories of public school has caused me to sit with the uncomfortable realization that I was ignorant of the realities that Indigenous students were facing. I did not question what I saw but rather assumed it was just “normal” for Indigenous students to not be successful at school.

Context

I am an elementary school teacher of European descent, living and working on the traditional lands of the Tsawwassen and Musqueam First Nations. I have been teaching in Delta since 2005. In 2018, I joined the Delta School District's Equity Scan committee. The focus of this committee is to look at district policies and procedures to "address systemic barriers impacting Indigenous student achievement" (Province of British Columbia, 2020, para. 1). The equity scan process provides participating school districts with specific data on practices within the district in regard to creating conditions for success for Indigenous students. Delta Superintendent Doug Sheppard noted that in addition to providing the district with important data, this process has also "helped us challenge ourselves in a wider context around some of those bigger ideas around equity but also around privilege" (Province of British Columbia [ProvinceofBC]. (2018, August 28). *Aboriginal education in BC: Equity in action project* [Video]. YouTube.).

Through the Equity Scan committee meetings, I learned about the Delta School District's (2011) *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement*, which provides "the framework for the development and implementation of the school district's Aboriginal education program" (p. 1). The goal of the agreement is to support Indigenous students in their academic achievements and in learning about their cultures. As I learned more about the *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement* and the equity scan process, I became increasingly aware of my lack of understanding and knowledge of Indigenous cultures and histories. I realized that this lack of knowledge was impacting my ability to meaningfully integrate Indigenous cultural knowledge into my practice. This in turn was negatively impacting the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in my class.

In 2019, I participated in a series of half-day professional development sessions focused on place-based learning with an Indigenous focus, created and facilitated by Lyndsay Smith, a teacher mentor for the Delta School District. The activities were hands-on, experiential, and grounded in the First Peoples Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee [FNESC], n.d.), which were developed in 2006–2007 through a partnership between the BC Ministry of Education and the FNESC during the creation of the English 12 First Peoples course. An advisory committee made up of many stakeholders, including Indigenous scholars, educators, and Elders, focused on creating a course that would include authentic Indigenous voices and highlight First Peoples knowledge and perspectives. The First Peoples Principles of Learning were developed “in an effort to help the course focus more authentically on First Peoples experiences, values, beliefs and lived realities” (Chrona, 2016). Realizing that the First Peoples Principles of Learning were beneficial for all learners, BC introduced them in the new curriculum for kindergarten to Grade 12. The principles are meant to work together, with a focus on balance, connectedness, and relationship. They are aligned with a student-centred, inclusive approach to learning.

At the end of the place-based sessions, I felt like I had gained a greater appreciation of Indigenous ways of knowing as well as many examples of and strategies for how to meaningfully integrate Indigenous content into my practice; however, I knew there were still significant gaps in my understanding. I struggled with the idea of teaching knowledge and history from a culture that was not mine. I worried that this was culturally inappropriate because I am a non-Indigenous teacher. For both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in my class, I wanted to create an environment where Indigenous knowledge was not seen as “other” but rather a different and valid perspective. The findings of Kanu’s (2005) research echo my

uncertainties: “Dominant-culture teachers expressed a similar lack of confidence, both because of their lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge base and because they were not Aboriginal” (p. 57). At the same time, because the workshop series was a pilot program and not all teachers participated, I began to think about how these ideas and strategies could be shared with a larger group of teachers with the intention of supporting more teachers who were feeling unsure about how best to integrate Indigenous content into their practice. Place-based learning was one lens to use. I was curious what other strategies and lenses teachers were using when trying to integrate Indigenous content.

During the summer of 2020 while working through the Research Methods course at Vancouver Island University, I read *Challenges, as Perceived by Teachers, to Integrating Aboriginal Content* (Tait, 2010), a thesis about challenges perceived by teachers to integrating Indigenous content into the curriculum. In Chapter 5 of her thesis, Laura Tait, an Indigenous scholar and educator from the Tsimshian Nation, suggested that more research needs to be conducted in order to support teachers and open the door to further questions: “What are others doing to overcome challenges in the field? What strategies are being used that have an impact?” (Tait, 2010, p. 45). After reading this thesis, I was left thinking about my school district and wondered what my answers would be to Tait’s questions. What strategies were teachers using? Were other teachers using strategies that would benefit my students? Acknowledging that I was still learning how to integrate Indigenous content into my practice, I wondered how other teachers were navigating this new learning. I thought it would be beneficial for teachers district-wide to have more opportunities to share their ideas, strategies, and insights.

Challenges of Positionality

As a researcher, I am aware of not only my privilege but also my responsibility to be as transparent as possible about my intentions and where I sit in relation to my research question. I navigated multiple roles throughout my research, as both a teacher and a researcher, and was mindful that I was asking my colleagues to be vulnerable and share their experiences, knowing that we were all in different places with our learning and understanding of Indigenous content, the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and our role in Canada's colonial history. I write from a perspective of not knowing and with humility in recognizing that my lack of knowledge is due to my privilege. I am aware that although I seek to deepen my understanding of Indigenous cultural knowledge, as a non-Indigenous person there are limitations to my understanding.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to look at strategies that teachers are using to integrate Indigenous content into their practice. I endeavoured to highlight what is working for teachers and open a door to conversations about how to build on these strategies. Through my research, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to decolonize education and investigate how teachers can best integrate Indigenous knowledge and histories into their practice.

Justification

There are several reasons why this study is important at this point in time. Educators have a moral imperative to look at their practice as a way to meaningfully participate in reconciliation. Korteweg and Fiddler (2019) invited educators to open themselves up to “teaching-as-reconciliation through re-learning and contending with Canada’s real history of colonization against Indigenous peoples, engaging with decolonizing their own teacher identities, or expanding their active, genuine engagement with Indigenous students and their families” (p.

263). By working through the process of understanding our own settler-colonialism and recognizing the implications of the “mass cultivated ignorance of generations of school children” (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2019, p. 265), educators will be in a better position to deliver curriculum that “represents accurate historical truths and respects Indigenous knowledge and perspectives” (Korteweg & Fiddler, 2019, p. 255). To successfully integrate Indigenous content for all students, teachers need to have access to resources and support in developing strategies to effectively carry out this work. If as a system we are committed to building equity for Indigenous students through better educational outcomes, we need to look at how we are delivering Indigenous content and ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to develop effective teaching strategies. This research could guide how the Delta School District structures professional development opportunities for teachers.

Research Questions

I explored the following research questions: What strategies are elementary school teachers in the Delta School District using to integrate Indigenous content and perspectives into their teaching practice? Second, where are there gaps or challenges and how can teachers be supported in strengthening their understanding and practice?

To answer my research questions, I used appreciative inquiry (AI) as my methodology. AI is a narrative-based framework that involves interviewing individuals and moving through a co-creative process to highlight the strengths of individuals and organizations. It focuses on building collective knowledge as a way to create positive change. Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) asserted that one of the most important things they have discovered in their research of AI and change is that

human systems grow in the direction of what they persistently ask questions about, and this propensity is strongest and most sustainable when the means and ends of inquiry are positively correlated. The single most important action a group can take to liberate the human spirit and consciously construct a better future is to make the positive core the common and explicit property of all. (p. 9)

This form of inquiry fit well with my research because it is collaborative in nature and action oriented. It allowed my colleagues to start from a strengths-based perspective when discussing what they are doing in their classrooms in regard to integrating Indigenous perspectives and knowledge.

Definition of Terms

- Integrate: to infuse Indigenous content, concepts, themes, and perspectives into the curriculum throughout the term or year (Tait, 2010).
- Indigenous: refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in a Canadian context (the term “Aboriginal” was formerly the predominant term and appears several times in this thesis).
- Indigenous content: Indigenous concepts, themes, perspectives, and histories.
- Indigenous education: Learning that leads to a deeper understanding and appreciation for Indigenous histories, cultures, systems, and ways of knowing.
- Strategies: methods used to help students understand and make connections with content, skills, and processes.

Chapter 2 – Background and Review of Related Literature

The following literature review provides an overview of the history of Indigenous education in Canada, clarifying what Indigenous education is and what it must include if the school system is focused on creating positive conditions and outcomes for Indigenous students. The review concludes with further areas of required research.

Historical Background of Indigenous Education in Canada

Prior to European contact, Indigenous Peoples in what would become Canada had highly developed educational systems. Children were educated in a holistic manner, with a focus on connection to the natural world and their community (Neeganagwedgin, 2013; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). Learning was an ongoing process and inextricably linked to language, culture, and community. This system was based on the spiritual and emotional needs of the child and benefitted the entire community. Teaching was centred around the importance of place, connection to the land, and one's roles and responsibilities within the larger community. In addition, there was a spiritual element within Indigenous teachings that built a strong connection to the creator and developed a child's understanding of the sacred. These values and ways of being are still central to Indigenous worldviews today.

This philosophy of holistic teaching and learning was in direct opposition to the colonial, Eurocentric goals of education: to maintain European identity, language, and culture. The forced assimilation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada began in the late 19th century with policies based on the racist idea that "Aboriginal people could eventually be educated out of their 'savage' and 'wandering ways' to become like Europeans" (Binda & Calliou, 2001, p. 12). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) final report shed light on the federal government's intentions in creating residential schools. By forcibly removing Indigenous

children from their homes, the bonds between the children and their families, their cultures, and their languages would be destroyed. Many Indigenous children suffered horrific abuse and neglect in residential schools, and many children died. The long-term impact of residential schools on Indigenous Peoples has been loss of language and culture, as well as intergenerational trauma.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2008 to acknowledge and formally document the experiences of and long-term impact on survivors of the residential schools. Along with its findings, the commission released 94 calls to action regarding steps to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Articles 62 to 65 are key areas of focus for the public education system. These articles highlight the need for provinces and school districts to develop and implement curricula represent Indigenous Peoples' history, with a focus on the negative and long-term impact of residential schools as well as support for teachers in teaching this curriculum. The articles also speak to the need to build “intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Government of Canada, 2015). The commission called on the federal government to work with individual provinces to create supports that respected the diverse and unique needs of Indigenous Peoples. In 2018, the Government of Canada, the Province of British Columbia, and the FNESC signed the *BC Tripartite Education Agreement* (Canadian Ministry of Indigenous Services, et al., 2018) with the intention of providing a framework to support Indigenous students and improve their educational experience in the public school system. In addition to this agreement, the BC Ministry of Education, school districts, and local First Nations have collaborated to create enhancement agreements in an effort to create personal and academic

success for Indigenous students. Yet there remains confusion about what Indigenous education includes.

Contemporary Approaches to Indigenous Education

In the book *Approaches to Aboriginal Education in Canada*, Widdowson and Howard (2013) outlined two conflicting approaches. Parallelism centres on the idea of Indigenous control of Indigenous education with the goal of self-determination. In contrast to this approach is integrationism, which seeks to improve Indigenous education by working within the Western education system. Both approaches are supported by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. Battiste (1998) highlighted the importance of Indigenous education focusing on Indigenous language and cultural revitalization as a means of healing the effects of a colonial education system. For Battiste (1998), this cannot happen as long as provinces force Indigenous schools to adopt a mainstream Western curriculum or Indigenous students to enrol in mainstream schools where their cultural identity, language, and beliefs are marginalized. She called for Indigenous control of Indigenous education and a transformation of the education system. Echoing Battiste (1998), Rico (2013) examined Kaupapa Maori theory in New Zealand as a framework for Indigenous education in Canada. This case study supported the idea of a parallel education system based on Indigenous language, culture, and epistemology. In the 1980s, the New Zealand government realized that to improve educational outcomes for Maori students, these students had to learn in an environment that reflected their identity, culture, and language. Rico asserted that the Maori case study highlights the positive changes that can occur when Indigenous Peoples take control of the education of their children. Rico contrasted the Kaupapa Maori theory with the Canadian system, where low graduation rates and lower socioeconomic status are all linked to a system that primarily is focused on integration. Rico noted the work of Phyllis Cardinal, who

argued that there are two competing goals within Indigenous education in Canada: assimilation and self-determination. Cardinal asserted that these goals need to be redefined, because they set up a divide within Indigenous students between their sense of self and the school system.

Although parallelism has demonstrated positive outcomes for Indigenous students, it requires a complete transformation of the existing school system and a restructuring of how education is funded. Arguably, there is also a disconnect between practice and theory. There are not yet enough Indigenous educators to support a parallel system in BC. This approach is also premised on the idea of two separate systems, which could lead to continued and further ignorance of Indigenous history, culture, and perspectives for non-Indigenous Canadians. In addition, critics of this approach see similarities between parallelism and the logic used to oppose Black integration during the civil rights era in the United States (Widdowson & Howard, 2013).

Supporters of an integrated approach believe that the focus of Indigenous education should be improvement for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Furo (2018) argued that to discuss Indigenous education using either of these frameworks is an oversimplification and does not take into account the needs of Indigenous students or the continued struggle of Indigenous Peoples to gain educational and societal equity.

Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators support the coexistence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives in the school curriculum (Deer, 2013; St. Denis, 2010). Using an integration approach benefits all students as it provides opportunities for increased understanding (Kanu, 2011), builds respect and appreciation for Indigenous cultures and perspectives (Kanu, 2011; Papp, 2020), and brings awareness of Canada's colonial past and the negative impacts, both past and present, experienced by Indigenous peoples.

Current Perspectives on Integrating Indigenous Perspectives Into Curriculum

Within the BC education system, there is a call to integrate Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and practices into classrooms and curriculum. The difficulty for non-Indigenous educators is the confusion in regard to what Indigenous education includes and how best to deliver it. Many educators see Indigenous education as a series of lessons to add into the existing curriculum. However, this add-on approach is at odds with Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Battiste, 2013). If non-Indigenous educators are to be successful in integrating Indigenous content, it is important that they are supported in exploring what Indigenous knowledge involves and how they might connect to the teachings of Indigenous wisdom (Munroe et al., 2013). When trying to define Indigenous education it is important to keep intention in mind. The very idea of Indigenous education has been socially constructed within a colonial education system.

Chartrand (2012) asserted that an awareness of competing goals is necessary when constructing Indigenous education. In some educational contexts, Indigenous education is developed with a Western lens, focusing on improving economic drivers linked to attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates for Indigenous students, as opposed to a cultural lens, which looks at connecting Indigenous students to identity and language (Ahenakew, 2017). In attempting to define Indigenous education, it is important to keep Indigenous students at the centre and to shine a light on the value of Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being. Yet it is also important that there is some common understanding of what constitutes Indigenous education if educators and the education system are to successfully integrate Indigenous perspectives into the school curriculum. In her study of Manitoba secondary teachers integrating Indigenous perspectives into the Grade 9 curriculum, Kanu (2011) defined Aboriginal perspectives as “curriculum content/ materials, instructional and assessment methods/strategies,

and interaction patterns that Manitoba's Aboriginal peoples see as reflecting their experiences, histories, cultures, traditional knowledges and values" (p. 96). This definition of Indigenous education highlights the importance of acknowledging that there is not one Indigenous perspective but many and that perspectives, histories, and experiences are specific to the Nation or peoples of a place.

Indigenous Knowledge

When trying to define Indigenous knowledge, there is a danger of creating a simplistic definition that fails to honour the unique histories and geographies of peoples; however, there are similar themes across peoples. Indigenous knowledge can be understood to include language, culture, and ways of knowing and being that are tied to place. This knowledge is passed down generationally and benefits the entire community. A connection to the land is at the heart of Indigenous knowledge and is linked to the interconnectedness of the natural world (Ahenakew, 2017). However, Indigenous students live with a tension in trying to navigate two different and often competing knowledge systems. The dominant Western culture sees land as property and a source of resources to be extracted. In contrast, Indigenous cultures see the land as the first teacher (Ahenakew, 2017, p. 82).

In addition to this land-based focus, Indigenous language and culture are central to Indigenous knowledge and are tied to creating better personal and educational outcomes for Indigenous students (Munroe et al., 2013). In this way, Indigenous education can be viewed as needing to be grounded in the teachings and knowledge of local culture and community. For educators, this becomes a potential challenge because not all school districts have strong relationships with the local Indigenous communities. Authentically integrating Indigenous knowledge is a challenge raised by Ahenakew (2017), who asserted that having non-Indigenous

educators try to integrate Indigenous knowledge was a “tokenistic means to an end” (p. 85); Indigenous knowledge is used to help Indigenous students meet a Western idea of success. In this way, integrating Indigenous knowledge is seen as a remedy for lower educational achievement levels. Ahenakew acknowledged that classroom teachers are struggling with these tensions as they begin to recognize their part in supporting and perpetuating a system of privilege and inequity: “We are asking teachers to undo the epistemic certainties that uphold their ontological securities and that provide the justification for their positions of privilege and authority in the perpetuation of sanctioned epistemic violence in mandatory content and pedagogy” (2017, p. 86). However, Munroe et al. (2013) provided a different perspective and saw integrating Indigenous ways of knowing as a way to decolonize education. By deconstructing and then rebuilding the education system, where learning is focused on Indigenous knowledge, education can be transformed. For Munroe et al., Indigenous knowledge is rooted in relationships, connected to the natural world, and passed down generationally. Munroe et al. saw alignment between Indigenous knowledge and 21st-century learning principles of respecting and valuing other cultures, understanding and appreciating the interconnectedness of all things, and focusing on place-based learning.

Teachers and Perceptions of Integration

Non-Indigenous teachers are increasingly aware of their moral and professional responsibility to embed Indigenous content and perspectives into their practice. The challenge lies in how to do this authentically and effectively within a system that often appears to be at odds with the philosophies and practices of Indigenous knowledge.

In a critical ethnographic study, Verna St. Denis (2010) sought to provide recommendations on how to better promote and support the success of Indigenous education in

public schools. She gathered data from open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews with 59 Indigenous teachers from across Canada. Her findings point to the need for ongoing professional development and daily authentic integration of Indigenous perspectives that are relevant to the lives of students. St. Denis' findings also highlight the need for educators to use resources from local nations when integrating Indigenous content and perspectives.

Kanu's (2005) ethnographic study of 10 non-Indigenous high school teachers in Winnipeg explored teachers' perceptions of integrating Indigenous cultural knowledge and perspectives into their practice. Using interviews, teachers' journals, and classroom observations, Kanu (2005) looked at what teachers integrated into their curriculum and how they achieved this. To help make sense of the differences between how teachers were approaching integration, she used Banks' (1989) work on the inclusion of multicultural perspectives in the classroom. This work highlights four approaches to inclusion: (a) the contribution approach, where students learn about the contributions made by those from other cultures; (b) the additive approach, where perspectives, content, and beliefs from other cultures are sometimes added to a predominantly Eurocentric curriculum; (c) the transformational approach, where the curriculum is taught from multiple perspectives; and (d) the social action approach, where students are encouraged to take their new understanding and create social change (Kanu, 2005, p. 55). Although all participating teachers thought integration was important, there were differences in regards to their understanding and approaches to integrating Indigenous content and practices. Teachers perceived their lack of knowledge of and experience with Indigenous content as a challenge to integration. In addition to their lack of knowledge, the teachers were concerned about their "right" to teach Indigenous perspectives and content. Kanu (2005) asserted that trends in cultural theory suggest that there needs to be a shift away from the idea of cultural possession and a move

towards seeing the integration of Indigenous perspectives as a “new scene of learning” (p. 59). Kanu’s (2005) findings also highlighted racist attitudes among non-Indigenous colleagues and students, lack of funding for resources, and lack of interest by school administrators as barriers to authentic integration. In addition, participants spoke of a disconnect between school structures and Indigenous cultural values. A rigid timetable and large class sizes were seen as interfering with Indigenous teaching methods like talking circles and experiential learning.

In a study of teacher candidates’ perceptions of difficulties with integrating Indigenous perspectives, Deer (2013) found the following factors influenced their practice: varying levels of experience and knowledge of Indigenous cultures, teacher attitudes in regards to Indigenous Peoples, varying levels of administration support, availability of Indigenous resources, and compatibility between the institution and Indigenous cultural values. Although Deer’s study had similar findings to those of Kanu (2005), Deer did not find the beliefs and attitudes of teachers reflected to the same extent.

Gaps and Further Considerations

The majority of educational research in regard to Indigenous education and teacher practice is situated within high school and postsecondary institutions. In looking through the academic literature to guide this study, I noted a lack of research within the elementary grades; the experiences of those teachers have been largely left out of the research. In addition, studies are often focused on what teachers are doing or not doing in the classroom in regard to incorporating Indigenous perspectives, but do not seem to include their voices. I believe more action-oriented research needs to be conducted with teachers and by teacher researchers, at both the elementary and secondary levels to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of embedding Indigenous content and perspectives into today’s classrooms. Conducting this

research will arguably lead to a strengthening of teacher practice and create better learning environments and outcomes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and Procedures

Study Design

The primary goal of this study was to develop an understanding of what strategies elementary school teachers use in their classrooms when attempting to integrate Indigenous content and perspectives into their practice. I also aimed to explore their experiences and perceptions of integrating Indigenous content into their practice. In conducting this research, I hoped to provide knowledge that might further the conversation about what is working for teachers in their practice and what further supports teachers need to continue to do this important work.

Methodology

This study was centered around the research question “What strategies are elementary school teachers in the Delta School District using to integrate Indigenous content and perspectives into their teaching practice?” Qualitative researchers state their research questions in a way that allows them to explore participants’ experiences and gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). I chose qualitative research because I believed that this was the best methodology for generating knowledge and gaining an understanding of the multilayered experiences of classroom teachers. My research question required an explanation of what strategies teachers were using to integrate Indigenous perspectives and content into practice as well a deeper understanding of their experiences and perceptions of doing this work.

To address the question, I used semistructured interviews, thematic data analysis, and an AI framework to document teachers’ strategies and experiences. Conducting semistructured interviews with participants who were also my colleagues allowed for rich discussions and allowed me to gain insight into their feelings and experiences. As a researcher I am aligned with

an interpretive constructivist paradigm. Central to this paradigm is the importance of participants' perspectives, feelings, and beliefs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The constructivist paradigm is grounded in the belief that knowledge is socially constructed and based on the experiences and interactions of the individual (Creswell, 2014). An AI framework fit well with the constructivist paradigm.

Bushe and Kassam (2005) asserted that “the process of inquiry that perhaps most defines AI practice is the collection of ‘stories’ from system members and other stakeholders about their experiences” (p. 167). AI is a strengths-based approach focused on creating positive change within a given context—for example, institutions, corporations, communities, or groups (Sandars & Murdoch-Eaton, 2017). It is centred on five core principles (Cooperrider et al., 2008):

1. The constructivist principle: An individual creates their reality through interactions with others.
2. The simultaneity principle: Inquiry and change happen together and not as separate processes. Whenever people begin to ask questions and are curious about a topic, a change process begins that leads to new understandings.
3. The poetic principle: People make meaning from words. Deficit-focused language can constrain how they understand and view a topic, and how they perceive the possibility for change.
4. The anticipatory principle: When people can envision potential change, it creates a sense of control over a challenging situation and creates momentum and motivation to change the situation.
5. The positive principle: Asking questions to highlight strengths creates engagement and moves people towards positive change.

In addition to the five principles, AI uses the “4-D” cycle (Cooperrider et al., 2008) to support positive change:

- Discovery: Invites dialogue through appreciative interviewing.
- Dream: Invites participants to envision something better. Interviews are used here as a jumping off point to collectively share hopes and dreams for the future.
- Design: Participants create or plan something new, authentic, and necessary. This cycle is grounded in positive examples from past experiences.
- Destiny: Participants take action to realize their shared dream of the future.

I chose AI because of the focus on an individual’s strengths. In interviewing participants, I wanted to focus on what was going well in their practice, which I hoped would create positive conditions to reflect on their learning about Indigenous perspectives and how they saw themselves moving forward in deepening their understanding. One of the benefits of the AI approach is using individuals’ strengths to create change. AI can create momentum and allow individuals to see possibilities. Sandars and Murdoch-Eaton (2017) asserted that AI “taps into the factors that individuals consider to be important for themselves and others, with the result that the potential of individuals, and also the organizations in which they are an integral member, can be developed” (p. 123). This idea of developing the capacity of individuals and organizations connects to the second part of my research question: “Where are there gaps and challenges and how can teachers be supported in strengthening their understanding and practice?” In reflecting on their experiences, teachers were able to articulate where they were experiencing challenges and what they needed to move their learning forward.

I also chose an AI framework because semistructured interviews aligned with the five core principles of AI. In the interviews, I sought to provide a space where participants could

authentically discuss their experiences and reflect on how far they had come in their understanding of Indigenous perspectives and how that was connected to their teaching practice. The interviews were full of rich discussions and learning for both the participants and me. They provided a place for reflection that might inspire participants to move into the design and destiny cycles; however, I did not document these cycles as they were not within the scope of this research.

Although an AI framework fit well with my research question, there were inherent limitations in using this methodology. These limitations are further explored in Chapter 5.

Participant Recruitment

I recruited participants by sending an email to all principals of elementary schools in the Delta via the district's webmail server (see Appendix A). Attached to this email was a request for research participants, a brief description of the study, and my contact information for those who might be interested in participating. This email was posted on each school's staff site. Six elementary teachers contacted me and participated. Arguably, this small sample size can be viewed as a reflection on how challenging the year had been for teachers. Covid-19 added an extra layer of difficulty, with teachers stretched to the limit.

I emailed the six participants a recruitment document (see Appendix B) and an informed consent document (see Appendix C). The participants were six elementary school teachers in the Delta School District. I knew most of them through working together or being involved in district professional development initiatives. Although all participants were elementary teachers, they had different levels of teaching experience, ranging from 10 years to over 25 years, and worked with different grades, spanning Grades 1 to 7.

Data Source and Collection Method

Once I had received the signed consent form from a participant, I arranged a time to conduct an interview over Zoom. Each participant was interviewed once between April and May 2021. The semistructured interviews took the form of a conversation, with the interview questions being used as a guide. Due to the collegial nature of the relationship between the participants and me, the conversation was informal and relaxed. With the participants' permission, I recorded and transcribed the interviews. I then reviewed the transcribed interviews against the recordings for accuracy. To establish credibility in the data, I sent the transcripts to the participants, offering them an opportunity to correct errors and provide additional information if necessary.

Data Analysis

Although some critics view thematic analysis as a tool existing within a formal analytic tradition, Braun and Clark (2006) asserted that thematic analysis can and should be a stand-alone method for data analysis. Furthermore, they said thematic analysis is a flexible method for beginning researchers because it is easy to understand and implement. I chose this method of data analysis because it offered flexibility and was accessible for a first-time researcher. Further, thematic analysis is defined as “not being wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and therefore it can be used within different theoretical frameworks” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81).

The participants' answers to the semistructured interview questions provided the data. These answers were transcribed and then analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis, where I identified and coded major themes. Because this was my first experience with data analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase guide as a framework (see Table 1). This process began with spending time reading and rereading the interviews, making notes, and trying to get a

sense of what was in the data. Once I felt satisfied that I had an understanding of the data, I set up a spreadsheet with the following four columns: (a) interview question, (b) key words and phrases, (c) quotes from the interview, and (d) possible codes and sub codes. I moved between the interview transcripts and the notes I had made while looking at the data to determine how the codes connected to larger themes.

Table 1

Braun and Clarke's (2006) Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and rereading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic “map” of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Four themes emerged with regard to teachers’ experiences of integrating Indigenous perspectives into their teaching practice: (a) a continuum of understanding Indigenous perspectives, (b) successful teaching strategies, (c) the importance of teacher professional development, and (d) accessible resources. The themes highlight common experiences, practices,

and perceptions among the participants and areas where teachers felt there could be growth and development. I discuss these themes in further detail in Chapter 4.

Ethical Considerations

The sensitivity of this study was not lost on me. I was at the same time a researcher and a colleague and was asking teachers to share their practice with me, which put them in a position of vulnerability. It was important for participants to not feel undue pressure to participate in a colleague's research. In the application to the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board, I outlined how I would protect participant confidentiality by using pseudonyms for participants as well as not including any details that could inadvertently identify a participant like school or grade. I also drew attention to the informed consent document, outlining each participant's ability to withdraw from the study without explanation. The initial application to conduct this research was denied and so I revised the recruitment process. Instead of directly contacting participants or asking school principals to discuss recruitment with teachers, I provided a recruitment email that would be sent out to all elementary teachers. This ensured I held no power over participants and also ensured school principals would not know who was participating. The resubmitted research application was accepted by the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board on March 26, 2021 (File No: 101148).

Reliability and Validity

Creswell and Miller (2000) asserted that the choice of validity procedures is guided by a researcher's lens and paradigm assumptions. As a researcher I have situated myself within the constructivist paradigm, which is grounded in the belief that knowledge is socially constructed through experiences and beliefs. The lens I employed when analyzing the data focused on the feelings and experiences of the participants. Creswell and Miller also highlighted "the

importance of checking how accurately participants' realities have been represented in the final account" (2000, p. 125). In order to minimize threats to the internal validity of the study, I chose member checking as the validity procedure. I verified the interview transcripts and then sent them to the participants, who were invited to change or omit anything that they felt did not represent their experience. When analyzing the data generated from the interview questions, I used theoretical triangulation in order to highlight multiple theoretical perspectives and to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Role of the Researcher

It is important for the researcher to consider their role in relation to the choices they make about all aspects of a study, including how they come to their research question and what methods are employed for data collection as well as data analysis. Creswell and Miller (2000) asserted that researcher reflexivity is a validity procedure that uses the lens of the researcher in an attempt to be transparent about their assumptions, beliefs, and biases.

In reviewing the academic literature on teacher practice and incorporating Indigenous perspectives, I realized that there was a gap between the academic analysis and the daily realities and experiences of teachers trying to do this work in the classroom. It seemed that the voices of educators were missing. Throughout this study I have had a strong belief that teachers are trying to do the best they can and want what is best for their students. They face a multitude of challenges in today's classrooms and are often overwhelmed and under supported. I have moved through this research process in a dual role, as a researcher and as a teacher and colleague. I acknowledge that I identify more as a teacher than a researcher, which influenced the data analysis. My intention was to share the experiences of a small group of teachers with a focus on what they felt was working for them in their practice. I was careful not to include anything in the

interview transcripts that could be taken out of context and be potentially harmful to my colleagues.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of elementary school teachers in the Delta School District who were integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice. By conducting semistructured interviews over Zoom and actively listening to them describe their experiences, I hoped to get a sense of what strategies teachers felt were supporting them in doing this work and how they were finding success in the classroom. The following questions were used as a guide in the interviews:

1. When thinking and talking about “Indigenous perspectives,” what does this term mean for you in relationship to your teaching practice?
2. Can you tell me about any professional development you’ve received and how that deepened your understanding of Indigenous perspectives?
3. Let’s shift to your teaching practice. Can you tell me about a lesson or activity where you felt you had been successful with incorporating Indigenous perspectives into your practice?
4. What led to this feeling of success? What specifically did you do or use?
5. What do you believe is working well in your practice right now in regard to incorporating Indigenous perspectives?
6. What resources, either personal or district supplied, have you found helpful in trying to integrate Indigenous perspectives into your teaching?
7. What supports do you feel would help teachers move their learning and practice forward and help them gain more confidence in integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice?

The participants were very candid in the interviews and openly shared their challenges, successes, and desire to know more and move their practice forward. The interviews became conversational. From these conversations, four themes emerged with regard to teachers' experiences of integrating Indigenous perspectives into their teaching practice: (a) a continuum of understanding Indigenous perspectives, (b) successful teaching strategies, (c) the importance of teacher professional development, and (d) accessible resources. In this chapter, I discuss each theme in detail.

Theme 1: A Continuum of Understanding Indigenous Perspectives

A theme that appeared in all the interviews was how teachers felt challenged by their own lack of experience and understanding of Indigenous perspectives. The BC Ministry of Education (2015) document *Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom: Moving Learning Forward* outlines characteristics of Indigenous perspectives, of which several participants said they had an emerging understanding. In the interview sessions, four of the six participants referenced connection to the land, nature, and experiential learning as being important pieces of Indigenous perspectives. Three participants referenced connection and relationship as well as identity and the power of story. Two participants discussed the importance of Indigenous protocols, and one participant described the importance of a local focus and an awareness of history. No one participant articulated all of the perspectives as outlined by the Ministry of Education.

Sally shared her learning journey in regards to deepening her understanding of Indigenous perspectives: “What I’ve come to learn is that it [understanding Indigenous perspectives] means being able to see the world through a different lens.... It has a lot to do with nature and connecting to the earth and respecting and caring and almost having a living

relationship with the land.” Cheryl described her initial lack of understanding of what Indigenous perspectives were by saying, “So there was the whole misunderstanding that I had, and I struggled with it even being my right to know what an Indigenous person’s perspective is.” Jennifer had also struggled in understanding Indigenous perspectives: “I feel like I’ve had a really slow journey to have any comfort with Indigenous perspectives, and I think about this a lot. I didn’t learn this way myself. I didn’t really know that there was an Indigenous perspective until probably 6 years ago.”

Why Indigenous Perspectives Should Be Taught

In discussing the new BC curriculum, four participants described their initial confusion surrounding Indigenous perspectives being embedded in the curriculum. They were frustrated with what seemed like an add-on piece that had no context and was not authentically connected to content areas. Two participants spoke of trying to embed Indigenous perspectives in math and science as being “a stretch.” When asked about incorporating Indigenous perspectives, Sally truthfully replied, “It’s something I’m supposed to do and possibly not doing enough of.... When it first came out, it seemed forced, or it seemed put on us in a way that we didn’t really understand what we were doing.” Cheryl shared a similar experience of initially not understanding the why behind incorporating Indigenous perspectives: “Well in the beginning I was suspicious. When I first heard the words, it was like, ‘Who am I to know what anybody else’s perspective is?’”

It was clear from the interview conversations that there had been growth in the teachers’ understanding of why Indigenous perspectives had been embedded in the new curriculum. Nicole shared how she had come to understand that incorporating Indigenous perspectives into her practice was really about “trying to teach in a way that is more accessible, inclusive, and

holistic for all students.” She viewed Indigenous perspectives as “enriching for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students” and believed that she had a responsibility to amplify these perspectives in her practice. At the same time several participants were struggling with how to integrate these perspectives into their practice.

Role of the First Peoples Principles of Learning

The First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, n.d.) were created through a partnership between the BC Ministry of Education and the FNESC to promote growth and understanding for non-Indigenous learners. Since their introduction in 2006, the principles have been used by K–12 educators. Jo Chrona asserted that these principles have

gained a more prominent place in the BC education system as educators are recognizing that they promote educational practices that are also powerfully effective for non-Indigenous learners, and are paralleled by some other non-Indigenous education theory, that is replacing the post-industrial model of education that has been entrenched in Canada’s education systems.([firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com/background of FPPL and Current Contexts](http://firstpeoplesprinciplesoflearning.wordpress.com/background-of-FPPL-and-Current-Contexts))

In five of the six interviews, participants explicitly referenced the First Peoples Principles of Learning as guiding their thinking around integration of Indigenous perspectives. For example, when asked about her experience, Susan immediately connected her understanding to the principles:

The first thing that comes to mind for me is the First Peoples Principles of Learning. I have them on my wall right here, and those principles of learning have been so formative for me in how I take responsibility for Indigenous education, how I use them to help us with moving forward with reconciliation and bring this into the classroom.

All of the participants believed that the First Peoples Principles of Learning were important to their practice, and several participants spoke of how these principles informed their daily classroom activities and their ways of connecting with students. Jennifer spoke of her strong classroom community and credited “problem-solving together and sharing stories in circle.” This routine highlights the principle that “learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place” (First Nations Education Steering Committee. n.d.). Michelle highlighted the need to think about how Indigenous resources could be shared and her intention of being respectful with how they were presented. She stated, “If you don’t know if something can be shared, you ask. Indigenous Peoples just want to be respected and their materials acknowledged and recognized.” This idea of being respectful and asking permission is connected to the principle that “learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations” (First Nations Education Steering Committee. n.d.) Cheryl believed that her ability to integrate Indigenous perspectives had developed because she had connected Indigenous perspectives to the First Peoples Principles of Learning.

Theme 2: Successful Teaching Strategies

In the interviews, teachers were asked to describe classroom experiences where they had felt successful at incorporating Indigenous perspectives and what had led to their sense of success. There were two reoccurring ideas: place based-experiential learning and exploration of identity through story.

Place-Based Experiential Learning

Four participants found place-based learning to be a successful way to integrate Indigenous perspectives. They defined place-based learning as learning experiences that were

connected to their local community and happened outside as often as possible. Several participants described learning from the natural environment as being a key piece of successful place-based learning.

Cheryl described a field trip to a local old-growth forest that she believed had been very positive for herself and her students: “There was deep understanding for those kids looking at literally 1,000-year-old trees and seeing evidence of First Peoples having lived there hundreds of years ago because of the cedar bark stripping on the trees.” She noted how her students had to empty out their pockets before walking in the forest to ensure that nothing they had could be left and change the land. “Learning about the importance of taking care of the land can happen in the forest so much easier and better and more meaningfully for students than if we were just to teach them this in a classroom. In that old-growth forest I could see the kids and deep learning was happening for them.” Through our discussion, it was clear that this had been a very positive experience for Cheryl and her students.

The importance of using place-based learning to integrate Indigenous perspectives was also demonstrated in Nicole’s experience of taking her students outside to connect ideas of land and community. She spoke of using place-based learning as a way to

really have students connect with nature and with the community and having them think about our space and where we are in our school and in our community. What did it look like in the past compared to the present? Where do we think we’re going in the future? Nicole used outdoor journaling, sit spots, and imagining activities to help students more deeply understand their relationship with and responsibility to the land that they live and learn on. It is important to note that Nicole had been doing her own professional reading and learning about

place-based teaching and incorporating Indigenous perspectives and had used this learning as a springboard for many of the lessons and units she had created.

Exploration of Identity Through Story

Three teachers spoke of the importance of using story to enable students to connect to ideas of identity. Sally used legends from various Indigenous cultures around the world as well as legends from First Nations in BC to build an understanding with students about identity: “We looked at what made the legends powerful and the power of storytelling and how storytelling is so important to identity.” Cheryl positioned oral storytelling as a teaching strategy that honoured diverse ways to communicate as well as a child-centred approach to teaching and learning.

Not every student feels confident with writing, or writes well, but we do talk about oral traditions being important to Indigenous Peoples and that it’s a way of knowing, story as a way to communicate ideas and understandings, and how it was very effective for thousands and thousands of years.

Nicole connected oral storytelling with identity and believed that this led to deeper student engagement:

Instead of writing about ourselves, the students were doing an oral storytelling piece about things that were important to them. I found many more kids were engaged and able to fully participate and exceed by far what they would have produced if I’d asked them to share it in writing instead.

Theme 3: The Importance of Teacher Professional Development

The interview question that pertained to professional development included district initiatives, school-based learning, and personal professional development. All six participants spoke of the positive impact that professional development opportunities had on their teaching

practice and their confidence with integrating Indigenous perspectives. By far the most impactful experiences were hands-on, led by Indigenous educators, Elders, or staff within the Delta School District's Indigenous Education department. Nicole described a session held at the Tsawwassen First Nation longhouse:

The best Pro-D [professional development] I've had was at the longhouse. I found the speakers really impactful. I think I had my aha moment then. I mean, we're doing land acknowledgements and we're doing a few isolated workshops, and in the new curriculum everything has things that felt a little bit forced. But I think that was the day where I kind of felt like I was really wanting with my heart to embrace Indigenous perspectives and saw the importance and the relevance of it, not just for First Nations students but for everybody and how it would really be an asset to our education system as a whole.

Two participants, Jennifer and Sally, shared that the most impactful professional development that they had experienced was a six-part half-day workshop series that explored place-based learning with Indigenous perspectives. Both participants believed that their understanding of the First Peoples Principles of Learning as well as how Indigenous perspectives could be embedded into their practice had been strengthened through this professional learning. Sally stated that this experience was

the first time I realized that it wasn't just about teaching kids about residential schools, it was about experiencing life from a different world view. Realizing that these ideas that we were talking about in the sessions—reciprocity, community—they lead into each other and that connection with the land was respecting place and was part of learning from Indigenous perspectives and that was part of reciprocity and reconciliation.

This workshop series was facilitated by a teacher mentor from the Indigenous Education department and focused on modelling hands-on, place-based activities that teachers could take back to their classrooms and try with their students. Sally believed that these sessions had been very helpful for her own growth and in developing her confidence. “These sessions were practical, hands-on, and I came away with tons of ideas and lessons to try with my students, but also with this huge relief of ‘okay, I can do this’ because she showed us how it could be done.” Jennifer viewed the workshop series as “really powerful” because it was grounded in place and identity and provided her with deep professional learning.

Both Michelle and Cheryl spoke of the significance of learning from Indigenous Peoples and Elders, and they believed this had a direct impact on their confidence and ability to integrate Indigenous perspectives. Michelle stated that having the opportunity to participate in learning from Elders was “awesome” because it allowed her to “gain a deeper understanding of the culture and perspectives of First Nations peoples.” Susan believed that her school-based professional development, which focused on available Indigenous resources, was very useful to helping her incorporate Indigenous perspectives into her practice.

Theme 4: Accessible Resources

In the related interview question, resources were defined for participants as including any materials they had used in their teaching practice, whether personally sourced or district supplied. These could include books, images, lessons, activities, or people. I asked what resources participants had found helpful in supporting integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice. All participants spoke of the importance of being able to easily access resources as key to their ability to incorporate Indigenous perspectives.

They believed that the Delta School District's Indigenous Education department was meeting this need through its website, resources that had been sent to school sites, and shared digital resources and Zoom sessions. Five of the six participants highlighted the territorial acknowledgement offered through the Indigenous Education department on Zoom with the district Indigenous cultural enhancement facilitator, Kaanaax Kuwoox (Nathan Wilson), being an important resource. Nicole valued the connection that her students had developed with Kaanaax Kuwoox, stating, "My students really enjoy the Monday morning acknowledgment. Nathan is a familiar face and the students feel attached to him." Cheryl described the sense of connection to a larger school community that she felt the acknowledgement created:

One of the things that I thought was really powerful about the territorial acknowledgement was the kids recognizing that they're part of something larger, and that never came through before.... I think it's a really great way to start your week, knowing that we're part of this community and that collectively we're trying to make a difference.

In addition to the weekly territorial acknowledgment, five of the six participants spoke about regularly accessing the digital resources offered through the Indigenous Education department. Sally described the resources sent out to teachers to support Orange Shirt Day as "really good. I found them really helpful." When asked what made the resources so helpful, Sally highlighted the need for resources to be readily accessible for teachers. "They were bundled by grade in a Google Drive with tons of different ideas, activities, and there was an online component as well. I didn't have to go looking for things for my grade because it had been done and the resources had been vetted." Nicole also valued the online resources from the Indigenous Education department and believed they were helpful in supporting her teaching of the history and impact of the residential school system in Canada: "There were resources sent out from the

Indigenous Ed department about residential schools, which were excellent. We watched the video for Orange Shirt Day. That was a very powerful resource.”

Two participants spoke about the school kits offered by the Indigenous Education department as being an important resource that they used with their classes. Cheryl described how she used plant cards from the kit at her school:

I’ve also used the plant cards from the Indigenous Ed kit, beautiful local plants, we’ve just looked at them. The kids and I are planning to use them on a neighborhood walk and see if we can find them in our community. They’re the perfect size to walk around with and carry.

In discussing next steps in developing more classroom resources to support teachers, several participants highlighted people as a resource. Four participants spoke of the importance of having someone come into their classroom to model a lesson or an activity. Cheryl described her experience of working with an Indigenous teacher mentor:

I had a district person come in and work with myself and my class today. She led us around the neighborhood. She knew where to find cedar trees and was able to point out native plant species and talk about their importance, and she talked to my students about which trees had been here the longest and how she could identify that. So having a resource person was terrific.

Our conversation moved to the idea of a framework of modelling a lesson, debriefing with the teacher, and then leaving resources. Cheryl saw this as invaluable for all teachers but particularly newly practicing teachers. She added that in using this model teachers could then tailor the lesson to their learners and do it again with another group of students. Cheryl believed that this would build confidence with individual teachers and could lead to knowledge sharing

between colleagues, as they could share the lessons and resources. She ended the conversation by saying, “After seeing this activity, I could do the lesson now and use it with future classes.” In short, all of the participants spoke of the importance of professional development and accessible resources as being integral to supporting teachers to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the data generated by the interview transcripts led to four themes that highlighted the strengths and challenges that participants had experienced through their work of integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice. The theme of a continuum of understanding Indigenous perspectives highlighted the learning journey that teachers were on, and how they had deepened their understanding of why these perspectives were important to embed in their practice. This theme also revealed that teachers felt challenged about how best to integrate these perspectives. For several participants, the First Peoples Principles of Learning became an anchor for their teaching and learning. Participants shared how important professional development opportunities were and how these led to increased confidence in their practice as well as a deeper understanding of Indigenous perspectives. All six participants spoke of the importance of being able to access resources and credited the Delta School District’s Indigenous Education department with providing resources that supported their work in the classroom.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, I discuss the significance of the research through the lens of the themes identified in the previous chapter. I also make recommendations for further research and present the limitations of the study.

Study Summary

The primary goal of this study was to develop an understanding of what strategies elementary school teachers use in their classrooms when attempting to integrate Indigenous content and perspectives into their practice, and to explore their experiences and perceptions of doing this work. In conducting this research, I hoped to provide knowledge that might further the conversation about what is working for elementary teachers in their practice and what additional supports teachers need to deepen their understanding and practice. The study was guided by the question: What strategies are elementary teachers in the Delta School District using to integrate Indigenous content and perspectives into their teaching practice? Second to this, where are the gaps or challenges and how can teachers be supported in strengthening their understanding and practice? My intention was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of elementary school teachers working towards integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice and gain a deeper understanding of what it means to decolonize education.

To address my research question, I used semistructured interviews, thematic data analysis, and an AI framework to document teachers' strategies and experiences. I chose to do qualitative research because I believed that this was the best methodology for generating knowledge and gaining an understanding of the multilayered experiences of classroom teachers. Conducting semistructured interviews with participants who were also my colleagues allowed for rich discussions that provided insight into their feelings and experiences.

Study Significance and Implications

An analysis of the data led to four themes with regard to teachers' experiences of integrating Indigenous perspectives into their teaching practice: (a) a continuum of understanding Indigenous perspectives, (b) successful teaching strategies, (c) the importance of teacher professional development, and (d) accessible resources. Here I discuss the implications of the findings.

Theme 1: A Continuum of Understanding Indigenous Perspectives

The data from this study illustrates the increasing awareness of non-Indigenous teachers of their moral and professional responsibility to embed Indigenous content and perspectives into their practice. All of the participants felt challenged by their lack of experience and understanding of Indigenous perspectives. Jennifer shared her initial insecurity teaching Indigenous perspectives when she stated, "It was new to me and I have this tremendous fear of doing it wrong and not being respectful because I want more than anything to do this right, and to do it respectfully and meaningfully and to be impactful." This lack of knowledge and confidence with incorporating Indigenous perspectives echoes Kanu's (2005) findings, where teachers' lack of knowledge of Indigenous perspectives was viewed as a significant barrier to integration of Indigenous perspectives: "Topping the list of challenges was their own lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and understanding required for effective integration. This challenge was identified by all of the teachers in this study"(p. 176). In my study, although all six participants felt challenged, they believed that they had grown in their understanding and could articulate key ideas surrounding Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. The participants spoke of their personal commitment and desire to learn more and to continue to develop their understanding and deepen their practice. Teachers felt strongly that in order for this work to be

authentic, it had to come from a place of personal understanding as opposed to being mandated by the Ministry of Education. This idea is supported by the work of Zurzolo (2010), who saw a disconnect between education policies and teaching realities. She argued that “teachers are not only marginalized and silenced by policy, but policy (well-intentioned and noble as its purpose may be) often becomes a barrier to change rather than a path towards it” (Zurzolo, 2010, p. 277). Zurzolo asserted that the key to successful integration of Indigenous perspectives involves including teachers in the policy creation and implementation processes. Her study highlights the importance of teacher collaboration opportunities to think about what they are doing in regards to integration of perspectives. This idea of collaboration was discussed by three participants in my study. Sally discussed the need for time and space for teachers to collaborate and share new learning:

If you are participating in workshops around Indigenous perspectives, I think it’s important to go back to your school and teach others. You’re going back and bringing that new knowledge. But then administrators need to make time and space for the information to be shared like on a Pro-D day or in a staff meeting. That would be really helpful for teachers. If not, the learning doesn’t get passed on.

Jennifer and Nicole also echoed this idea and shared how important it was to be able to talk through units and ideas with colleagues.

Theme 2: Successful Teaching Strategies

The findings illustrate the connection between the First Peoples Principles of Learning and successful teaching strategies. Several teachers used the principles to anchor their teaching, specifically the principle that “learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place” (FNESC,

n.d.). From the First Peoples Principles of Learning, teachers used outdoor place-based learning to embed Indigenous perspectives and help students connect to ideas of land stewardship, identity, and the historical and cultural significance of place. Gruenewald (2003) asserted that place “teaches us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy” (p. 621). Kress and Lake (2018) stated that “place is not simply about geography or ecology: place resonates in our bodies, and it anchors our family histories that are passed down through generations” (p. 948). In an example from the current study, Sally shared her deepening understanding of the significance of place in relation to the First Peoples Principles of Learning. She stated that learning from and on the land was “almost like bridging all of the things that we love and appreciate about nature with authentic learning experiences and Indigenous perspectives, all intertwined together ... leading to deep learning and understanding.”

Theme 3: The Importance of Teacher Professional Development

Teachers’ experiences in this study confirm the value and the importance of professional development as a means of deepening understanding of Indigenous perspectives. All six teachers felt strongly that their professional development experiences had strengthened their practice. Several teachers felt that learning with and from Indigenous people was impactful professional development. Chapter 4 highlighted the experiences of two teachers who had participated in a six-part professional development workshop series. These teachers believed that this type of experiential learning was key to building their confidence in integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice. This idea is supported by Burgess’ (2019) study of a teacher professional learning program in New South Wales, Australia, which focused on building teacher capacity for culturally responsive teaching. The findings of this study include the need for

improvements in acknowledging the impact of Australia's colonial legacy, rejecting deficit discourses about Aboriginal peoples and understanding that Aboriginal culture is dynamic and fluid rather than static. Teachers also reported a growing confidence in developing culturally responsive pedagogies that affirmed student identities, implemented place based curriculum and built relationships with Aboriginal parents and community members. (p. 483)

Although not directly referenced in my interviews, I wonder if the preference for Pro-D led by Indigenous Elders is also connected to teachers' interest in deepening their understanding of culturally responsive teaching. Several teachers connected their professional learning to a greater understanding of how incorporating Indigenous perspectives is tied to better outcomes for Indigenous students. Nicole spoke of the importance of making education accessible and culturally relevant for Indigenous students in her classroom: "Now that I'm more aware of what Indigenous perspectives are and the ways that Indigenous communities educated their children in the past ... I try to teach in a way that is more accessible and familiar for Indigenous students." Susan believed that she had a responsibility to listen to Indigenous people's lived experiences and "find ways to connect and listen to people's stories." She viewed this responsibility as a way to participate in reconciliation: "I think the more opportunities we have to connect with Indigenous Peoples the better. It has to move from your head to your heart. I have a personal and professional responsibility to keep moving through the process of reconciliation."

Theme 4: Accessible Resources

This research highlights the importance of teacher resources. All teachers in this study made reference to the accessible and teacher-friendly resources offered through Delta School District's Indigenous Education department. Kanu's (2005) study showed a lack of classroom

resources was one of the perceived obstacles to integrating Indigenous perspectives into the classroom. Although the context was very different from this study, Kanu's (2005) study highlighted the importance placed on accessible resources for teachers trying to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their teaching practice. In contrast, participants in the current study believed that there were many resources they could access to support them with incorporating Indigenous perspectives into their practice, as indicated in Chapter 4. This may point to a deepening understanding by school districts and provincial governments that providing funding for school-based resources is an important step forward in meeting the goal of embedding Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum and supporting teachers in the classroom.

Cheryl's idea of having lessons that are readily available for teachers to deliver and adjust according to the needs of their students is supported by Kanu's (2011) recommendation that "teachers should develop their own classroom-ready resources that relate to their curriculum units and the specific students and communities in which they teach" (p. 217). Kanu asserted (2011) that although this would be time-consuming, it would create a bank of resources. Within the Delta School District, this work of finding, validating, and creating classroom resources is done by the Indigenous Education department. Teachers can access ready-made grade-specific lesson plans or can connect with district support staff who will come into the classroom and model a lesson or co-teach a lesson and then do a debrief with the classroom teacher.

Study Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, the study was based on a small sample size of six settler teachers. Each teacher had more than 10 years of teaching experience, so the voices of novice teachers were not included. All of the participants volunteered to be interviewed and felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Therefore, they probably had some confidence

with incorporating Indigenous perspectives and content into their practice and also saw this as important work. This study did not include the voices of Indigenous teachers. The participants self-assessed what they considered Indigenous perspectives as well as successful implementation I their practice.

Another limitation of this study is that all participants were from the same school district. The teachers spoke of the wealth of support and resources that they felt they could access through the Delta School District's Indigenous Education department. They all believed that having access to classroom resources including lessons, activities, and support staff had led to an increase in their confidence and ability to incorporate Indigenous perspectives and content into their practice. This is not necessarily the experience of teachers in all school districts. In addition to this study being conducted in only one school district, it was also focused solely on elementary teachers. The experiences of elementary and secondary teachers are very different, as secondary teachers work within a discipline and arguably there is more focus on content delivery. The findings from this study may have differed if it had been conducted with secondary teachers.

Suggestions for Further Research

Although the results of this study are encouraging, more investigation is needed to continue to maximize the learning for teachers and students. This study could be replicated in other school districts, thereby strengthening the impact of the findings and providing a wider overview. The research could also be expanded to include a larger sample size and greater diversity of teachers. It would be useful to interview participants several times over the course of a school year or several years to look at growth in confidence and teaching strategies. Moreover,

it would be valuable to look at what teaching strategies are being used by elementary teachers from various school districts as a way to share ideas and build teacher capacity.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of elementary school teachers working with integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice. It highlighted their successes and challenges and revealed the ways that teachers are engaging with this work. It also provided a snapshot of what this work looks like in a specific elementary school context.

The teachers in this study demonstrate the desire of all educators to meet the needs of their students and also highlight the complexities of integrating Indigenous perspectives. Through the interview questions, teachers were asked to reflect on their teaching experiences. These conversations revealed that the teachers are committed to deepening their own understanding and believe that incorporating Indigenous perspectives and content into the classroom is both challenging and necessary. These are encouraging findings; however, there is much more work to be done. When discussing the challenges of doing this work, Cheryl stated, “I think we have to realize that change isn’t going to come easily or quickly, and I think these are big ideas for students and teachers to deeply understand, but we’ve got to lay the groundwork. It’s all part of reconciliation, right?” To keep all stakeholders in education focused on the importance of this work, let us keep the words of Morcom and Freeman (2018) in our hearts and minds:

The conviction that a fairer, more equitable society benefits the whole and ultimately lifts us all up is necessary to sustain us in this effort. Only then will we be able to build wisdom and speak truth in order to move towards meaningful reconciliation. All of this must be done with love. (p. 830)

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Appendix A – Email to School Administrators

Good Morning Principals,

I am seeking research participants for my thesis study. Could you please post this email to your school First Class. This study has been accepted by the Research Ethics Board (REB) file #101148 at Vancouver Island University as well as the Delta school district.

Sincerely

Jane Cogle

Dear colleagues,

My name is Jane Cogle and I am currently an elementary teacher in the Delta school district and a student in the Master of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). I am looking for research participants for my thesis study. My research is entitled “Integrating Indigenous Perspectives: A study in Elementary Teacher Practice” and aims to explore how teachers in Delta are attempting to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their teaching practice. Through my research, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to decolonize education, the importance of recognizing Indigenous knowledge and provide an informed snap shot of current practices in the Delta school district.

This study will involve a 30-60 minute Zoom interview where I will ask you questions about what you think is working well, identifying experiences where you have felt successful and types of resources that you are finding beneficial. The interview will take place between April and the end of May.

If you are interested in more information and possibly participating please contact me at
xxx@xxx

Thank you for your consideration,

Jane

Appendix B – Recruitment Document

Dear [Participant name]

As you have expressed interest in being a volunteer participant in this study regarding the experiences of elementary school teachers and integrating Indigenous perspectives, I am following up with this Recruitment Document, which provides further details of the study for your consideration. If you have any questions regarding the information in this document, I would be happy to answer them via email. If you are still interested in participating in this study after reading this document, please contact me via the email address below and I will send you a Consent Form.

Sincerely,

Jane Cogle

Title of Study: An Appreciative Inquiry into the experiences of elementary school teachers in the Delta school district integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice

Principal Investigator:

Jane Cogle, Student
Master of Educational Leadership Program
Vancouver Island University
xxx@xxx

Research Supervisor:

Dr. Teresa Farrell
Masters of Education Program
Vancouver Island University
Teresa.Farrell@viu.ca

Purpose

I am a student in the Master of Education in Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University (VIU). My research is entitled “Integrating Indigenous Perspectives: A study in Elementary Teacher Practice” and aims to explore how teachers in the Delta are attempting to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their teaching practice. Through my research, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to decolonize education, the

importance of recognizing Indigenous knowledge and provide an informed snap shot of current practices in the Delta school district.

Description

I would like to ask you if you would be willing to voluntarily participate in a 30–60 minute Zoom interview where you will describe your experiences of integrating Indigenous perspectives and content into your practice. I will ask you questions about what you think is working well, identifying experiences where you felt successful in integrating Indigenous perspectives and what types of resources you are finding beneficial. The interview will be between late April and May. With your permission, the interview would be video recorded on my computer.

If you agree, we will arrange a date and time for the interview. I will email the transcripts of your interview to you and you will have two weeks to review, edit or amend them.

Time requirement

Reading and signing the Consent Form will take 15 minutes and, if you have any questions, an optional email or information Zoom call which could take about 15-30 minutes. The interview will take 30-60 minutes. Reviewing your transcripts once I email them to you may take another hour (you will have two weeks to review or edit them). In total, your voluntary participation in this study may require a total of 2-3 hours of your time over a 6-week period.

Potential risk of harm to participants and strategies to manage risk

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and I intend to keep the identity of all participants confidential by using pseudonyms (fictitious names). Although the interview would be video recorded, I will transcribe the video into text. No one else will see or hear the video. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript and invited to make changes as you wish (e.g.,

if you would like to withdraw a particular statement you made during the interview or add clarifying information). You will have two weeks to review or edit your transcripts and send them to me via email.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study for any reason, without explanation, up to any point until 4 weeks after the interview or when the data analysis/ synthesis phase has begun, approximately mid-June.

I will assign a pseudonym to your data for confidentiality. You will not be named in the products of the research. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided would be withdrawn from the study and destroyed.

Use of Research

The results of this study will be presented in a final thesis required for completion of my degree and may also be used in conference presentations, professional development workshops or may be published in academic journals.

Management of Research Information/Data

My Delta District Zoom account will be used to conduct and record the interview which uses zoom global network data centre in Canada with the server located in Canada. All data associated with our interview and this study will be permanently deleted at the end of the project/thesis approximately end of June 2021. The Delta District Zoom license complies with BC's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act(FOIPPA) more information about Zoom security and Canadian Data Protection regulations can be found at

www.zoom.us/docs/doc/PIPEDA_PHIPA%20Canadian%20Public%20Information%20Compliance%20Guide.pdf

Thank you in advance for your consideration in participating in my research study.

For more information, please contact me, Jane Cogle, at xxx@xxx

Jane Cogle

Appendix C – Consent Form

Title of Study: An Appreciative Inquiry into the experiences of elementary school teachers in the Delta school district integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice

Principal Investigator

Jane Cogle

Masters of Educational Leadership

Vancouver Island University

xxx@xxx

Faculty Supervisor

Dr. Teresa Farrell

Masters of Education Program

Vancouver Island University

Teresa.Farrell@viu.ca

Purpose

I am a student in the Master of Educational Leadership at Vancouver Island University (VIU).

My research, entitled “Integrating Indigenous Perspectives: A Study in Elementary Teacher Practice,” aims to explore how teachers are integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice. This research will inform my practice as a teacher and provided an informed snapshot of current practices in the Delta school district.

This research has been approved by Vancouver Island University’s Research Ethics Board, case #_____ and by the Delta School District 37.

Description

I would like to ask you if you would be willing to voluntarily participate in a 30–60-minute interview over Zoom where you will describe your experiences, feelings and perceptions of your work with integrating Indigenous perspectives into your practice. You will be asked questions

about what is working well for you, identifying experiences where you felt successful in the classroom integrating Indigenous perspectives or content and what types of resources you are finding beneficial. The interview will be in April/May 2021. With your permission, the interview would be video recorded on my computer.

If you agree, we will arrange an interview date and time that works best for you. I will email the transcripts of your interview to you and you will have two weeks to review, edit or amend the transcripts before returning them back to me.

Time requirement

Reviewing the consent form with the option if you would like to email or discuss on Zoom any questions you might have will take 15-30 minutes. Participating in the interview will take 30-60 minutes. Reviewing your transcripts once I email them to you may take another hour (you will have two weeks to review and/or edit them). In total, your voluntary participation in this study may require approximately 2-3 hours of your time over two months between April and May.

Eligibility to Participate

All elementary teachers in Delta are eligible to participate. All participants must be voluntarily willing to share their experiences and perceptions of integrating Indigenous perspectives into their practice.

Potential risk of harm to participants and strategies to manage risk

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and I intend to keep the identity of all participants confidential by using pseudonyms (fictitious names).

As strategies to manage risk, this study is entirely voluntary, your personal identity will not be revealed. With your permission, this interview would be video recorded, and I will transcribe the video into text. No one else will see or hear the video. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript and invited to make changes to your transcript if you wish (e.g., if you would like to withdraw a particular statement you made during the interview or add clarifying information). You will have two weeks to review or edit your transcripts and send them to me via email.

Participation and withdrawal

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study for any reason, without explanation, up to any point until 4 weeks after the interview when the data analysis and synthesis has begun. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all information you provided would be withdrawn and destroyed.

Management of Research Information/Data

Zoom will be used to record the online interview. If you agree, the interview would be recorded using my Delta District Zoom account, which has its data centre and server in Canada. All data derived from the interview will be stored on my password-protected computer. Once the interview on Zoom has taken place and I have transcribed the interview the recording will be deleted. Any hardcopies of transcripts or signed consent forms will be kept in a locked cabinet. All data associated with our interview and this study will be permanently deleted at the end of the study approximately July 2021. The Delta District Zoom license complies with BC's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPPA) more information about Zoom

security and Canadian Data Protection regulations can be found at

www.zoom.us/docs/doc/PIPEDA_PHIPA%20Canadian%20Public%20Information%20Compliance%20Guide.pdf

Use of Research

The results of this study will be presented in a final thesis required for completion of my degree and may also be used in VIU's CREATE conference presentations or may also be used for conference publications, presentations, and published in academic journals. Products of the research will include only aggregate data unless you explicitly consent to be quoted (see checkbox below).

Informed Consent

I have read and understand the information provided above, and hereby consent to participate in this research under the following conditions:

I consent to participate in this research in accordance with the conditions described above.

Yes

No

I consent to being quoted in the products of the research.

Yes

No

I consent to the interview being video recorded using Zoom.

Yes

No

I understand that I can edit my own transcripts, and/or withdraw from the study up to

Yes

No

*the point until 4 weeks after
the interview.*

*I consent to having my
personal identity being made
confidential during the
interview and to being given
a pseudonym*

Yes

No

Participant Name _____ Participant Signature _____

Date _____

I, **Jane Cogle**, promise to adhere to the procedures described in this consent form.

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board at reb@viu.ca or (250) 740-6631.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in my research study.

Jane Cogle

xxx@xxx