The Alberta Journal of Educational Research Vol. 51, No. 1, Spring 2005, 50-68

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Teachers' Perceptions of the Integration of Aboriginal Culture Into the High School Curriculum

Recently activities surrounding the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, content, and perspectives into the school curriculum have increased in an attempt to increase school success and retention among Aboriginal students. But how do public schoolteachers, mainly non-Aboriginal and belonging to Canadian mainstream culture, perceive this integration? An ethnographic study conducted among 10 teachers from three public high schools revealed that although there was an expressed openness to the integration of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum, in practice little or only moderate headway is being made. What teachers integrated, how they integrated it, and what they perceived as challenges to, and facilitators of, integration are discussed in this article. Based on the research findings, 10 recommendations are made to guide policy and practice in the integration of Aboriginal perspectives.

L'intégration dans le programme d'études d'un contenu autochtone impliquant des connaissances et des perspectives culturelles, s'est intensifiée ces derniers temps. Cette tentative vise à améliorer la performance scolaire des élèves autochtones et les maintenir aux études. Comment les enseignants dans les écoles publiques, qui sont majoritairement non-autochtones et membres de la culture canadienne dominante, perçoivent-ils cette intégration? Une étude ethnographique auprès de 10 enseignants dans trois écoles secondaires publiques a révélé que même s'ils manifestent une ouverture quant à l'intégration au programme d'études des connaissances et des perspectives autochtones, dans la pratique, peu de progrès sont réalisés dans ce domaine. Cet article porte sur le matériel que les enseignants ont intégré et comment ils l'ont fait. De plus, on y discute les points de vue des enseignants sur les éléments qui se dressent comme obstacles à l'intégration et ceux qui en facilitent la mise en œuvre. S'appuyant sur les résultats de la recherche, on présente dix recommandations offrant des lignes directrices pour les politiques et les pratiques dans l'intégration de perspectives autochtones.

Research Background

Studies have consistently explained the persistent failure of Aboriginal students in the Canadian public school system in terms of the differences between the sociocultural environments of their homes and those of the school (Battiste, 1998; Caillou, 1998). Particularly in the case of urban Aboriginal students among whom the highest incidence of school dropout has been reported (65%-68%, Manitoba Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat, 2002, cited in Rubenstein & Clifton, 2004), the lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives in the school curriculum and among teachers, 94% of whom are non-Aboriginal and belong to the dominant-culture (English or French), has been identified as a significant factor in school failure, prompting calls for the inclusion of Aboriginal cultural perspectives across school curricula and teacher education

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programs (Binda, 2001; McAlpine, 2001; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). These calls have produced an increase in research and publications on pertinent issues such as the specific aspects of Aboriginal cultural knowledge to be included in order to enhance and support classroom learning for Aboriginal students, and the most effective ways that dominant-culture teachers can integrate such cultural knowledge into their teaching of the regular curricula of urban public schools (Kanu, 2002; Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2003).

Needed, however, are studies and publications on teachers' perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum. In studies of curricular reforms and innovations involving change in experienced teachers' practices (e.g., an innovation such as the integration of Aboriginal materials, perspectives, and pedagogical practices into the teaching of existing curricula) teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about the change have been identified as the crucial factor that can make or break the innovation (Calderhead, 1987; Day, Calderhead, & Denicolo, 1993; Guskey, 1985; Kanu, 1995).

So far, little research has been done focusing on teachers' perceptions of curricular innovations as most researchers have continued to focus on students' responses to innovations (Grant, 2001). This study, undertaken to investigate teachers' perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal culture into the regular school curriculum, addresses part of the current knowledge gap in this aspect of Canadian public education.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in sociocultural theories of cognition and learning, radical multicultural theories of education, and psychological theories that probe the relationship between teachers' internal constructs and their external behaviors.

Sociocultural theories of cognition propose a link between the development of children's thinking, communication, learning and motivational styles and the culture into which they are socialized, the thesis being that an intimate connection exists between culture and student learning (Ramirez & Castenada, 1974; Vygotsky, 1981; Wertsch, 1991; Winzer & Mazurek, 1998). Winzer and Mazurek, for example, have argued that children's conceptual frameworks (i.e., their learning and thinking processes) are deeply embedded in their own cultures and that difficulties in classroom learning and interactions arise when there is a mismatch between a child's culture and the culture of the teacher and the classroom, setting up that child for failure if the school or the teacher is not sensitive to the special needs of that child. Therefore, sociocultural theorists of education strongly argue for the inclusion of the learner's culture as the entry point of the teaching-learning process. *Inclusion,* however, has been interpreted and practiced by teachers as occasionally adding nondominant-cultural perspectives to the school curriculum, leading radical multicultural theorists to advocate for full integration (meaning infusion throughout the school curriculum) to support more fully the learning of nondominant-culture students and maximize their chances of school success (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2000). Radical multiculturalists also crucially draw on critical race theory (CRT) and on an anti-racism discursive framework to analyze and explain minority student underachievement and to make proposals for meaningful educational reform. CRT focuses on the effects of race and racism and on challenging the hegemonic hold of White supremacy on the meritocratic system, the intent being to bring about change in the form of social justice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Two tenets of CRT are of particular interest to radical multicultural theorists and to this article. These are *interest convergence* and *critique of liberalism*. Interest convergence refers to those concessions that majority-culture Whites offer to the extent that such concessions do not constitute a major disruption to the self-interests of Whites and their "normal" way of life (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Critique of liberalism challenges two liberal notions—the notion of *color-blindness* in the dispensation of the law, rights, and opportunities, and the notion of *incremental change* where gains for marginalized groups come at a slow pace palatable for those in power who are "less likely to be affected by oppressive and marginalizing conditions" (p. 29). Critical race theorists and radical multiculturalists have mounted vigorous challenges to the notions of color blindness and incremental change on the ground that they ignore race-based policies that promote societal inequity.

A corollary of CRT is an anti-racism discursive framework that acknowledges the role of the education system in the production and reproduction of racial, gender, and social and class-based inequalities (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997). It interrogates the institutional structures of teaching, learning, educational administration, and the interactions between local communities and these structures and argues for a connection between students' identities and schooling processes.

Whether public school teachers embrace the innovation of full integration as proposed by sociocultural and radical multicultural theorists will depend on how they (teachers) perceive the process, for psychological studies have suggested that teachers' internal constructs (e.g., beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, conceptions, personality traits) are strong predictors of external behaviors (Agne, Greenwood, & Miller, 1994; Rose & Medway, 1981). This suggests the need to study these antecedents and their effects on actual teaching behaviors, especially in the light of Day et al.'s (1993) finding that when what teachers perceive as challenges and obstacles to curriculum reform are addressed, the chances for reform being successfully implemented are significantly increased.

Research Methods and Procedures

The major question that this study investigated was: What are teachers' perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the teaching of the Manitoba high school curriculum? Subsidiary questions guiding the exploration of this major question were: What are teachers' beliefs/views about the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum? What are the reasons for these beliefs/views? Do teachers currently integrate Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the teaching of their school subjects? If so, what do they integrate and how do they integrate? What do teachers perceive as facilitators of, and challenges/impediments, to the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives and how can these challenges be addressed? Are there important differences among teachers in their perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge?

Research participants consisted of 10 teachers from three Winnipeg inner-city high schools with a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and predominantly dominant-culture teachers. Nine of the teachers belonged to one of Canada's two dominant cultural groups (English), and each has taught social studies and English language arts (ELA) for over 10 years. One teacher was Aboriginal (Ojibwe) and has taught ELA for five years and Native awareness for two years. All 10 teachers had been identified by their colleagues and their school principals as integrating Aboriginal perspectives in their classrooms. Also participating in the study from the margin (because he was not a certificated classroom teacher) was an Aboriginal community liaison worker hired by the school division to serve as "the bridge" connecting schools with the Aboriginal community, providing cultural teachings, resources, and information and generally supporting at-risk Aboriginal students in the school division.

A disproportionately high number of dominant-culture teachers participated in the study because, as mentioned above, they constitute the vast majority of public schoolteachers and their perceptions and views about the integration initiative have not been investigated. However, Aboriginal voices are important to the integration process; therefore, two Aboriginal participants were purposely included in order to have their perspectives on the research questions and the issues under investigation. By voice, I mean a community's perspective on how to improve its economic, social, and political conditions through improved schooling practices that have the potential to enhance the chances of success for its members.

Qualitative research methodology—specifically, ethnography (Miles & Huberman, 1994)—was employed for this research. Multiple data collection methods were employed in the study as follows.

1. *Classroom observations.* Over six months (January-June 2003), a total of 54 classroom observations focusing on teaching processes and interactions were carried out by the research team (consisting of the principal investigator and two Aboriginal graduate research assistants) in social studies, ELA, and Native awareness classrooms ranging from grade 9 through grade 12. Separately, the research team wrote field notes, which were compared later for inter-researcher reliability.
2. *Teachers' journals.* The teachers in the study were asked to keep journals where they wrote their reflections on the integration processes, focusing on what they were learning from these processes, what they perceived as resource or support needs and facilitators of and challenges or impediments to integration. The field notes and journal entries were used later as materials for open-ended interviews with the teachers about their perceptions of the integration process.
3. *Interviews.* The interview protocol probed salient issues observed in the classrooms and identified by the teachers as important to understanding their views/perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge into the school curriculum.

Data analysis was ongoing during the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were examined to discern what was being said about the research questions and the teachers' overall perceptions of the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Once identified, key dimensions of these data were coded using a coding system developed collaboratively by the research team and then organized into themes based mainly on the research questions. Drawing on aspects of the study's theoretical underpinnings, interpretive and analytical comments on each theme, supported by quotes from the teachers' journals and the interviews, were written and returned to the research participants for comments, changes, and/or confirmation before writing them as research reports. Where teachers are quoted, pseudonyms are used to protect their identity. The teachers are referred to as Dan, Tim, James, Ann (the Aboriginal teacher), Nick, Mike, Neil, Ted, and Arnie (the Aboriginal liaison worker).

Findings and Discussions

Theme 1: Teachers' beliefs about integration and reasons for these beliefs

All 10 teachers in the study believed that the integration of Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum was absolutely crucial for the following reasons.

A rich body of Aboriginal cultural knowledge, values, and contributions needed to be learned and understood by others; curriculum and learning have to be culturally relevant for all students, not only students from the dominant cultures; the integration of Aboriginal perspectives would greatly improve how Aboriginal students felt about themselves and their backgrounds (e.g., Doug observed, "Aboriginal students are the only cultural group in my class who hide their identity"); integration may lead to school success and school retention among Aboriginal students; Canada is a multicultural democracy where everyone should be fully included and represented; a good number of students, including a high proportion of Aboriginal students, do not have adequate knowledge of the issues affecting Aboriginal lives: the school would provide the opportunity for complex analyses of these issues, compared with the so-called authentic and accurate representations of Aboriginal peoples that students heard at home or on the media.

Because of these beliefs, the teachers reported that on their own they had collected Aboriginal curriculum materials, paid guest speakers, and attended workshops on Aboriginal education to increase their understanding of this group.

Undoubtedly not all teachers are able to make this move. The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies (2003) posits that teachers who embark on the journey of integration often credit some sort of transformational experience for helping them acquire the interest and the desire to improve their teaching. Transformational experiences are "those by which the individual operates, evaluates, and makes decisions" (p. 22). For the non-Aboriginal teachers in this study the move to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into their curricula and classroom teaching was clearly due to transformational experiences. For example, James wrote in his journal:

> It hit me a few years ago.... We had judge Murray Sinclair (an Aboriginal) in our school a couple of years ago, and he told us that in the not very far future,

> one out of every five people living in Winnipeg is going to be Native in one way or another. So I mean, if that's true and that's coming, it's kind of amazing that it doesn't get more attention in the school system.

For Tim and Dan the transformation came about as a result of years of teaching the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, according to which "everyone is supposed to be included and everyone is supposed to be equal, and that's still not true ... it certainly isn't necessarily true in the case of the Aboriginal community." Clearly these data suggest the need for studies that investigate catalytic ways of encouraging this process of transformation for more teachers.

It was important to explore the current beliefs/views of teachers regarding integration because, as the psychological studies cited above suggest, these internal constructs and prior conceptions can serve as barriers to change as well as provide frameworks for interpreting and assessing new and potentially conflicting information and ideas. Conceptual change theory (Strike & Posner, 1985) suggests that changing teachers' beliefs depends on their recognizing discrepancies between their own views and those underlying new visions of teaching and learning. The dominant-culture teachers in this study have described why new practices in Aboriginal education and their associated values are better than conventional approaches. This provides an important insight into one of the conditions that is likely to influence teachers toward the integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the public school system.

Theme 2: Teachers' understandings of, and approaches to, integration

Although the teachers generally supported the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum, clear differences emerged among them in how they understood and approached integration. To make sense of these differences, I turned to Banks' (1989) typology of teachers' engagement of the inclusion of multicultural perspectives in the classroom. Banks identifies four approaches to the inclusion of multicultural perspectives observed among teachers: (a) the contributions approach, where the focus is on teaching students about the contributions made by each cultural group; (b) the additive approach, where content, concepts, and perspectives from other cultures are occasionally added to a curriculum that remains largely Eurocentric; (c) the transformational approach where curriculum topics are taught from multiple perspectives; and (d) the social action approach, where based on the transformational approach, students are encouraged to take action for social change.

In this study, participants' understandings and approaches to integration spanned Banks' (1989) first three categories, whereas the fourth approach was not addressed either in their classrooms or in their responses to the interview questions. To varying degrees teachers moved between the contributions, additive, and transformational approaches depending on their social locations and the topics they were teaching. By far the most consistent use of the transformational approach was exemplified by Ann, the Aboriginal teacher, who understood integration as the infusion of Aboriginal content/perspectives into every aspect of the school curriculum and teaching one's subject from several perspectives: "I teach kids from several different backgrounds.... My literature circles work because we study a huge amount of books from America, the Caribbean, traditional European texts, Spanish novels, Aboriginal literature."

Ann's transformational approach was further exemplified by several behaviors, attitudes and activities observed in her classroom. There were prominent displays of Aboriginal cultural artifacts, posters and flyers about Aboriginal events on classroom walls and bulletin boards, vibrant discussions of books and other publications by Aboriginal and international authors, the use of sharing circles, Aboriginal guest speakers, and culturally sensitive assessment strategies (e.g., students were observed choosing class projects based on their cultural strengths and experiences), consistent inclusion of positive content materials about Aboriginal peoples and other ethnic groups, and demonstration of respect and warmth toward students.

By contrast, the dominant-culture teachers tended to adopt mainly Bank's (1989) additive and contributions approaches to integration. Although these teachers were unanimous in their agreement that the social studies curriculum was assimilating Aboriginal students through omission or token additions of Aboriginal perspectives, they unwittingly contributed to this process of assimilation by allowing the curriculum topics, not Aboriginal issues/perspectives, to remain at the center of their teaching. The teachers perceived integration as occasionally adding Aboriginal perspectives, where convenient, to a curriculum that remained largely Eurocentric. On average, each teacher had integrated Aboriginal perspectives into the social studies curriculum only six times over the entire academic year.

Classroom observations and the interviews revealed that when teachers integrated, videos on disparate Aboriginal topics were the most common resource used (e.g., in all three schools the video *Black Robe* was often observed to be shown in grade 11 social studies classrooms when teachers taught the unit on Europeans' first contact with Aboriginal peoples, and the video series *Daughters of the Country* was used to teach about the contributions of Aboriginal women to the fur trade). In one school a grade 11 social studies teacher identified the news media as an occasional educational resource (e.g., "I discuss current Aboriginal issues with my class whenever they come up on the news"), and another claimed to engage his students occasionally in content analyses of old textbooks either to point out omissions of Aboriginal perspectives or to discuss stereotypical images of Aboriginal peoples in the books. Some teachers reported drawing on Aboriginal community members as an educational resource whenever possible (e.g., as guest speakers in their classroom), but regretted that the pool of available community members known to them was limited.

Informal conversations with representative groups of non-Aboriginal students from each of the grade 11 social studies classrooms where these "integrations" were being carried out revealed that these activities had little or no effect on the students in terms of either how they perceived Aboriginal students or of moving them toward interrogation of power structures in society. Their frames of reference remained firmly fixed within their own vantage points, confirming Britzman, Valles, Muñoz, and Lamash's (1993) position that in multicultural education, teachers need to move beyond a belief that "rationality leads to sensitivity" or better attitudes.

It was revealing that professional vulnerability and isolation were reported by many of the teachers as a reason why they did not integrate Aboriginal perspectives as much as they would like to. For example, referring to his social studies class, Dan said, "It's not a Natives studies class, and I have students from other cultures in the class, not just Aboriginal students. I can integrate Aboriginal perspectives only so much without getting into trouble with the other kids and perhaps with the administration."

Overall, what emerged from the data presented in this section was that although there was an expressed openness among the teachers to include Aboriginal perspectives in the school curriculum, in practice little headway was being made except for a few unique cases such as Ann. Applying a CRT framework to the analysis and interpretation of these data, the liberal incremental factor becomes quite evident. The dominant-culture teachers' additive and contributions approaches to the integration of Aboriginal perspectives, their limited use of Aboriginal-centered resources and activities that appeared to have no effect on how non-Aboriginal students viewed Aboriginal students, and their reasons for not integrating Aboriginal perspectives more consistently are all indicators of a token commitment to integration. They are actions that ensure that curricular reform in this area "would not be sweeping and immediate" and that guarantee that the integration of Aboriginal perspectives, if it happens at all, would not happen quickly but "incrementally and superficially" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29).

Theme 3: Perceptions of Challenges to Integration

The interviews and journal entries revealed several issues that the teachers perceived as challenges to meaningful integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into their teaching of the school curriculum. These issues can be described as: teachers' own lack of knowledge about Aboriginal cultures; the lack of Aboriginal classroom resources; the racist attitudes of non-Aboriginal staff and students; school administrators' lukewarm support for integration; and incompatibility between school structures and some Aboriginal cultural values.

Teachers' lack of knowledge. Topping the teachers' list of challenges was their own lack of the Aboriginal cultural knowledge and understanding required for effective integration. The non-Aboriginal (dominant-culture) teachers repeatedly mentioned their lack of knowledge about Aboriginal content, topics, or issues about the cultural backgrounds and other characteristics of their Aboriginal students and about Aboriginal cultural ways of learning. Lack of familiarity with Aboriginal approaches to teaching and learning was reported to be a particularly serious impediment to integration because it meant that these teachers did not have the pedagogical content knowledge (i.e., the useful forms of knowledge representation, analogies, illustrations, and examples from Aboriginal culture) to make the curriculum comprehensible to their Aboriginal students. This seriously compromised teachers' ability to act as "cultural brokers" (Stairs, cited in Aikenhead & Huntley, 1999) able to negotiate and move back and forth between the two cultures (Aboriginal culture and the teachers' own culture) and help students deal with cultural conflicts that might arise.

A significant question arising from these data, however, is whether the dominant-culture teachers' lack of knowledge was simply a passive lack of information or in part an active resistance to the difficult knowledge of cultural differences arising routinely in educational encounters between white, middle-class, Euro-Canadian teachers and their ethnic minority-culture students such as Aboriginal students. As McPherson (in press) has noted, encounters with difference can generate an uncomfortable sense of strangeness and estrangement between teacher and students, and so dissonant knowledge tends to be subverted by the ideal of ignorance of its existence and the promise of cultural reproduction embedded in such an ideal.

For Ann, the Aboriginal teacher in the study, the lack of expertise in Aboriginal ways posed challenges that sometimes left her vulnerable and uncertain. She reported that when she integrated certain aspects of her Ojibwe culture into her teaching or when she was called on as the expert to deal with some trauma having to do with an Aboriginal student, she was not always sure if she was doing things correctly:

> I don't always know if I am doing things right ... There's lots of rules, lots of protocols about specific times that you don't do certain things and that you do certain things ... Now if there was a Native elder here to guide me and say "this will be the protocol," then I'll feel more secure. (Ann).

On the few occasions when participation from the Aboriginal community had been invited, the knowledge of those invited had been denigrated and treated with disrespect by the school. Ann referred to the conflict and struggle over knowledge that ensued when the participation of Aboriginal elders and parents was invited by her school:

> We had this huge struggle over how we were going to host the pow-wow. I mean, we had the (Aboriginal) parents wanting it done a certain way, we had the teachers having another idea about how it should be done.... I am really excited about our Aboriginal parent council. It seems like a very empowered group but we need to keep them empowered. We need to act on their voice as if it has meaning. I have seen (White) parents come to this school and make changes happen in this school, individual parents, and I would like to see our Aboriginal parents have that power. I don't feel our Aboriginal parents are as collectively heard as other parents. (Ann)

Viewed through the lens of an anti-racism discursive framework, the suppression of Aboriginal voice and agency (i.e., individuals' empowerment and abilities to affect their environment and act on their own behalf) from integration initiatives in Ann's school constitutes what Scheurich and Young (1997) have called *epistemological racism,* the tendency by the West to marginalize the world views of minorities and people of color, thus excluding them from selfhood and by definition political self-representation. As Goldberg (1993) aptly put it, "The universal claims of Western knowledge, then, colonial or postcolonial, turn necessarily upon the deafening suppression of its various racialized others into silence" (p. 151).

Particularly distressing for the two Aboriginal research participants was public school teachers' and school administrators' lack of knowledge about what they (the Aboriginal participants) perceived as the real issues causing school failure and dropout among Aboriginal students who leave their communities to live and study in urban centers. Some of these issues were identified as: economic poverty, homesickness and missing families and cultural traditions; strict boarding home rules; absence of families in the cities; drug and alcohol abuse in families; pregnancy or becoming a father; racism; parental worries over their kids in the big cities; death and other important events in the family; preference for life in the North; and difficult school courses delivered in non-Aboriginal languages (usually English or French). According to Ann, "These are the real issues. It is difficult, if not impossible to integrate these aspects of Aboriginal culture into the school curriculum and yet they are the important reasons why these kids fail or drop out."

As radical multicultural and anti-racism theorists have argued, school structures and processes do create unequal opportunities and differential outcomes particularly for racial/cultural minority students and students from low-income families (Curtis, Livingstone, & Smaller, 1992; Dei et al., 1997). However, it is evident from the multiplicity of complex issues presented by the Aboriginal research participants that addressing the problem of school failure and dropout among Aboriginal students requires a multi-pronged approach that goes far beyond the reform of school structures and the simple injection into the curriculum of selected Aboriginal topics and perspectives into macro political, social, and economic structures as they affect Aboriginal lives.

Accompanying the teachers' lack of knowledge base was their lack of confidence, due to not having what they called the right to teach Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Ann felt that because of her relatively young age (mid 30s), inexperience, and lack of authority about certain aspects of Aboriginal culture, she had not earned the right to teach certain Aboriginal practices. The 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. Comments such the following were common during the interviews: "Who am I to be teaching Aboriginal culture to Aboriginal kids?" (Nick); "I feel like a fraud" (Ted); "Do I have the right to be teaching about these issues? Perhaps as a teacher, yes; but as a non-Aboriginal person, I'm not sure" (Doug).

The point being raised here has been the subject of much bitter debate about whether outsiders are taking possession of the knowledge of formerly colonized peoples just as Europeans once took possession of their countries (Johnston, 2003). Taken to its inevitable conclusion, such an argument indicates that the only culture one can study or teach about is one's own. However, trends in cultural theory have argued against such a stance and suggested that in cross-cultural situations, we need to move away completely from metaphors of *possession* of culture toward a consideration of cultural encounters as a new scene of learning (Dasenbrock, 1992). The evidence from this research suggests the need for teachers to make this move and consider the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives as a new scene of learning.

Lack of resources. The lack of Aboriginal resources, particularly classroom-appropriate materials for students' use, was often cited as the second most important challenge to integration. Often appropriate Aboriginal content is not part of the mandated curriculum, and eight of the non-Aboriginal teachers in this study referred to the unavailability of relevant Aboriginal curriculum resources as a problem. For example, the teachers pointed out that most curriculum materials available on the Internet were relevant to Native American students in the United States, not Canadian Aboriginal students.

Lack of available funds to pay for the services of Aboriginal community members or elders as an educational resource, coupled with the fact that the teachers did not personally know these community elders, were also cited as a challenge to integration. For example, Neil said, "I don't know these people personally. I don't know who has the expertise and the authority to speak in my class ... I think that's a problem for many of us."

Professional development workshops or meetings on Aboriginal education were generally not considered a helpful educational resource because "The workshops are typically run on weekdays when we are in class ... and there is no funding to bring in substitute teachers for us to attend" (Neil).

Further, the blame-and-victimization approach of many of these educational workshops, conferences, and meetings was reported as a turn-off for many non-Aboriginal teachers:

> If it (workshop/meeting/conference) is proactive, you can see that it's got a purpose. At one meeting we asked, "What can we do to help?" And they told us about how the land was stolen 300 years ago and it's the white people's fault, etc. And you know what, it turned quite a few people off, a few people like me. (James)

Emerging here is an ahistorical view of integration among the dominant-culture teachers who seemed reluctant to see the relevance of history to a fuller understanding of the issues to be integrated into the curriculum. By describing any reference to the origins of some of today's Aboriginal problems/issues as a blame-and-victimization approach, and by proposing a proactive approach that left these issues unexamined, the teachers were undercutting the specific historical and cultural struggle that should be a part of any particular life in the present. The two Aboriginal participants in the study insisted that this history—"this return to the past to go forward"—must be brought to deliberations about integrating Aboriginal perspectives.

Racism. Racist attitudes of dominant-cultural groups were also identified as posing a challenge to integration. Teachers reported a perception among some teachers and school administrators that integration is not relevant to majority-culture students and is, therefore, not worth spending money or resources on. For example, Doug said, "There is a feeling out there that we have nothing to learn from Aboriginal people, and this is simply not true."

Overwhelmingly the teachers identified racist, stereotypical images of Aboriginal peoples held by some of their non-Aboriginal colleagues and students as a most difficult challenge. For example, James reported, "The anger and resentment are sometimes palpable. They always feel these people (Aboriginals) are getting something for free."

These negative stereotypical images of Aboriginal peoples were cited by all the teachers as the main reason why Aboriginal students tended to deny their Aboriginal ancestry or identity and disconnect themselves from Aboriginal culture, a phenomenon that poses a major challenge to integration. This finding is supported by Aikenhead and Huntley's (1999) study in which teachers reported a similar disconnect among Aboriginal students when they (teachers) attempted to incorporate Aboriginal cultural knowledge in science classes in Saskatchewan.

The challenge for schools, it seems, is to find ways of integrating Aboriginal traditional values and knowledge that enable students to feel connected to their Aboriginal culture even as they acquire the knowledge and codes of the dominant culture through the school curriculum.

School administrators' lukewarm support for integration. Participants perceived their schools' or school divisions' support for integration as lukewarm and inconsistent, with integration defined as the infusion of Aboriginal perspectives into all school structures and activities (e.g., Nick said, "The rhetoric certainly exists but full commitment to integration still has to be seen"). The teachers spoke about their schools' additive approach of "introducing initiatives here and there without the commitment to effectively support and sustain these initiatives on a long-term basis." For example, Ann commended her school for introducing Native Awareness as an elective course open to all students in the school, but regretted that only 30 minutes of instructional time per week had been assigned to the course compared with other courses that were scheduled for 50 minutes three or more times per week, and that only a handful of non-Aboriginal students were taking this class.

Another case in point was the lack of sustainable funding for the position of Aboriginal community liaison workers or for hiring Aboriginal elders as an educational resource. During our interviews, Arnie (the liaison worker) expressed his frustration over the position and status of liaison workers:

> The position of Aboriginal community liaison officer was created five years ago in this school division. There are 16 schools in the division but only three liaison officers. They are the lowest paid, are given no authority by the school and are forever running around, not providing cultural teaching and information as they are supposed to, but dealing with traumas and disciplinary problems among Aboriginal students in the schools.... No wonder the officers quit so often. I am the third one here in only five years.

Further, Arnie reported that when a liaison worker was invited into a classroom it was done at the discretion of the teacher. It was the teacher who decided when the liaison worker should visit the class and what to talk about. Arnie said,

> I have so much more I can teach here—Aboriginal cultural dances, stories and arts—but I am not given the opportunity. I once asked the principal if I was just a token hire and she said, "No, we need you." But I do not feel valued here.

The interest conversion factor in CRT, rather than any meaningful commitment, is what emerges from these descriptions of school administrators' support for integration. In human capital terms, Aboriginals are the fastest growing population in Canada; therefore, school dropout among them would not only reduce their potential as a tax base, labor pool, and a critical mass with economic clout, but also they would become an economic burden on the society. For these reasons schools are under pressure from the White majoritarian culture and federal and provincial governments to integrate Aboriginal culture/perspectives to enhance opportunities for academic success among Aboriginal students. Clearly the demands on schools to create such opportunities converge with the economic self-interests of White elites who also want these opportunities offered in ways that do not disrupt or dismantle their "normal" hold over the education system—hence, for example, the token hiring of a limited number of Aboriginal liaison workers who concurrently serve the school's own interests by being deployed to deal with trauma and disciplinary problems among Aboriginal students that the school cannot deal with. These self-interests of White society and those of the school converge with Aboriginal desires for the school education of their children to be grounded in Aboriginal cultural realities. Evidently the token approaches to Aboriginal cultural integration observed in the classrooms and described by the teachers in this study suggest that these desires will not be quickly fulfilled. In fact since our interviews with the teachers, the Native awareness course and the position of Aboriginal liaison worker in Ann's school have been shut down.

Incompatibility between school structures and Aboriginal cultural values/practices. The two Aboriginal participants in the study pointed out that schools as currently structured posed difficult challenges to the integration of some Aboriginal cultural values and practices into the school curriculum. Three incompatibilities between school structures and Aboriginal culture were cited as examples: (a) incompatibility between schools' rigid approach to dealing with time and Aboriginal people's more flexible view of time; (b) incompatibility between schools' large classes and Aboriginal teaching methods such as the talking circle; and (c) incompatibility between the regimentation of the classroom experience and Aboriginal people's cultural value of noninterference in childrearing practices in some Aboriginal communities (noninterference means refraining from directly criticizing an individual or attempting to control the behavior of others by direct intervention). Ann spoke at length about what she called "the tyranny of time" and how clock time controlled everything in Western culture to the extent that people did not listen to their bodies or their emotional and spiritual needs, and how this contributed to the problem of school attendance and punctuality for some Aboriginal students.

> The way that our school system runs is one of the most oppressive, timed structures that you're going to find ... this is appalling to Aboriginal peoples.... Umm, it is believed by Aboriginal peoples, and even by some Europeans, to be an incredibly oppressive culture in the way we control people through time, and the way we expect people to get up at times when their bodies cannot cope with getting up.... We don't listen to our physical needs; we don't listen to our spiritual and emotional needs; we don't listen to our bodies.... And so Aboriginal people will not be controlled by time. They will not be, and the other side doesn't get it. Our culture is barbaric in the way it runs on time scheduling and I believe it's ill-nurturing to the intellect, to the emotional and spiritual well-being of our people.
>
> So these (Aboriginal) kids have issues to deal with, like a death in the family. They need time to grieve, to recuperate and so they don't show up in school for some time. What happens if they don't show up for math class every single day? They're behind and you might as well forget it.... They're too lost and that's considered their fault because they don't show up, and every year we keep plunking them into grade 9 math ... and then after three years of doing that, they sit in the halls and do nothing or stop showing up altogether. You

> want to integrate Aboriginal culture, these are the issues you need to consider. (Ann)

As a solution to the problem of school attendance and punctuality among Aboriginal students, Ann suggested a flexible and modular approach to course scheduling, something she described as working in a mixed school located in the Greater Winnipeg area, with a high population of Aboriginal students:

> I talked with the people from Portage High School (pseudonym), and they have a system.... They run their English, math, and social studies courses as modules for two or three months at a time, and they teach each course two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon.... And if you cannot be there in the morning you can attend in the afternoon ... so you'll have all these chances.

Ann went on to propose another flexible alternative to current class scheduling:

> Like in my grade 12 ELA and Native Awareness classes ... you have kids that come every single day; but for others who do not, we can do independent stuff (study). We can say "come in and pick up this book and try to read it at home." I mean, one Aboriginal girl in my ELA class, very bright girl, was getting 80%. But what happened with this girl? ... Umm, her boyfriend who was incarcerated was let out, came back, moved into the house, brought his alcohol with him, brought all the trauma back ... and in about a month, her whole studies went whoosh. I kept with her, I kept phoning her. We were so close to graduation; there was only one more book to cover. So she finally came and picked up the book ... and she read it at home, came back and we had a big, long discussion about it, right? So I try to be flexible that way and I know some of the other teachers do, and that's looking at things from an Aboriginal perspective.

We spoke about the Aboriginal cultural value of noninterference and how dominant-culture teachers found it difficult to understand and practice this value in dealing with students. I learned that the principle of noninterference meant the child's will is respected and that the imposition of the adult's will on the child is considered inappropriate except, of course, in instances where the child may encounter immediate harm. This noninterference and nondirective approach determines a basis for a future lifestyle. Children mature rapidly and become adept at determining their own actions and making decisions while being sensitive to the expectations of the collective and elders (Kanu, in press). This principle is still prevalent in some Aboriginal communities. Formal (Western) schooling, on the other hand, is seen as a confrontational and adversarial system where students' ideas and behaviors are directly challenged and criticized or critiqued, often in the public arena of the classroom. According to Ann, this drives the Aboriginal students away from the system. She provided an example: "For instance, when students do class presentations and they are critiqued in front of their peers, that is not comfortable for some Aboriginal students."

A final example of incompatibility cited was that between school structures such as large classes (over 20 students) with fixed time schedules for each class period (usually 40-50 minutes) and the use of Aboriginal teaching methods such as the talking or discussion circle. Ann explained:

> In the circle you speak when you're ready and you speak for as long as you like, you are not timed. But how can you have, say, a literature circle with 30 students and only 50 minutes of scheduled class time? Will everyone have time to speak? It's a real challenge.

Theme 4: Facilitators of Integration

What did teachers perceive as facilitators of meaningful integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge? They strongly believed that the key to successful integration was the strengthening of teachers' *professional efficacy*. Professional efficacy refers to security in the professional knowledge base that teachers need in order to be able to implement the integration of Aboriginal cultural perspectives into the curriculum (e.g., knowledge about Aboriginal culture, topics, and issues and knowledge about effective pedagogical strategies that are successful with particular Aboriginal students). Such professional efficacy, teachers believed, could be achieved through both initial teacher training and professional development opportunities for practicing teachers.

Next, teachers saw resource adequacy as integral to the effective integration of Aboriginal perspectives. Dan, for example, remarked:

> Right now, I am doing the unit on "Canadian government" with my grade 11s and I would like to incorporate Native government as much as possible—how the Natives governed themselves before European contact, and where they are currently going with Aboriginal self-government. But I still cannot find student-level materials for use on this topic.

CAAS (2003), however, has pointed out that simply making resources available to teachers did not ensure that they understood the materials or used them in their classrooms. This suggests the need for help through *professional development opportunities* for teachers unfamiliar with Aboriginal cultures and histories, so that appropriate materials and the contexts in which to use them can be identified. Unanimously the teachers in this study perceived this type of professional development as a critical factor in the preparation of teachers for their role as cultural brokers and curriculum integrators.

Sustainable funding that would enable teachers to draw on the Aboriginal community as an educational resource, coupled with *respect for and recognition of* the expertise of such resource persons by teachers and school administrators, were also cited as potential facilitators of integration, as were *support and leadership from school administrators*. The data suggested that the teachers fully expected their school divisions and school principals to act as leaders and catalysts for integration.

Mentioned by all the teachers in the study was the need for *change in school culture* for integration to succeed. Fullan (1993, 2001) has observed that curriculum interventions tend to leave the basic policies and practices of schools unchanged, often ignoring the fact that changes in the core culture of teaching require major transformation in the culture of the school. From the teachers' descriptions of school administrators' lukewarm support for integration, the absence of interest in and enthusiasm for integration among most dominant-culture teachers in their schools, the sporadic resource support for integration initiatives, and the additive approaches to integration observed among teachers and school administration, it appears that changes are needed in the cultures of schools if integration is not to remain empty rhetoric. This suggests the need for quality research aimed at understanding the school contexts where integration is to occur so as to gain insights into the forces at work in the schools, identify the impediments to change, and use the information as the foundation from which discussion and focused change can begin.

Recommendations

This study is important because its results will significantly help policymakers and educators to plan approaches to Aboriginal cultural integration informed by teachers' perceptions of such integration. Based on the data collected and analyzed, the following top 10 recommendations are proposed for guiding successful integration.

- Schools and faculties of education should provide opportunities for all teachers, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal alike, to learn about Aboriginal culture, issues, and perspectives. This is best done through preservice teacher education programs and in schools, through professional development opportunities for practicing teachers and the utilization of the expertise of Aboriginal community members. In both routes, priority should be given to educating teachers about Aboriginal issues, Aboriginal pedagogical practices and social interaction patterns, particular ways that varying groups of Aboriginal students best learn, background knowledge about Aboriginal students in teachers' classrooms, and support systems for Aboriginal student learning in the public school system.
- Schools should provide support that enables practicing teachers to take advantage of educational opportunities pertaining to Aboriginal culture (e.g., provide release time and financial support to enable teachers to attend workshops that typically fall on weekdays when teachers are teaching). This may prove effective in preparing teachers for their role as cultural brokers and curriculum integrators.
- Curriculum development units and schools should provide teachers with easy access to Aboriginal resources for classroom use. As Aikenhead and Huntley (1999) have suggested, teachers who want to help Aboriginal students to succeed in school through the integration of Aboriginal culture and perspectives into the school curriculum must not be undermined by a lack of instructional resources.
- Curriculum development units must include Aboriginal culture, content, issues, topics, and perspectives as an integral part of the school curriculum in every subject area. By substantially withholding the cultural knowledge of Aboriginals and other ethnic minority students, the curriculum serves to invite them into participating in their own oppression.
- Researchers need to conduct quality research into the cultures of schools to know the challenges and resistances to integration and use the data as a beginning point for policy and practice in the integration of Aboriginal culture.
- School principals and school divisions must act as leaders and catalysts for integration.
- The provincial governments must work in concert with faculties of education to put more effort and resources into the training and hiring of Aboriginal teachers. Aboriginal teachers understand the cultural values of

their communities, infuse the Euro-Canadian curriculum with their language and culture, can easily act as cultural brokers and positive role models, and may instill high self-esteem into Aboriginal students. To this effect an aggressive plan to enroll more Aboriginal students in teacher education programs might include strategies such as identifying and tracking Native students in the secondary school system and providing them with financial aid incentives.

- Schools must allocate part of their budgets to providing and sustaining financial support for educational resource persons such as Aboriginal liaison workers who help parents and community members understand the curriculum and school policies, and Aboriginal guest teachers or speakers who bring unique Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives to the classroom.
- The roles and expertise of Aboriginal resource persons must be recognized and respected by teachers, students, school principals, and school divisions.
- Schools need to consider changes to certain existing school structures such as timetabling and course scheduling (e.g., instead of offering five or six subjects per day, try the modular approach suggested by Ann in this study where only two or three subjects (modules) are taught per term, offered at various times of the day so that if students cannot be in class at a particular time, they can have the course at another time). Also, longer class periods (say 75 minutes per period) could be considered so that Aboriginal teaching methods such as the sharing circle, where each student has an opportunity to speak, can be used.

Concluding Remarks

One of the challenges facing the Canadian public education system today is educating diverse students for meaningful and successful participation in society. This challenge is compounded when there is a wide social-cultural divide between those charged with the responsibility of delivering this education and the students for whom it is intended. This study explored one of the most controversial responses to this challenge as it affects Aboriginal education, namely, the integration of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and perspectives into the school curriculum, particularly focusing on how classroom teachers perceive the integration process. The voices of the teachers suggest that the process is fraught with enormous challenges, but that these challenges are not insurmountable if all stakeholders concerned—school administrators, the government, educational researchers, teacher educators, teachers, and the Aboriginal community—play their parts to facilitate the integration process. The findings and recommendations of this study could help all of these stakeholders in playing their parts meaningfully to address the current inequalities that characterize schooling, inequalities that have for generations produced economic, social, and educational inequity for Aboriginal peoples.

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