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# Aboriginal Knowledge Infusion in Initial Teacher Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto

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# Aboriginal Knowledge Infusion in Initial Teacher Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto

## **Abstract**

Knowledge of the Aboriginal socio-political history in Canada has historically been excluded from public education. In Ontario, public school children learn about Aboriginal people at specific times in the curriculum. However, teachers frequently only teach the bare essentials about Aboriginal people in Canada because they do not have adequate knowledge or feel that they lack the ability to teach about this subject. The Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto has implemented the Deepening Knowledge Project to provide teacher candidates with an increased awareness and knowledge about Aboriginal history, culture, and worldview for their future teaching careers. This article will provide insight into the project and the curriculum developed for working with teacher candidates.

## **Keywords**

Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous, post-secondary education, teacher education, adult education, education policy, Canada, Ontario

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## Aboriginal Knowledge Infusion in Initial Teacher Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto

In 2008, the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) implemented the Deepening Knowledge Project to provide teacher candidates with an increased awareness of and knowledge about Aboriginal history, culture, and worldview for their future teaching careers. As part of the Project team, the two authors were tasked with the delivery of introductory presentations to teacher candidates about these topics while collecting data on teacher candidate responses to this endeavour. The purpose of this article is to outline the work of the Deepening Knowledge Project and to document the results of the first two years of evaluation of the associated presentations. We begin by outlining terminology, situating the Ontario context, and reviewing the literature on curriculum that will positively impact Aboriginal people. We then discuss the Deepening Knowledge Project, which is situated at OISE/UT, details of the presentations, and the results of evaluations and observational data. Finally, we suggest further steps to be taken with the project. Our observations and results may also inform the work of others designing mainstream teacher training programs in the successful incorporation of Aboriginal content.

### Literature Review

#### Terminology

“First Nations” is a self-designated term and is used in the official names of communities, and regional and national organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations. The *Indian Act* (1985), first legislated in 1876, defines who is eligible for Status or registration among First Nations people with all others being considered Non-Status. This requirement to be recognized by the government means that some First Nations people and all Métis people who are *not* registered are not eligible for certain government rights and privileges granted in the treaties and *Indian Act* (Borrows, 1994). Previously, only First Nations people with two generations of paternal lineage are eligible to register as a Status First Nations person. Over the years, many methods of enfranchisement<sup>1</sup> were amended into the *Indian Act*, which resulted in a loss of status. In 1985, Bill C-31 amended the *Indian Act* to include First Nations people who previously lost their Status as a result of interracial marriage and enfranchisement (Borrows, 1994). The recently concluded McIvor case (McIvor v. The Registrar, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2007) is challenging current criteria in the *Indian Act* around registration and, if successful, has the potential to increase the number of Status First Nations people in Canada by as many as 200,000 people (Gibson, 2009). There are over 200,000 people who identify as having Aboriginal ancestry in Ontario. With an increasing number of Aboriginal children who attend non-reserve schools, many teachers will have Aboriginal children in their classrooms.

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<sup>1</sup> Enfranchisement refers to the process by which Indian Status is taken away from a person and replaced with Canadian citizenship. Enfranchisement required that Status First Nations people give up their treaty rights and “assimilate” as a member of Canadian society. Whether or not a Status First Nations person became enfranchised was set out by conditions determined by the Government of Canada as recorded in the Indian Act.

## **Education in Ontario**

In Ontario, the provincial Ministry of Education (MOE) regulates education beginning in early childhood and continuing through to elementary and secondary school institutions. The Ministry mandates that, up until age 16, children living in the province must attend school. In 2003, the MOE developed new initiatives in the province to improve student engagement and achievement for Aboriginal learners. As part of the Aboriginal Education Strategy, the Ministry committed to “developing and implementing curriculum resources for teachers to reach Aboriginal students and to teach all students about First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures, traditions and histories” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, para. 6). Even with this initiative and Aboriginal input into the Aboriginal Education Strategy, change is slow in coming. It is not yet evident to what extent teacher education programs in the province have taken up the mission to educate teacher candidates about Aboriginal issues and history. It is also not yet evident what, if any, concrete and province-wide initiatives will be taken to (re)educate teachers about these issues.<sup>2</sup>

It has been stated by many scholars that the Aboriginal population is the fastest growing and the youngest amongst the Canadian population (Preston, 2008). Mendelson (2006) reported that there were 188,315 self-identified Aboriginal people in Ontario in 2001. The most recent Census data from 2011 showed there were 301,425 self-identified Aboriginal people in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2013). These numbers reflect only those people who responded to the Census questionnaires and self-identified as Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit). There are many communities in Ontario that do not complete the census; therefore, this number may not accurately represent the current Aboriginal population in Ontario. Aboriginal agencies estimate that 70,000 Aboriginal peoples live in the Greater Toronto Area (Environics Institute, 2010).

## **Curriculum that will Help Aboriginal People**

There are marked differences between Western and Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews. Western ways of knowing and education can be described as “secular, fragmented, neutral or objective” (Kanu, 2011, p. 105), or unfolding in a linear fashion (Alfred, 2009; Borrows, 2001). Traditional Aboriginal education has always been flexible, adaptable, and synergic, and can further be described as “intra-personal, subjective, holistic, spiritual and transformative” (Kanu, 2011, p. 105). The entire community has always been responsible for educating Aboriginal children and youth (Stonechild, 2006). In part, this ensured a high rate of knowledge transfer from one generation to the next.

To create a holistic approach within the mainstream school system in Ontario, it is necessary for educators and teachers to learn, understand, and incorporate knowledge about Aboriginal worldviews into their own vision of education at, not just the level of the classroom, but also the level of curriculum creation and school structure. Indigenous scholars have provided a growing number of articles about Aboriginal worldviews and the importance of community learning (Alfred, 2009; Battiste, 2004; Cardinal, 1969; Stonechild, 2006; Tully, 1995). This literature has contributed to the inclusion of Aboriginal content in teacher education in Ontario.

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<sup>2</sup> While one of the authors of this article has attended a Professional Development Day conference on Aboriginal culture held by one of the boards, she was not inspired by the reception of the audience.

The “Grandfathers” have always said that things that occur now will have impact for seven generations, and Aboriginal people in Canada are experiencing impacts from the past three hundred years of change in their education due to contact with settler society. To heal from the historic trauma of colonization, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop<sup>3</sup> (and following decades of forced adoption), poor living conditions and racism, Aboriginal peoples are decolonizing and healing through higher education. Education (including formal Western education) will be the “new buffalo” (Stonechild, 2006) by nourishing, clothing, sheltering, and healing Aboriginal people through helping them to find ways of thriving in the Western workforce while maintaining cultural traditions and perspectives if they so choose.

Traditional education continues in many forms throughout Aboriginal communities (on and off reserve). The belief in the interconnectedness of all things, including people, lends itself to the traditional practice in many communities of families and communities learning from one another. If members of these communities have been traumatized by the Western education system, they may stay away and seek to keep others from being consumed by Western paradigms espoused within these institutions (Gone, 2007; Jones, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to engage educators, teachers, and learning institutions in developing awareness, appreciation, and understanding of Aboriginal peoples and the socio-political history that they have endured to ensure that they (Aboriginal peoples) feel included, recognized, and validated by the knowledge used in Western education.

As Aboriginal ways of knowing are incorporated into public schools, it is necessary to acknowledge that traditional education does occur in present-day Aboriginal communities. Strong emphasis is placed on observation, trial and error, and success cycle, for instance (Gone, 2007). “Apprenticeship” or experiential learning was intentionally provided to maintain and transmit traditional knowledge to the next generation as well as creating an interdependent relationship between all members of the community (Faries, 1996; Stonechild, 2006). There is limited research on how traditional educational practices are surviving in the current era, but it is apparent that traditional knowledge is being transmitted and maintained even amongst urban Aboriginal populations (McCaskill & Fitzmaurice, 2007).

Aboriginal leaders have advocated that education needs to be addressed within communities to ensure that vital information and the community’s way of life continues on for future generations. The literature reflects the belief that Aboriginal communities must have complete control of their education in order to transmit their culture, language, values, and beliefs to another generation and that everyone in the community is responsible for teaching the youth, especially the Elders (Akan, 1992; Battiste & Barman, 1995; Frideres & Gadacz, 2001; Preston, 2008; Stonechild, 2006). Within urban communities like Toronto, there is a multi-Aboriginal culture developed that is respectful and accepting of all traditional knowledge, languages, and beliefs. In many urban areas in Ontario, cultural centres are created to allow Aboriginal people to socialize and access their culture (McCaskill & Fitzmaurice, 2007). These cultural centres often have other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations with which they work closely to

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<sup>3</sup> The Sixties Scoop is a term first coined by Patrick Johnson and it refers to the time period stretching from the 1960s to the late 1980s when First Nations children were apprehended from their families by the Canadian government and adopted to non-Aboriginal families in Canada and internationally.

ensure that Aboriginal people living in urban centres have the ability to obtain education, employment, shelter, and other social supports (McCaskill & Fitzmaurice, 2007).

Traditional learning passed on much more than traditional knowledge for the community to function; it also allowed for culture, language, and worldview to be passed on to the next generation (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Preston, 2008; Stonechild, 2006). Many Aboriginal people who live in urban cities have lost their Aboriginal languages but have maintained parts of their culture and worldview through connection to other Aboriginal people (McCaskill & Fitzmaurice, 2007). Language and culture grow from the land base that people inhabit, but when the land is taken or the people (re)moved, the language can be lost (Brigham, 2008; Grande, 2004). It has become necessary to revitalize Aboriginal languages for the majority and also to provide diverse languages in education for those who still maintain their mother tongue (Faries, 1996). Those individuals who maintain their traditional language are a small portion of the urban Aboriginal population in Toronto, Ontario and Canada; however, doing so is recognized as a large part of traditional learning.

The mainstream education system that is provided to Aboriginal people acts to assimilate them into the mainstream economy (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Faries, 1996; Stonechild, 2006). This has led to a negative view of education with few Aboriginal advocates for using such a system (Stonechild, 2006). That being said, an increasing number of Aboriginal people encourage Aboriginal children and youth to finish high school and move on to post-secondary education (Malatest, 2004; Mendelson, 2006). It is felt by many, including the current leader of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, that participating in education will build “strong First Nations” who help Canada to “fulfill its economic potential” (Atleo, 2010, para. 3). Many scholars and Aboriginal communities agree that it is necessary to learn mainstream education, but, at the same time, it is also necessary to use traditional methods of teaching to pass on cultural knowledge to future generations (Atleo, 2010; Mendelson, 2006; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996; Stonechild, 2006).

It is critical that teachers and teacher candidates acknowledge their collective responsibility to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students currently face “the choice between assimilating and dropping out of school” (Kanu, 2011, p. 21). This situation necessitates an improvement in teaching to address the cultural backgrounds of Aboriginal students in order to rectify the polarization of options and create real change in educational attainment. Teachers must recognize “the functioning power of the curriculum in shaping identity, representation, and social and economic circumstances [underlying the call from Aboriginal people to] ... have their perspectives integrated not only into school curricula but also the organization and delivery of formal schooling as a whole” (Kanu, 2011, p. 19).

Other than gaining different perspectives on Canadian history, non-Aboriginal children in Canada will benefit wholeheartedly from knowledge, recognition of, and respect for Aboriginal worldviews and knowledge. Western knowledge gatekeepers have repeatedly “dismissed traditional Aboriginal knowledge as inconsequential and unfounded” (Kanu, 2011, p. 15). However, as Kanu (2011) argued, the new global environment within which economies compete requires new and creative perspectives, which would benefit immensely from the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge.

Initial teacher education programs across Canada are in the process of implementing Aboriginal content and perspective within their curriculum. Various researchers (Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; den Heyer, 2009; Dion, 2007; Finney & Orr, 1995; Vetter & Blimkie, 2011) have documented strategies and interventions that include Aboriginal perspectives within mainstream teacher training programs and have noted the reactions elicited from teacher candidates. Efforts range from documenting initial conversations among faculty (den Heyer, 2009), to instruction within a particular subset or option for teacher candidates (Vetter & Blimkie, 2011), to the creation of an Aboriginal Education Council and Centre for Aboriginal Research and Education (Cherubini et al., 2010). There is a substantial difference in the type, quantity, and variety of implementation strategies, depending on the university, the provincial guidelines, and the Aboriginal communities working with each institution. For example, in Saskatchewan, where there is an Aboriginal cohort, there are courses available for all teacher candidates; whereas in British Columbia, one full course about Aboriginal topics has been mandated for all teacher candidates.

Literature is also emerging from colonized contexts across the globe as Indigenous peoples and settler-allies grapple with the concerns and issues that arise when Aboriginal content is incorporated into teacher education programs and is applied in the classroom by non-Indigenous teachers. O'Dowd (2012), for instance, explores the nature of the resistance displayed by non-Indigenous teachers to accept and teach Indigenous history in Australia and argues that the Australian national identity as reflected through literature, art, and historical accounts of early settlement "creates an Indigenous history that is not possible" (p. 105) or what she terms an "unhistory" (p. 104). She recommends that teachers and their students take a critical look at these discourses of identity within classrooms, suggesting that doing so "co-sequential with a study of other nationalisms and understanding Australian national identity, Indigenous history may be less emotional and engagement more likely" (O'Dowd, 2012, p. 114). Looking at the Hawaiian context, Indigenous scholar Julie Kaomea (2005) conducted research in the classrooms of non-Indigenous teachers documenting the teaching of Hawaiian studies. What she found was that lack of knowledge and confidence in teaching this content on the part of non-Indigenous teachers, as well as using out-dated resources has led to the replication of colonial discourses about Hawaiian savagery and the random and brutal nature of rules and rulers in Hawaiian society (Kaomea, 2005). In order to rectify these deeply entrenched misconceptions, she argues that

Ultimately, Native peoples should have authority over Native issues. In the case of Hawaiian studies instruction, this means that in order for Hawaiian/non- Hawaiian team-teaching alliances to be effective, non-Hawaiian classroom teachers will need to take a back seat to Hawaiian elders and cultural experts, and assume a supportive role that allows Hawaiian experts to take the lead. (Kaomea, 2005, p. 40)

Bishop (2003), writing from Aotearoa (New Zealand) also believes that "new images and their constituent metaphors are needed to inform and guide the development of educational principles and pedagogies" (p. 234) in the classroom and that these new forms should be guided by Indigenous Kaupapa Maori educational experiences so that Maori children will be able to participate with greater success. This need arises from the current deficient images teachers hold of Maori children, which are reflected in teaching practice and continue to "perpetuate the educational crisis for Maori children" (Bishop, 2003, p. 234).

## **The Deepening Knowledge Project**

Initiated by Dr. Kathy Broad, Executive Director of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), the Deepening Knowledge, Enhancing Instruction Project (Deepening Knowledge Project for short) has engaged faculty, staff, and students at OISE/UT in different ventures that work toward increasing knowledge of Aboriginal histories, perspectives, and contemporary communities among instructors in the program and teacher candidates since 2008. The Executive Director has demonstrated ever-increasing involvement and enthusiasm for developing this area of knowledge for teacher candidates. Thus the project has had strong leadership from the institution, developing a great team of dedicated and involved faculty and staff who implement a series of strategies to increase awareness and capacity within the program. Under the leadership of the Executive Director, course instructors in the ITE program were asked to host at least one workshop in their classrooms to relay information to teacher candidates about Aboriginal topics for use in their classroom instruction starting in the spring of 2011.

The authors of this report were recruited to design and conduct workshops for teacher candidates in both elementary and secondary streams as part of the Deepening Knowledge Project. Angela Mashford-Pringle is an urban Aboriginal scholar with personal experience with the Ontario public school system through her own experiences and those of her children. Angela Nardozi is a qualified teacher, who has taught in and conducted research with, a northern First Nations community to complete her M.A., and who herself graduated from the ITE program at OISE/UT. The authors developed workshops that varied in length from 45 minutes to 3 hours. The workshops addressed: (a) who are Aboriginal peoples; (b) the historical and intergenerational trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples through residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, and legislation (*Indian Act*, Constitution of Canada, etc.); (c) statistics of Aboriginal people in Canada and specifically Ontario; (d) videos about Aboriginal peoples and the social injustices they have and continue to face; and (e) potential ways to include Aboriginal subjects into the curriculum, including resources that could be used by teachers and/or their students. The topics were chosen primarily by the Aboriginal presenter (Mashford-Pringle) and the list was modified depending on the interest, level of knowledge, and questions of each group. With longer workshops, more opportunities for interactive segments arose, such as question and answer or brainstorming sessions, which allowed teacher candidates to become more involved in their learning. At the end of the workshops, most classes were provided with an evaluation form to complete, the results of which provide the basis for this report.

### **The Setting**

The level of enthusiasm that course instructors used when introducing the presenters set the tone for the workshops. Some course instructors seemed uninterested prior to the workshop, but were extremely involved by the end, even asking questions and prompting the class to ask questions. Other course instructors were excited and interested prior to the workshops. Some provided concrete connections for the teacher candidates between the work that the class had done and the workshop's themes. At the very least, each instructor made mention of the great importance of the topic, its implications for the audience's future students, and for social justice in general.



The process of scheduling presentations grew easier as we built relationships with instructors, who then began to speak to their colleagues about the importance of the presentation. When the presentation was first offered in the spring of 2011, take-up occurred quickly in the elementary cohorts, but it was much slower in the secondary classrooms. Factors that may have contributed to this were the timing (the presentations were first introduced late in the school year) and the increased focus on subject-based teaching for secondary teachers. However, by the 2011 to 2012 academic year, many instructors were eager to book presentations and after continued outreach to secondary instructors, presentations were booked in all but a small number of cohorts.

One phenomenon that contributed greatly to the reputation of the presentations and repeat bookings for the instructors was the reaction of the students. During presentation after presentation, instructors witnessed the surprise, shock, and passionate responses of a large number of teacher candidates when they realized the extent to which they had not been taught about Aboriginal peoples, histories, and contemporary cultures in their own education. Some openly asked why this material had not been presented earlier in their teacher training program. Their responses are reflected in the post-presentation evaluations, which are discussed below.

### **Context and Methodology**

OISE/UT's ITE program graduates upwards of 1,000 teacher candidates a year. The teacher candidate population consists of mainly of settler and settler-diasporic candidates (Cannon, 2011); the majority of the population enrolled in the program continues to consist of female, middle-class candidates (Solomona, Portelli, Daniel & Campbell, 2005). Teacher candidates who attended workshops were provided with an evaluation form, but as some students may not have been present in class, the total number of teacher candidates who should have been provided with the presentations is not known.

The evaluation used in this study (see Appendix) was co-created by the authors and the other members of the Deepening Knowledge Project team. Comments were only included in this article if the teacher candidate who made them indicated on their evaluation that we could use their words in future publications. Observations, questions, and comments from each presentation were recorded afterwards by the authors in independent research journals and were compared as data was being analyzed. Qualitative responses were often about the content; for example, what the teacher candidates liked or did not like in the presentation and suggestions for further improvement. The qualitative data was compiled by question. Then responses were coded using NVIVO 9 software and analyzed for similarities and differences. The data were checked individually by both authors to ensure that all data were entered accurately. The authors conducted member checks with some teacher candidates from each workshop and with the instructors for each of the cohorts.

While the authors intended to receive responses from each teacher candidate who attended the workshops, some groups were not provided with the evaluation form due to time constraints. The data are rich in knowledge, but may not reflect all teacher candidates' reactions from the two academic years because not all teacher candidates received the workshop or had the opportunity to complete the evaluation forms.

## **By the Numbers**

To date, the program has run over two academic years. In both years, we asked audience members to fill out a voluntary evaluation after the presentation in order to gain anonymous feedback and insight into reactions to the material and our presentation methods. After analyzing the statistical results and the written feedback sections, we determined that the results from both years were quite similar, and thus we have collapsed the feedback for the purposes of this paper. Over the two academic years, 844 evaluations were collected after 25 presentations. In total, 36 presentations were given, but due to a variety of factors (most often lack of time at the end of presentations) 11 groups were not asked to fill out evaluations.

Course instructors were asked to provide at least 1.5 hours for the workshop, but presentations ranged in time from 45 minutes to 3 hours (with a 15 minute break). We agreed to fill any time slot we were given, convinced of the importance of our message, especially given that our audience consisted of future educators. After the delivering the first round of presentations in a two week span at the end of the 2010 to 2011 academic year, many course instructors acknowledged verbally that the workshops were much needed and would have benefited their students if spaced throughout the year. During the 2011 to 2012 academic year, presentations were delivered throughout the two semesters, with the majority of instructors hosting us prior to the second practicum period for teacher candidates.

## **Evaluation Results**

In the evaluations after the workshops, teacher candidates were asked if they had received any instruction at OISE/UT on Aboriginal peoples, histories, or contemporary cultures prior to the presentations. In the first year, presentations were given during the last month of the academic year, and 70% of teacher candidates responded that they had received some instruction on these topics. However, when broken down, some groups had averaged much lower, with only 26% and 48% of candidates in three particular options responding that they had received previous instruction. The lowest percentage was registered in the one concurrent teacher education program (CTEP) option in which we presented; CTEP is an option where teacher candidates earn an undergraduate degree concurrent with their Bachelor of Education degree, taking five years in total to complete the program. The CTEP program tends to be less unified, with education courses and practicums scattered throughout the five years, and this may contribute to candidates having never encountered these topics. The two options in which only 48% of candidates had received education on Aboriginal peoples consisted solely of teacher candidates training to become secondary teachers, and their program tends to be more subject-specific in its instruction. The curriculum decisions made by the instructors of these three cohorts of teacher candidates would have influenced the instruction received during their program. In the second year of presentations, 33% of respondents replied that they *had received instruction* on Aboriginal topics prior to our presentation, 62% responded that they *had not*, and 5% responded that they were *unsure*. It is probable that this significantly lowered average among the groups reflects the earlier placement of presentation within the school year. However, as of 2010 to 2011, the evaluations indicate that, depending on their particular courses and instructors, a number of teacher candidates did graduate from OISE/UT having received no instruction on Aboriginal topics.

Based on our findings, it became clear that, for some teacher candidates, the workshops represent the only professional instruction about historical and current Aboriginal topics to which teacher candidates

are exposed before entering their teaching careers. In the written comments on evaluations, teacher candidates noted that having completed elementary, secondary, and even postsecondary education (as is required to obtain a B.Ed.) does not guarantee that an individual has received a memorable lesson on Aboriginal perspectives. One respondent astutely observed that teacher candidates who immigrated to Canada might have missed learning about this subject area as a result of not being educated in this country. Given this reality, it becomes even more important for Initial Teacher Education programs, like the one at OISE/UT, to include an Aboriginal instruction component because for many teacher candidates this may represent the last opportunity to learn about the material in a formal setting before embarking on their teaching careers.

One question on the evaluation asked how comfortable teacher candidates were teaching or speaking about Aboriginal issues *before* attending the workshop. Grouped over two years, 15.5% of teacher candidates stated they were *very comfortable*, 24% were *comfortable*, and 35% were *somewhat comfortable*, while 15.5% stated they felt *not at all comfortable* teaching about these topics. Teacher candidates were also asked how important they felt Aboriginal content was in their classrooms prior to having viewed the presentations. Only 4% of all teacher candidates thought Aboriginal content was *not important* in their classrooms. The remaining respondents were divided among *somewhat important* (23.5%), *important* (35.5%), and *extremely important* (28%), while 6.5% answered that they were *unsure*.

To further understand if the presentation had been effective in conveying information to the teacher candidates, the evaluation asked respondents if they had a better understanding of Aboriginal issues *after* the workshop. Overwhelmingly, 90% of teacher candidates felt they had a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples, with only 6% expressing that they did not. It became apparent that the workshops largely achieved their goal of increasing awareness among teacher candidates. In the future, longer time slots and multiple workshops will allow for more interactive presentations, which could incorporate more learning styles in order to reach more of the audience. Incorporating more Aboriginal content would effectively increase awareness among future educators and could assist Aboriginal students because their classroom teachers would feel more confident in teaching Aboriginal content.

The most promising response came to the question of whether or not the workshop had inspired the teacher candidates to learn more about Aboriginal people. When asked on the evaluations, the vast majority of teacher candidates (93.5%) reported that they were. Only 4% of respondents were not inspired or were not planning to learn more about Aboriginal peoples after the workshop. Some of those who responded that they were not planning to learn more left no indication on their survey about why they responded this way: some indicated that they felt Aboriginal content was either *not at all important* or *somewhat important* to their future classrooms, and others indicated that they had been previously inspired to learn about Aboriginal topics. This overwhelming response indicates that, in most cases, learning will extend beyond the limited time of the presentations. To assist in future learning, key resources for teachers and students were discussed at the end of every presentation and both authors have contributed resources to a website that OISE has developed to direct teachers towards appropriate and respectful teaching and learning resources. It is available at:

[www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge)

The evaluation also asked how confident teacher candidates felt teaching about Aboriginal issues after attending the workshop. Although over 12% of teacher candidates responded that they *did not feel confident*, 47.3% of respondents felt *somewhat confident*, while 29.2% were *confident* in teaching the material to their future students. Unfortunately, only 6.9% of all teacher candidates felt *very confident* that they could teach this material after the workshop. This lack of confidence in teaching Aboriginal material after the workshop indicates that, in addition to information workshops delivered as part of this project, additional time does need to be dedicated to instruction around lesson planning and practicum assignments in order to boost the confidence of the teacher candidates and give them concrete experience in incorporating information about Aboriginal cultures into their lessons. It may also be helpful for OISE/UT to help facilitate relationships between teacher candidates and various organizations in Toronto, which provide educational outreach for classes and schools, such as the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto.

An open-ended qualitative question was posed to teacher candidates about what they found most interesting about the workshops. The responses to the question varied. Almost every part of each presentation was cited in this section in different evaluations. Resource suggestions, the video clips highlighting inequities in the cost of living in remote communities, as well as current youth culture were favourites among the candidates. Indeed, the reactions on the faces of teacher candidates when the videos, which were at times provocative, alarming and fun, were shown on screen, suggested that candidates had been affected by what they saw. Many respondents recorded that they found all of the information included in the presentations to be of interest. The information on residential schools was also frequently mentioned. In response to what they did not find interesting within the workshop, a surprising and overwhelming majority either had no response or indicated that they found the whole presentation interesting. Some used this space to suggest the presentation be longer so that information could be covered in more depth, and that there would be additional time for questions. Those who did respond mentioned various aspects of the presentation, but no distinct trends emerged.

Other open-ended questions on the evaluations did yield some trends in opinion. It became apparent that many teacher candidates had a desire to learn much more about the topic during their initial teacher education with comments like:

This is a subject one cannot know enough about.

I feel like this should be a larger priority at OISE. One hour-long presentation is not enough.

Some expressed frustration that the presentation was their only exposure to topics regarding Aboriginal people in the year, as indicated by one candidate who stated:

[W]hy is this only a workshop?! Why is there no mandatory class? We talk about social justice and multiculturalism ... but why is that we don't hear about First Nations?

These comments suggest that teacher candidates who were in the workshops may spend time learning more about Aboriginal people in order to incorporate the knowledge into their classrooms in the future. However, since there was no follow up with the teacher candidates after the workshops were presented, it is unclear if respondents did continue to learn about Aboriginal people and issues or if their only exposure throughout their education was in the workshops.

We also received many comments about the timing of the presentation, especially with regard to the perceived importance of the topics. For instance, teacher candidates stated:

The workshops should not be presented at the end of the year. It should be integrated into the year in all our curriculum. ALL of our curriculum.

Mandatory & longer/ Maybe do this presentation before second practicum so we can use this!

We need more! [This] should be at the beginning of the program.

Have this workshop earlier in the year, I could have used this in my practicum – it would make more confident teaching this.

In reviewing teacher education programs across Canada, it is apparent there is a wide range of incorporation of Aboriginal content into teacher instruction. Therefore, further analysis of how much time is provided to teacher candidates in all teacher education programs would be useful in order to ensure that all candidates are provided with at least some instruction about Aboriginal people and issues to assist with improving Aboriginal student graduation rates.

Finally, many teacher candidates requested the inclusion of concrete lesson plans and more direct links with various aspects of the curriculum:

[Include] more time for resources => how we can make positive change.

[H]ow to tie it into Math/Sci?

[M]ore specific to schooling, education and teaching.

[H]ow Aboriginal culture could be integrated into the curriculum ... or what actions can be taken to integrate Aboriginal students into the curriculum?

The presenters received similar questions from teacher candidates at almost all workshops. Among these questions were:

Why wasn't this workshop provided earlier in the year? Or why wasn't the information provided in smaller segments across the curriculum?

How do I get more information about Aboriginal children and families?

How can I help Aboriginal children and their families with the curriculum?

What resources should I use in my classroom?

Is there a place to take a course or workshop to add to the information that you've provided?

We had some Aboriginal information throughout the year, but we don't all have the Canadian history knowledge. Will OISE work on rectifying that?

Another line of questioning that emerged during both years of the presentations had to do with the cultural makeup of Toronto. It is true that Toronto is an especially multicultural city; however, as the original inhabitants of this land, Aboriginal peoples hold a unique place in the country's history and contemporary culture. Some teacher candidates expressed concerns about the importance of learning Aboriginal topics in a city where they felt Aboriginal people were not a significant portion of the population. Some also expressed disbelief that they would encounter First Nations, Métis, and Inuit families in their schools, instead perceiving Aboriginal communities to be "up North," "out there," and "not here." As the presentations continued, effort was made to highlight that Toronto has one of the biggest populations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, as well as to highlight the number of youth of Aboriginal descent thought to be residing in Toronto. Other Toronto-centric statistics and statistics provided by Aboriginal community organizations were also offered in an effort to demonstrate how the information being presented would be immediately useful in a career teaching in Toronto.

It is important to note that teacher candidates do have opportunities to learn about Aboriginal topics during their time in Initial Teacher Education. While enrolled in both the elementary and secondary option, teachers are required to choose from a list of electives to be taken during one of their two semesters. One of the courses currently offered focuses on Aboriginal worldviews and education. With special permission, teacher candidates may also enrol in graduate level courses to fulfill this requirement and some of those elective courses focus on specific aspects of Aboriginal history, health, and culture. However, most teacher candidates either do not choose to enrol in Aboriginal-specific courses because they choose to take other electives offered in the ITE program or, in the case of the graduate level courses, because they are offered in the evenings, which would create an overwhelming schedule since teacher candidates do attend a full day of classes. While a few may avail themselves of Aboriginal learning opportunities, the reality is that most of the teacher candidates who currently pass through the ITE program will not receive adequate instruction in Aboriginal issues.

After two years of delivering the presentations, it is clear that they have become an important component of the ITE program at OISE/UT. Although not enough on their own, the presentations do provide the beginnings of a foundation of knowledge of Aboriginal histories, cultures, and contemporary experiences. This can lead to improved Aboriginal educational attainment: Future educators may be more inclined to discuss and teach about Aboriginal people and issues in their classrooms, which may assist Aboriginal students in connecting with the curriculum they are being taught.

### **Suggested Next Steps**

The following recommendations were formed based on evaluation comments and presenter observations. First, the length of presentations should be re-thought. For those groups who participated in workshops that were up to two hours in length, most evaluations included comments about how more time should be allotted to this subject. Some commenters echoed the belief of the presenters in recommending that a mandatory course be added to the ITE program. For presentations that were three hours in length, teacher candidates repeatedly stated that while they found the information valuable, they felt overwhelmed and would have preferred there be a series of sessions to allow time to absorb and apply the information. However, it was also clear from the evaluations that the mandated one hour is not enough to meet the needs of the teacher candidates.

Second, different and more in-depth presentations should be offered for those few teacher candidates who do come from a background in Aboriginal studies or who are further along in their journey in learning about these topics. On the other hand, based on feedback during presentations and within the evaluations, it is clear that the majority of teacher candidates who enter into the ITE program do not have a solid working knowledge of Aboriginal peoples, histories, and cultures. Teacher candidates spoke about not learning this in elementary or high school, or in their undergraduate programs. Evaluations indicated that candidates wanted more information about a variety of subjects such as contemporary issues, historical perspectives, and especially residential school.

Course instructors may assume that their teacher candidates have more knowledge about Aboriginal peoples and perspectives than they do. On two notable occasions, instructors expressed shock at the lack of knowledge communicated by teacher candidates during the course of a presentation. One commented that knowledge of social justice in general does not necessarily translate into knowledge of Aboriginal-specific topics. Instructors should not assume that a satisfactory knowledge of social justice issues on the part of their teacher candidates translates into an equal level of knowledge of Aboriginal-specific topics. Instructors should be prepared to devote a larger proportion of their instructional time to Aboriginal-specific topics.

Third, the diversity of the requests from course instructors regarding length and content of the presentations, as well as the different needs of each cohort, meant that at least 30 minutes to 1 hour of preparation was dedicated to thinking and planning for each presentation. Presentations could be even more effective if more time was spent meeting with each instructor to learn more about the students and what material they have been taught up to the point of the presentations.

Some of the information provided by presenters was met with resistance from teacher candidates. Some teacher candidates made comments about the political nature of the presentations and that the delivery was biased. Others could not yet see culture beyond the representations of “artefacts” and “spiritual routines.” Taken together, these comments suggest a fourth recommendation: More time needs to be spent on identity, privilege, bias and perspective, and critical multiculturalism theory prior to the presentations.

The original purpose of the presentations was to give a background of Aboriginal peoples, histories, and cultures, with some focus on the integration of material into classroom curriculum. Despite efforts to bring the two together, one presentation is not enough to give sufficient time to cover both to a satisfactory degree. This presentation should not be seen by teacher candidates or course instructors as the “one stop shop” for all things Aboriginal-specific for the year. Instead, course instructors should focus on curriculum integration and understanding how to work with Aboriginal children and families throughout the ITE program. If multiple sessions with the presenters are not possible, course instructors must see the integration and lesson-planning piece as their responsibility within the ITE curriculum.

Exposure to Aboriginal peoples, histories, and cultures should continue to be increased within the ITE program. The inclusion of established Aboriginal organizations at the University of Toronto such as the Indigenous Education Network (IEN), the Infinite Reach Network (IRN), Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement (SAGE), and First Nations House would be advised in such events as orientation through the use of guest speakers throughout the program.

In addition, the presenters recommended that OISE/UT create a partnership with Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada (previously known as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) and, most importantly, build strong and trusting relationships with First Nations and Inuit communities in order to create more practicum opportunities in First Nations and Inuit schools. These relationships can also assist OISE/UT in determining the needs of Aboriginal families with children in the education system that may be beyond the curriculum. In this way, OISE/UT can assist communities by advocating for their interests.

Finally, it has become apparent that the lack of knowledge teacher candidates have about Aboriginal history and current issues is unacceptable, given their responsibility in educating future generations of Canadian, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children. To begin to rectify this widespread problem, OISE/UT must do its part to educate, to undo the years of trauma perpetuated by the school system on many Aboriginal people, as well as the widespread ignorance among Canadians of these events and other assimilationist practices. To this end, it should be mandatory that candidates entering the B.Ed. program have some undergraduate credits in Aboriginal issues or that candidates receive a full term, mandatory course on topics related to Aboriginal communities while being educated at OISE/UT. In British Columbia and Saskatchewan, B.Ed. students are mandated to take at least one full course in Aboriginal history before the completion of their degree. While the Ministry of Education in Ontario has not mandated this requirement, OISE/UT could become a leader and establish such a practice with assistance from the local Aboriginal community and faculty. OISE/UT will need to increase the number of Aboriginal faculty who provide this knowledge, which will also likely increase the number of Aboriginal teacher candidates applying.

### **Conclusion**

The Deepening Knowledge Project was deemed to be a first step toward the incorporation of Aboriginal ways of knowing and content for teacher candidates at the University of Toronto. The Aboriginal awareness and orientation sessions that were discussed in this article are ongoing and will hopefully continue into future years. The inclusion of these workshops and content in the ITE program is a positive step toward integrating Aboriginal histories, cultures, and contemporary experiences into mainstream education. The inclusion of Aboriginal content in the ITE program will assist future educators with becoming comfortable in providing such information to their students, some of whom may be Aboriginal students.

The findings also suggest that more should be done for already practicing teachers and educators because they may not have had any Aboriginal content in their ITE program or throughout their teaching careers. Based on the needs of a growing Aboriginal population, it is necessary to have teachers and educators who are comfortable with and aware of Aboriginal people and issues so they can further assist their students with identifying themselves in the curriculum. As many respondents suggested, learning about Aboriginal people and issues also can be helpful for non-Aboriginal students and may help to reduce stereotyping, racism, and discrimination in the future. Further inclusion of Aboriginal content into initial teacher education will move Western education toward assisting Aboriginal people in achieving higher levels of education because they will feel connected to the curriculum. Historically the ITE program at OISE/UT has had a very low enrolment of self-identified Aboriginal teacher candidates, and so these findings and the next steps we have suggested may not apply directly to programs with



larger populations of Aboriginal students. Given the large population of settler-diasporic peoples in the Greater Toronto Area, the social dynamics differ from other urban centres in Canada where tensions between Aboriginal communities and settler peoples can be quite pronounced. These dynamics carry into teacher training programs and public school classrooms and so our work may not be fully applicable in these contexts.

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## Appendix

### Evaluation

Date:

Your Option:

**Thank you for attending and being involved in our workshop today. Below are a few questions so we can evaluate our workshop and areas that may require improvement.**

May we use your ANONYMOUS comments in future academic publications? \_\_\_\_\_

**BEFORE viewing this presentation...**

1. Did you receive any instruction on Aboriginal content at OISE prior to this workshop?

Yes	No	Not sure /N/A
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2. How comfortable were you with speaking/teaching Aboriginal history and in your classroom?  
Please circle the one most applicable to you.

Not all comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Not sure
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3. How important did you think Aboriginal content was to your classroom? Please circle the one most applicable to you.

Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Extremely Important	Not sure
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**AFTER viewing this presentation...**

4. Do you feel you now have a better understanding of Aboriginal peoples?

Yes                      No

5. What part of the workshop was most interesting for you?

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6. What part of the workshop was not interesting for you?

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7. Are you inspired to learn more about Aboriginal peoples and the issues surrounding them?

Yes                      No

8. How would you describe your confidence in teaching this material?

Not confident	Somewhat confident	Confident	Very Confident	Not sure
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9. How would you rate the length of the workshop?

Too long	Long	Perfect length	Could be longer	Should be longer
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