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Crossing Borders in Schools:  
Racialized Experiences and Inclusive Education

by

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### **Abstract**

My doctoral research seeks to examine and reveal the ways in which schools engage with multicultural and racially diverse communities as a means of achieving inclusive education. This research is actively intended to inform both contemporary multicultural policies and practice by exploring the experiences of visible minority families and students in their school locations. Using critical ethnography as the guiding methodology with a theoretical framework informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) as practiced through anti-racism discourse, this research seeks to bring forward the perspectives and voices of racially minoritized populations to increase the understanding of diversity and address inclusive practices within the institution of education.

## Acknowledgements

The years have accumulated many moments of triumph, uncertainty, excitement, and doubt. The state of world affairs can be a source of pain and hope simultaneously, and it is through the support of honest conversations and encouragement of those surrounding me, I have entered a field of study that comes with setbacks and advances. I am humbled to say that I have, more than ever, come to realize the value of education and the opportunities it has afforded me. Both formally and informally, the learning I have been immersed in would not be possible without the following support systems of this work.

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I would also like to thank the students and families of this study and all for whom this research resonates with being a racialized minority in our schools. With a collective hope for continued change, I am humbled to envision the success of our schools through your courage and experiences.

## Dedication

For my Dad and Dadaji

This for all the hope and beauty in life you have shown. Thank you.

you broke the ocean in  
half to be here.  
only to meet nothing that wants you.

- immigrant

(nayyirah waheed, 2013, p. 5)

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Table 1: Participant Profile

(see p. 49)

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility.

(bell hooks, 2004, p. 159)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

The desire to understand the larger context of multiple perspectives within the discourse relating to inclusive and diverse education settings inspired this research study. As a researcher, I immersed myself in the conceptualization, development and progress of the study, while preserving my role as a teacher, parent, and community member. By collecting, analyzing and reflecting on the experiences, recollections, and insights, of 18 individuals who keenly participated in this research, I came to an understanding that surpassed my expectations. The voices of the participants have amplified my desire to share in their hopes for a stronger future of inclusive education. In the words of Soyini Madison (2012), “you are invested in your audience because you are hoping that what you write makes a difference to them and that it makes some kind of contribution. You want your words to matter to your audience” (p. 232).

In a time where North American societies contain increased diversity, troubling headlines speak of stricter border controls in the USA and Canada, and significant changes regarding immigration policy, and/or the outlawing of religious symbols worn by people in government service spheres (see Aujla-Bhullar, 2020, for an analysis of the latter), inclusivity is an immanent issue. The borders I speak to in this study, refer to the boundaries made apparent by this study, between the lived experiences of racialized communities and the discourses of inclusive education in Alberta. With the current political climate evoking calls for social justice, equity, and reconciliation, I evoke the encouraging words of Maya Angelou (2015) who wished and fought for a fairer, kinder world where visible and invisible resources are more equitably distributed. This is the foundation upon which I approached and framed my doctoral study while working through a vital process of decentering and re-centering myself as researcher, whilst

acknowledging and negotiating my subjective positioning within the research.

### **Centering, De-Centering and Re-Centering: Subjective Positioning**

My positionality in this research stems from years of involvement and my roles as a teacher, student, parent, community activist, and more recently as an instructor in a post-secondary institution. It is within the intersections of these roles as they shape my identity that this research came to be. From my several roles, I came to perceive and define education as a realm in which there are diverse viewpoints and systemic structures, all of which work together as a parallel flow of both achievements and tensions. As a learner and practitioner of critical theory, specifically anti-racism education, I experienced an ongoing pursuit of understanding of the ways in which communities and schools work together through curriculum, relationship, and policy. I felt my curiosity challenged by the theories and applications regarding how to “do diversity” in a gentle and welcoming way while instances of violence and oppression seemed to be endless in the stories and events of the world. George Sefa Dei (2014) asserted that identifying one’s position and stand-point are imperative in becoming an anti-racist educator. He reiterated: “the question of where one is coming from is critical to my anti-racist practice” (p. 244). Although I agree with this, it is also imperative to acknowledge that the research I undertook and my position as teacher/researcher were a source of tension when balancing my experiences and perspectives, while also opening myself to the possibilities of learning about and with the lived experiences shared by participants of this study.

The work of an anti-racism educator is neither simple nor straightforward. It is, however, a commitment to critically examining the structures of one’s own life and capacity to engage in the teaching and learning of interpersonal and institutional structures that embody education

today (Lee, 2020). Shari Stone-Mediator (2000) explored how our narratives, and therefore identities, are shaped by experience:

our daily experience is not only shaped by hegemonic discourse but also contains elements of resistance to such discourse; elements that, when strategically narrated, challenge the ideologies that naturalize social arrangements and identities. Such a notion of experience – experience as a resource for confronting and re-narrating the complex forces that constitute experience. (p. 118)

I recognize that my experiences have been formed in the larger context of our society and this is a similarity I share with the participants. Furthermore, my experiences have influenced the lens with which I have approached my data collection and analysis – with an “insider/outsider” status (Bolak, 1997, p. 97). This position permitted me to gain informed and potentially broader insight into the larger hegemonic discourses within the community experienced by the participants of this study and the resistance to the discourse of the participants and myself.

## **Statement of Problem and Research Question**

### **Research Problem**

The voices and perspectives of racialized minorities are often missing from the dominant discourse surrounding school programming and community engagement in classrooms (Dei, 2014a; Dei, Irby & Clark, 2018; Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2003; James & Wood, 2005; Lund & Carr, 2015; Milner, 2020; Ng, 1995; Nieto, 2010; Rezai-Rashti, 1995; Theoharris & Scanlan, 2015). Furthermore, ongoing concerns around intolerance, fear, and ignorance regarding cultural and religious differences, “coupled with an increase in racism and xenophobia” factor into the interactions between groups of people in public spaces such as schools (Basu, 2011, p. 1308). By exploring and increasing understanding about how inclusive

education discourse is recognized and pursued by school sites in an increasingly multi-ethnic and diverse society, this research extends study into the field of diversity and inclusive education measures (Ahmed, 2012; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Dei et al., 2003; Kubiak, 2009; Leat & Thomas, 2016; Scanlen & Theoharris, 2015). By investigating the understanding of multiculturalism in schools, this research seeks to provide an in-depth study on how schools and communities engage with one another.

The idea of community was a key factor in the planning, design and execution of this study, specifically around discourse relating to community engagement and school sites. Community engagement in schools comprises a host of interactions involving racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic identities that require ongoing research and insights to promote inclusive education practice in schools (Bannerji, 2000; Dei, 2000; James & Wood, 2005; Kumashiro, 2004; Ng, 1995; Nieto, 2010; Scanlan & Johnson, 2015; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). I set out wanting to learn more about vibrant and diverse school communities, where complexities as well as accomplishments have impacts which may facilitate or hinder inclusive education (Armstrong & McMahon 2006). According to Scanlan and Johnson (2015), “schools themselves are such frontiers to the degree that they create a space in which diverse families are forced together to negotiate different notions of teaching and learning” (p. 163). The need exists to explore these negotiations in schools and classrooms. It is in this space of schools that this research was engaged knowing that “inequities within schools cannot be understood without considering the various out-of-school influences” (Scanlan & Johnson, 2015, p. 163). Examining the intersections of out of school influences with school sites is essential to the study in order to uncover the realities, encourage understanding, and move toward possibilities in nurturing diversity and inclusive education.

In the development of this research, the concept of multiculturalism is the key term used as a basis when developing the research questions as a means to explore inclusive education and diversity. Multiculturalism is a recognizable attribute of Canadian society (James, 2005), and has been a defining feature in moving education towards addressing diversity in schools, which has included embracing and celebrating the various cultures, languages, and identities of a growing and increasingly diverse population.

**Research Question: How do schools and communities engage in multicultural understandings, as a means of inclusive education practice and policy?**

Within this overarching question, the following sub-questions were explored:

1. Are there formal and/or informal roles and responsibilities inherent in multicultural and diversity work in school-community interactions?
2. Who (e.g., groups or individuals) is leading multicultural work/practice between schools and the community?
3. How does race and ethnicity enter conversations/understandings around multiculturalism? Inclusive education?
4. How do students and families perceive racial identity within multicultural work/practice and, therefore, define inclusive practice in their school sites?
5. What kinds of initiatives can best foster and/or hinder the goals of multicultural and inclusive schooling, with regards to race and racial identities?
6. How do these practices inform contemporary “school-community relations” within inclusive education discourse?
7. How is race and racial identity connected to multicultural understandings in schools?

8. Are there examples of racism and discrimination in schools that are addressed by inclusive education measures?
9. What measures are needed in education for racialized communities to feel included in the day- to - day operations of schools?
10. Are there opportunities for families and students to engage with schools in discussions of racial diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusion? What does this look/feel/sound like?

### **Methodology and Design of the Study**

This study arising from an intent to explore anti-racism and inclusive education discourse was guided by critical ethnographic methodology (Carspecken, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Madison, 2012; Willis, 2007). As discussed in this Introduction, a subjective lens and reflexivity were active throughout the stages of the research design, data collection and analysis.

Incorporating the principles of critical ethnography required a strong understanding and undertaking of emancipatory actions and included the lifting up of marginalized voices in a specific environment. The school environment holds a significant place in how we perceive institutions of education, and it is from my professional position within the school environment, that I seek a critical form of research that, “takes us beneath the surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” (Madison, 2012, p. 5). Inherent to critical ethnographic research there is a recognition of the political, and therefore, the need to create a space of advocacy “for the emancipation of groups marginalized in society” (Creswell, 2007, p. 70). Such an overarching position is founded on the ideas of lived experiences and positionality as being forefront in critical ethnography (Madison, 2012). The discourse around race, and anti-racism education, is the critical lens I have brought into to the design of my study.

This discourse includes the critical understanding of multicultural education, the history of inclusive education, and the roles and functions of a community setting in my study. George Dei explicitly states that:

As anti-racism researchers we have particular responsibilities to explain the continuing silence on race in many academic quarters, as well as the ways in which race discourses are taken up in ways that support the status quo. We must ask about how our research work helps inform how prevailing racial and racist tropes are supported, maintained, and reproduced in the everyday of schools and wider society. (Dei, 2014b, p. 15)

The location for conducting this research was in a large urban centre in Alberta, one of the major immigrant-receiving provinces in Canada. In Alberta, the visible minority population (excluding Indigenous people) amongst school age children between the ages of 5 and 24 years old is 26.5 percent (Statistics Canada, 2016). This trend has been reflected in the Statistics Canada census data since 2003.

The 18 participants in this study ranged from ages 12-47 years. They were 8 parents and 10 students. As I intended to understand their perspectives through their accounts of lived experiences, we entered a realm where the systemic structures of power and privilege were spoken to explicitly and implicitly. In some cases, the examples given by the participants were contrary to the mantra of inclusive education measures espoused by the schools. The shared perceptions among all participants reflected a consciousness of how intersecting identities played a significant role in their racialized minority status within school structures. This critical consciousness was evoked and shared in varying degrees throughout the data collection and analysis. All participants emphasized the multitude of layers comprising their experience of systemic structures that surrounded them as community members within their respective schools.

## **Delimitations**

### Intersectional Identities

This research focuses on the perceptions and experiences of 18 participants who self-identified as visible minorities and/or racialized minorities. I did not pursue a differentiation in terms of specific identity markers such as religion, culture, language, gender or race.

Furthermore, this research recognizes the identity markers of the participants as they engaged with a self-reflexive process of conceptualizing their racialized identity. In order to provide a succinct understanding of the terminology and definitions used throughout this study, I have included operational definitions to provide clarity to these terms.

### Operational Definitions and Terminology

**Community:** For the purposes of this research I draw on the relational aspects of “community” to describe the family unit of parents and students who contributed to this research, Dei et al. (2003), however, define community as those who are “collectively engaged in common educational activities, and sharing some common interests regarding education” (p. 7). This is a broader definition than one that might use “family” and “community” interchangeably. For this reason, the operational use here is intended to allow for a broader notion of *who* is a member of the community and/or extended family (i.e., peers, grandparent, spiritual advisor).

**Ethnicity:** This term can be defined as those characteristics that are common to a group of people and may transcend any formal borders or national identity. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) stated that, “ethnicity refers to people bound by a common language, culture, spiritual tradition, and/or ancestry” (p. 23). As with race, ethnicity is socially constructed and intersects

with race and other forms of identification. Determining personal ethnicity was guided predominately by the participants of this study (i.e., Punjabi-Sikh).

**Institutions/Institutionalism:** With roots in sociology, the concept of institutions and institutionalism is viewed with an aim of revealing the ways institutions become a familiar, constant, stable and public representation of an organization, while also changing and being experienced in complex ways by the participants who reside/work within them. Furthermore, as Ahmed (2012) stated, “diversity practitioners do not simply work *at* institutions, they also work *on* them” (p. 22).

**Intersectionality:** This concept resides in the work of black feminist scholars (Crenshaw, 1993; Davis, 1981; Hill-Collins, 2004), examining the notion of association and advancing the idea that identity markers intersect with one another in complex ways. Elements of race, gender, and class do not exist independently of one another. Instead, these identities intersect and create active spaces such as oppression, marginalization, and life complexity that do not fit neatly into a singular defining insight to one’s lived experiences.

**Multiculturalism:** As both a policy and ideology, the definition of multiculturalism is convoluted and complex. In basic terms, it refers to the integration of immigrant and visible minority populations in Canadian society by keeping their cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity intact. Also, known as a Canadian mosaic. This is often contrasted with policies of assimilation, “melting pot,” used to describe the United States of America. Further discussion and advancement of conceptual definition is critically examined in Chapter 2.

**Minoritized (Group):** Building on the term “visible minority,” minoritized refers to a “social group that is devalued in society and given less access to resources” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 5). The term “minoritized” speaks to the structural and systemic dynamics at

play within a society to limit the power and social acceptance of a specific group within society, whether or not their numbers increase to provide pockets of “majority” representation. For example, a White teacher working in a school of predominately non-White students is not minoritized, although she/he may feel like being a visible minority in that specific place and time.

**Race:** I conceptualize race as not being a biologically determined category, but a powerful social construction used to reinforce racialized categories. “Race” in this work refers to the physical identity markers of a person and resides with the “socially constructed system of classifying humans based on phenotypical characteristics (skin colour, hair texture, bone structure)” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, pp. 22-23). It is a term that is complex, as it intersects with other dynamics of identity markers (e.g., ethnicity). Furthermore, there is a need to acknowledge the perspective of defining race as, “how one personally *identifies* versus how one *is identified* by others [emphasis in original]” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 24). This study focuses on how the literature defines race as a point of intersectionality and then respectfully uses terms of racial identification as determined by the participants of this study.

**Racism:** As a Canadian research study, the term “racism” is defined in the Canadian context and is best defined by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012), who write:

In the United States and Canada, racism refers to White racial and cultural prejudice and discrimination, supported by institutional power and authority, used to the advantage of Whites and the disadvantage of people of Colour. Racism encompasses economic, political, social, and institutional actions and beliefs that perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power between Whites and people of Colour. (p. 187)

**Visible Minority/People of Colour/Racialized Minority:** These terms will be used interchangeably in acknowledging the non-dominant racialized groups in Canada. “People of colour” is not used in formal Canadian policy or legislation, whereas “visible minority” is an official government term. The correlation between the two terms used to identify people is critical, as it reveals the complexities of not being the dominant group in terms of privileges associated with hegemony (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

**Racialized Identity:** Refers to the complex interactions of identity markers and perceptions of such as determined by the “race” of an individual and/or minoritized group. Na’ilah Suad Nasir (2011) describes it as a concept, “the term “racialized identities” signals my underlying assumptions about the fluidity and social construction of racial boundaries” (p. 4). David Pereira (2014) explains that, “racialized non-Whites and at time racialized Whites or ethnically diverse individuals are quickly and easily reminded of where their racial identity positions them in relation to power and privilege” (p. 37).

### **Summary and Structure**

In this chapter I briefly introduced the theoretical underpinnings of the research that arise from critical social and education discourses, and the subjective positioning that has been a part of the conceptualization and subsequent execution of the research design and study. I stated the research problem and research questions that guided this inquiry which led to a discussion of the methodology of critical ethnography as the means for engaging my theoretical framework based in anti-racism education. As well, the set parameters and delimitations were presented, and operational definitions clarified the foundational terminology that functions in the inquiry.

In the next chapter I will delve into the field of study through an examination of the literature and academic scholarship surrounding my research study. In Chapter 3 I will embark

on a more detailed and thorough examination of the chosen methodology and theoretical framing. From there, in Chapters 4 and 5 I will present the key findings, and the discussion and analysis of the research study. Finally, in Chapter 6 I will conclude this study by highlighting implications and the significance of this research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The literature that has informed this study is vast and far-reaching into past decades of critical thought and analysis of a post-colonial world, including Canada. This, in part, has much to do with my own history as a student of international relations and education, both as practitioner and researcher. Furthermore, as a first-born Canadian with my ancestral home intertwined with the British colonial legacy in India, and present-day understandings of being a second-generation immigrant and settler residing in Treaty 7 territory in Canada, I have a vested interest in the relations of power, marginalization, and the structures that maintain these systems. There has been solace in finding a home in the knowledges shared by scholars from a number of educational research fields that I highlight in this chapter.

To succinctly capture the central bodies of literature for the research, I have organized this chapter into four sections that frame my study. Beginning with the foundations of *Critical Race Theory* (CRT), which informs the theoretical lens of the study. From here, I will examine the concept of *multiculturalism* as a defining characteristic of Canadian society within its policy and enactment of tolerating diversity in society. To focus the concept of Canadian multiculturalism within education, I will move into the literature of *multicultural and anti-racism education* in terms of practice and policy within Canadian schools. Venturing into a related discourse regarding policy. I draw attention to key bodies of work to explore the concepts of *inclusion and diversity*, where I review literature investigating race and minoritized identities in educational settings. Within these key fields of research, I have aimed to create an overarching frame to show how inclusive education and racialized minorities have been located, both in research and theory, in Canadian schools today. These areas of scholarship inform the

parameters of this study and will serve as a continuous thread woven within the analysis and, optimistically, intensify the robust discussions concerning the findings and contribute to this field of study.

### **Section 1: Positioning through Critical Race Theory**

The design of this study is embedded in the fundamental principles of critical theory. Critical theory has beginnings within the Frankfurt School, Marxism, and post-modernist understandings, which can be valued for incredible insights into how we think, relate, and develop knowledge around disparities and representations of ourselves and others. Although it is important to understand the roots of such theories, this research incorporates the views of Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) that, “critical theory’s analysis of how society works continues to expand and deepen as theorists from indigenous, postcolonial, racialized, and other marginalized perspectives add layers to our collective understandings” (p. 27). In essence, critical theory disrupts the normalized accounts of “being,” both in history and the present-day.

There is a long-established theoretical understanding of race and ethnicity as being historically based and socially constructed and that the conceptualization carries forward today. From the rationalizations of slavery, colonial conquests, and justifications for genocide, history is filled with examples of violent and prevalent ethnocentric viewpoints which have led to the oppression and marginalization of minoritized groups. There is a lasting impact in policy and race relations that is derived from Western philosophical thought and action (Satzewich & Liodakis, 2007). Edward Said’s (1978) ground-breaking book *Orientalism* examines how the conception of imperialism and colonialism contributed to dimensions of identity, power, and privilege. The idea of what/who is “Oriental,” argues Said, is a creation of scholarly and imaginative workings of the West. It is where one’s position is deemed Other in hegemonic

Western society, including Canada. His work and consequent analyses brought forth critical groundwork in the studies of decolonization and the ways that nations, schools, and institutions have or have attempted to right the wrongs in how ethnocentrism has disadvantaged, and marginalized people based on race, religion, ethnicity, and culture. Said's work reveals the extent of oppression in how we define ourselves based on differences from others; e.g., "the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority" (Said, 1978, p. 42). Said's analysis is instrumental in knowing the limitations of what history teaches and leaves out as part of the grand narrative of race and ethnicity as a complex relational and social construct.

The history of Canada resides in one of colonial power, genocide of Indigenous populations, and systemic discrimination and racism toward non-Anglo Saxon populations attempting to reach Canadian shores (e.g., Komogata Maru<sup>1</sup>). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) explained that, "oppression is a multidimensional imbalance of social, political, and institutional power that builds over time and then becomes normal and acceptable to most people in the society" (p. 67). The insights gained in critically examining the impact of colonialism and globalization support a robust historical knowledge that can inform present-day disparities and marginalization. This is especially important in contextualizing national policy and discourse that has had multiculturalism as a defining, official, characteristic of Canada for almost 40 years. The Other is not defined by an ethnicity, culture, race, or religion. Rather, it is a concept meant to understand the past and present-day experiences of those at the margins, including racialized minorities.

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<sup>1</sup>In 1914, the Komagata Maru, a Japanese ship with South Asian people (including many Sikhs from India's Punjab region) was denied permission to dock in Vancouver. The people aboard were forced to return to India. Source: <http://komagatamarujourney.ca/>

Critical race theory, rooted in legal studies (Crenshaw, 1991; Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995), has expanded to an understanding of racial inequalities and White supremacy ideology within other institutions, such as education, where colour-blind or “culture-blind” (Wilton, Yull, & Massey, 2018, p. 135) ideology are evident. Its beginnings can be traced to the 1950s and 1960s, to the North American social change and social justice initiatives, such as the civil rights movement in the USA; the antiwar protests; the Black, gay and feminist rights, where the concept of liberal humanism was critically examined, embraced, and ultimately rejected (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). The ultimate assessment was realized in the form of the identification of systemic and structural barriers which limited individual access and autonomy which impacted negatively, aspirations for the betterment of life and access to the privileges and power when compared with the dominant members of the society. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), for example, explained that,

the ideal of individual autonomy that underlines liberal humanism (the idea that people are free to make independent rational decisions that determine their own fate) was viewed as a mechanism for keeping the marginalized in their place by obscuring larger structural systems of inequality. (p. 26)

Critical Race Theory (CRT) at its foundation has five principal tenets. The first is that within a society, such as Canada, racism is interwoven into everyday experiences for all groups, dominant and minority. Secondly, that the privileges and power are advantageous to Whites, both “materially and psychologically” (Irby, Drame, Clough, & Croom, 2019). There is an understanding of the political and legal structures residing in postcolonialism (Taylor, 2009). Thirdly, race is “a consequence of social thought and relations” where we can understand White supremacist ideology as the ongoing subordination of peoples of colour within systemic

structures. Fourthly, building on the work of Crenshaw (1991), CRT recognizes the intersections of multiple oppressions that require a distinct analysis. For example, the intersection between race and gender requires a focused understanding of critical race feminism (Ng, 1995; Wing, 2003). The fifth principle is the understanding that racialized groups and persons cannot be essentialized into having a monolithic identity, because there are unique and distinct understandings and characteristics within minority communities themselves.

Critical Race Theory is embedded in careful analyses of the “structural systems of inequality” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 26) and are at the core of this research. Within the realm of education, there is ample evidence that has revealed the marginalization of racialized/minoritized Others. This includes, but is not limited to, studies pertaining to disproportionate disciplinary measures against racialized youth (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; Irby, 2018; Wilson, Yull, & Massey, 2018), questions of engagement and identity for both teachers and students (Buehler, 2013; Cole, 2020; Emdin, 2017; Ibrahim, 2014; Irby, 2018; Kelly, 1998; Milner & Laughter, 2015; Picower, 2009; Pollock, 2004; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003; Tatum, 2017), and the role of administration and leadership in schools (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2003; Ryan, 2003; Scanlan & Theoharris, 2015). The field of research is vast, deep, and anguished by decades of calls for recognition, emancipation, and equitable policy reform. Part of the policy dialogue includes challenging the official channels concerning what is taught through curricular standards and programs of study. It is an ongoing marathon to hear the “silenced dialogue” and see “the culture of power” (Delpit, 1988, p. 282) that has existed in education systems both past and present-day.

The curricula in Canadian schools, including Alberta, have not accounted for many of the injustices experienced by marginalized and oppressed populations (Satzewich & Liidakis, 2007). While this observation is not meant to discount contemporary accounts of intense social justice discourse and dialogue, there is a gap existing between how and where inclusive policy *meets* diverse populations in schools. The documented risk is that “knowledge within the schools benefits some students at the expense of others, while being presented as neutral, logical, and normal” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 77). Furthermore, “it is in these students’ interests that inclusive educational leadership is imperative to cultivate if those interests are to ever be made discernable and, from there, central to their education” (Scanlan & Theoharris, 2015, p. 61).

The history of minoritized populations in Canada, and the progression of this history into the discourse and policy of multiculturalism, provide valuable contextual understandings of present-day institutional structures in today’s education system.

## **Section 2: Discourse of a Multicultural Canada**

The history of Canadian discourse regarding multiculturalism is relatively new, and yet is a defining feature of our rhetoric on the world stage (Marche, 2016) which forms a part of the national identity that is “showcased by politicians and business people” (Jansen, 2005, p. 33) and seen as a Canadian symbol of success. It is within the context of this discourse around Canadian multiculturalism that I will explore the forms in which identity politics take centre stage in the understanding and organization of society. An understanding of liberal theory within the discourse relating to multiculturalism is important, as it often argues for the recognition and protection of the human rights of cultural minorities (Kymlicka, 1995) within varying parameters.

Of relevance to the research I conducted, Kymlicka's book, *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995) takes an in-depth look at the politics of minority rights within liberal democratic Western states, specifically Canada, in the context of liberal theory and traditions. Kymlicka argued that "multicultural" is not a term with a singular understanding, but instead, there is a complex web of "cultural pluralism" (p. 10), that deals with the challenges of recognition and governance, given complexities of the who, what, and where of members of different communities. He explained that the "mode of incorporation affect the nature of minority groups, and the sort of relationship they desire with the larger society" (p. 10). Further, Kymlicka identified two broad categories of cultural diversity within most Western societies: "national minorities" and "ethnic groups" (p. 10).

National minorities often make up a multi-nation state in terms of language, culture, and history. Canada is a multination state with three distinct national groups, the English, French, and "Aboriginal" (Kymlicka, 1995, pp. 12-13), where the Indigenous population was colonized by European settlers before confederation. Kymlicka warns of the dangers in confusing the idea of national identity with that of a shared patriotism; however, he stresses the importance of having an "allegiance to the larger political community" (p. 13). Immigration is another contributor towards cultural diversity that has taken place in many Western nations. This is defined as being a defining factor of countries such as Canada, which actively accepts large numbers of immigrants from other countries, "allowing them some of their ethnic particularity" (p. 14), thus nations may also be viewed as having a "polyethnic" population (p. 17). The author's distinction here is important, as it clarifies the factors which caused Canada to enshrine a multicultural policy in 1981 that moved away from more assimilative models of Canadian cultural identity

pre-1970s. Kymlicka explains that Canada, therefore, is both a multinational and polyethnic country, with the more popular term being “multicultural” (p. 17).

I find this distinction important within the context of this research for two reasons. The first reason is that the participants most likely to be a part of this study will come from a polyethnic context, through immigration or being first, second, or third generation immigrants. The second important reason is to draw attention to the socio-political complexities that exist and potential dismissiveness given to some populations within “multicultural” communities, which often results in the exclusion from discourse of the unique and distinct experiences and history of Indigenous populations in Canada. As well, Kymlicka’s (1995) analysis does not provide a due diligence of understanding around the institutions of French and English cultures and governance which are the socio-political foundations on which multiculturalism policies are instituted. My study uses the terminology of “multicultural” and “multiethnic” interchangeably, including during interviews with participants, reflecting practice in mainstream policy and professional discourses.

In understanding the complexity of the terminology and contexts, it is important to be aware of distinctions, but not limit communities or groups solely to these definitions, for example, polyethnic populations. One could make the argument that refugees are not making the same “choice” as an immigrant family would, and neither could we apply these understandings to many Black Canadians, who have a multi-generational history in the provinces and territories. Kymlicka (1995) suggested viewing these important nuances on a continuum for theorizing around minority rights, and that “a theory of minority rights is also forward-looking” (p. 25) and is important in seeking to acknowledge the injustices of the past. In relation to considering the

success of multiculturalism as a policy further questions are raised regarding how we would measure successes or losses for various cultural groups or diverse identities (Jansen, 2005).

The realities of multiculturalism in Canada have been documented by scholars such as Bannerji (2000), James and Wood (2005), Jansen (2005), Razack, Smith, and Thobani (2010), and Saul (2005), in addition to political theorists such as Kymlicka (1995). It is a discourse that questions the realities in matters of equality, equity, and integration. While there is critical discourse around multiculturalism, it is simultaneously a term that appears as a significant identifying feature of Canada. Bannerji (2000) best describes this paradox by stating:

Official multiculturalism represents its polity in cultural terms, setting apart the so-called immigrants of colour from francophones and the aboriginal peoples. This organization brings into clearer focus the primary national imaginary of “Canada,” to echo Benedict Anderson. It rests on posing “Canadian culture” against “multicultures.” (p. 10)

There is a deep underlying tension in the discourse about diversity and multiculturalism that removes any opening to critically examine the aspects of hegemony, power, and the ethnocentrism of Canadian liberal democracy (Bannerji, 2000; Mohanty, 2003). It is a discourse that “reduces all political issues into cultural ones and converts cultural into a private matter” (Bannerji, 2000, p. 51). There is an argument that there are forces, both seen and unseen, in our Canadian political and societal landscape that go unexamined outside of academia. For example, the terminology that is used in official government policy and documentation, “visible minority,” itself can be viewed as a play of hegemony within the social relations of ruling Canadian institutions.

When this terminology became documented, it replaced the wording “people of colour” who all were subsumed as a group with the commonality of not being White, into the discourse of a “new” multicultural Canada,

but colour was translated into the language of visibility. The new Canadian social and political subject was appellated “visible minority,” stressing both the features of being non-white and therefore visible in a way whites are not, and of being politically minor players.

(Bannerji, 2000, p. 30)

Bannerji (2000) reiterated the vast impact of the multicultural discourse and how it ignores a serious political force in Canada: “we continue to subscribe to the discourse of diversity or liberal plurality, forgetting both its depoliticizing capacity and its ability to perform a most powerful political function” (p. 53). Also, as explained by Saul (2005), there is a reality of “discriminatory practices and resultant discord between multicultural policy on the one hand, and practices and implementation on the other,” where there, “is the widely-held belief in individualism as a valued and central ideal of this country” (p. 176).

Discriminatory practices are not unique to Canada; however, there are distinct diametric forces affecting the idea of integration of visible minority Canadians (James, 2005). Moreover, the images and discourse of multiculturalism in Canada do not account for the complex intersections of identities and prevalent oppressions. As noted by Bannerji (2000), “the discourse of diversity makes it impossible to understand or name systemic and cultural racism, and its implication on gender and class” (p. 54). As we delve into the institutions of Canadian education, I heed the following statement by Bannerji (2000), as it recognizes multiculturalism as a multi-faceted discourse used theoretically in the context of liberal democracy, whilst being limited in its ability to critically examine the impact and lived reality for Canadians:

Politics of recognition, an ideology of tolerance, advocacy of limited group rights, may all result from adopting the discourse of diversity, but what difference they would actually make to those people's lives which are objects of multicultural politics, is another story. (p. 55)

Feminist sociologist, Thobani (2007), further explains this paradox: "multiculturalism has had the effect of constituting people of colour as possessing an excess of culture that marked them as outsiders to the nation" (p. 162). In the past year this is perhaps most evident by the passing of Bill 21 in the province of Quebec. Where religious symbols, such as the turban or hijab, are not allowed to be worn by any person working in the public service sector. For teachers who identify as Muslim or Sikh, their identity markers tied to religion are further regarded as being Other in Canadian society (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016). Multiculturalism, with its limitations, is a prevalent concept in the discourse of inclusive education (Kariwo, Asadi, & Bouhali, 2019) and accessible to persons that engage in conversations about how and when diversity is acknowledged and seen explicitly in Canadian schools.

### **Section 3: Foundations of Multicultural and Anti-Racist Education Paradigms**

Multiculturalism as an approach to education was developed in earnest in the 1980s, after the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was passed in 1981 by the Government of Canada, at that time led by the Liberal Party. This section will briefly examine the philosophy of multicultural education and anti-racist education, drawing on both Canadian and American contexts with the understanding that although unique in respective policies, our two countries share a commonality of Eurocentric education models. Within the Alberta context, it is interesting to note that in the indicators for inclusive schooling (Ainscow & Booth, 2012; Alberta Education, 2013) there is mention of "racism" but there is no direct reference to "multiculturalism," as part of what

schools are to understand, value, and respect. However, the influence of multi-cultural and anti-racist approaches has reverberated both directly and indirectly in Canada. I will examine the main tenets and critiques of each approach as a means of understanding how schools may or may not view diversity as part of their programming.

James (2005) analyzed both education and employment initiatives in response to the official discourse around multiculturalism in the late 1980s, and described these as “respective formulations of integration, equality of opportunity, and accommodation of differences and diversity” (p. 18). He explained that provincial bodies operating to implement multicultural education seek “to promote sensitivity to, awareness of and tolerance for ethnic and racial minority groups and cultural differences” (p. 18). However, other academic research is more critical of education policy and denials of ethnocentrism and privilege. The concepts of integration and assimilation are addressed below, in addition to embedded systemic views of the Other. As stated by James and Wood (2005),

it is a system in which students for whom the school system was designed to serve and still serves—the economic, social and cultural elites of society, i.e., English-speaking (and in Quebec, French-speaking), white, middle-class Canadians—are more likely to succeed. (p. 93)

Multicultural education has its roots in the debate and critique of knowledge construction and what comprises ethnic diversity in terms of school curriculum and teaching (Banks, 1996; 2009). At the heart of this debate, there are three main groups within the scholarly/academic field that can be defined in terms of their perspectives around diversity and the role of education (post-secondary and mandated education). In the United States, these areas of study include “the Western traditionalists, the multiculturalists, and the Afrocentrists” (Banks, 1996, p. 3). In short,

Western traditionalists are those who take a stance of protecting the established forms of knowledge being presented and taught in school environments, with the idea that Western civilization is inextricably tied to schools and therefore requires protectionist measures from “feminists, scholars of colour, and other multiculturalists” (Banks, 1996, p. 3). In contrast, multiculturalists argue that the narratives and experiences of oppressed groups have been marginalized by schools and curriculums, and advocate incorporating the histories and cultures of other groups as a key focus within multicultural education. The key idea here is how the curricula, education, and experiences of the Other are defined, understood, and brought forward into schools. It is a question of knowledge, and whose knowledge and perspectives are being advanced or marginalized further in our schools today.

Multicultural education is seen by many as a transformative discourse that has changed over the course of the latter 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As this study works within the North American context, I concur with Banks (1996) that “multicultural education is an education for functioning effectively in a pluralistic democratic society” (p. 5). Banks argues that, to accomplish this, students need to engage in the study of five types of knowledge: “personal/cultural; popular; mainstream academic; transformative academic; and school” (p. 5). His work has been very influential in the work of social justice education (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) with the goal of enacting a transformative education for students to question their perspectives, positionality, and understandings of knowledge acquisition. Multicultural education is aimed at developing an inclusive environment for all students in sharing, understanding, and critical thinking around knowledge construction within education. However, within the traditional canon of Western, Eurocentric, and ethnocentric curriculums, multicultural education has often been adhered to as an add-on form or tourist-style multicultural approach (Derman-

Sparks, 1995; Zine, 2002). These approaches and others like them seek to accommodate cultural and religious differences where the “goal has been to foster appreciation of the cultural heritage of others toward increasing group harmony” (Lund, 2006, p. 258). The critique, however, is that discrimination and marginalization of minority groups is not adequately addressed (James & Wood, 2005), and runs the risk of glorifying or exotifying a historical/stereotypical image of the Other (Zine, 2002). Furthermore, the systemic and structural inequalities of power and privilege are not addressed in order to effect change for all students (regardless of ethnicity) and education as a system remains rooted in ethnocentrism.

Anti-racist education, in contrast, moves beyond curriculum and teaching as a means to transform knowledge, and instead critically examines the systemic structures of inequity embedded in schools. Here, in agreement with Dei (2000), I adhere to the definition of anti-racist education as follows:

Action-oriented educational strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and interlocking systems of social oppression. It is a critical discourse of race and racism in society that challenges the continuance of racializing social groups for differential and unequal treatment. (p. 27)

Specific policies and practices of racism are critically examined in anti-racist discourse and have emerged from the experiences of racial minorities against discrimination and marginalization in education (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016; Dei & McDermott, 2014; Emdin, 2020; Housee, 2008; Houser, 2008; Nieto, 2010, Rezai-Rashti, 1995; Zine, 2002).

It is within this premise that one must reveal and name racism as an inherent quality of “White Christian ideology” (Dei, 2000, p. 27) that includes forms of racism and racist discourses across society which subjugate social groupings to unequal and inequitable treatment. In

understanding the origins of prejudice and racism, we can open dialogues around equity, inclusivity and “power-sharing in communities” (p. 27). The concept of how discrimination is embedded, is reported by Lund (2006), for example, in learning materials and in the invisibility of Whiteness (Dei, 2000). Dei also regards the challenges of anti-racist initiatives as an interrogation of dominance. This approach resonates deeply with my study, as it is work that seeks to draw from and elevate the voices of minoritized students and families. The agency of these participants cannot be assumed as passive or ignorant about their identities (racial and/or ethnic), when in reality their identities rest in some form of recognition within schools.

The paradigms expressed by Lund (2006) and Dei (2000) argue for a transformative change, whether through localized curriculums or systemic structuring; both approaches speak to the importance of recognizing and changing schools and recognizing the inequities experienced by minoritized students. The work around multicultural and anti-racist education reflects the teaching and curriculum both formally and informally at the school level where, “a critical component of school knowledge is not only what *is* taught, both explicitly and implicitly, but also what *is not* taught [emphasis in original]” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 31). These approaches are viable pillars to building an inclusive education system and school sites.

The concepts, legislations, policies, and informal curriculums surrounding schools today operate within forms of intersectionality of race, gender, class, age, and culture. For example, how one defines the traditional family unit (e.g., White, middle-class, heterosexual union) and so-called traditional family values can also be viewed as a “gendered system of social organization” (Hill-Collins, 2000, p. 157). What constitutes a “traditional” or “family unit” is heteronormative and marginalizes those who do not identify or conform to an ideal which, potentially impacts interactions between schools and communities (Yosso, 2005). This echoes

the findings by Crenshaw (1991), where the experiences of dominant groups constitute a standard to measure everywhere:

The most one could expect is that we will dare to speak against internal exclusions and marginalizations, that we might call attention to how the identity of “the group” has been centered on the intersectional identities of a few. (p. 1299)

The institution of education most often upholds society’s notions of what should or needs to be taught to the next generations. The framework derived from anti-racism and critical race feminism is where “experienced reality is used as a valid source of knowledge for critiquing sociological facts and theories, while sociological thought offers new ways of seeing that experienced reality” (Hill-Collins, 2004, p. 122). The current inquiry into experienced reality examines educational perspectives and is a window into the complex layers of acquired knowledge, and histories of the participants’ lives as they encountered ‘inclusive’ education in schools today.

#### **Section 4: Inclusive Education and “Doing Diversity” in Schools**

Ahmed’s work, *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life* (2012), critically examines the work of diversity within the realm of post-secondary institutions. It is an important venture into how the work and those identified as ‘benefiting’ from said work, fair in a precarious process of understanding responsibility and roles within diversity policies. Ahmed’s work has built on what other scholars have studied in terms of White privilege (DiAngelo, 2018; Kincheloe, 1993; Kumashiro, 2004; Lund & Carr, 2015; McIntosh, 1991; Nieto, 2010) as a concept that deals with power, hegemony, and dominant discourse in society. Ahmed (2012) explains,

the very idea that diversity is about those who “look different” shows us how it can keep

whiteness in place. If diversity becomes something that is added to organization, like colour, then it confirms the whiteness of what is already in place. Alternatively, as a sign of the proximity of those who “look different,” diversity can expose the whiteness of those who are already in place. To diversify an institution becomes an institutional action insofar as the necessity of the action reveals the absence or failure of diversity. (p. 33)

How we perceive K-12 education as an *institution* reflects multiple functions as an organizational structure, or human resources sphere, and a defining feature of civil life in Canada. The lens in this research is that of seeing the institution of education as it involves social relations in its workings, policies, and the interactions around forms of diversity and inclusion.

Institutions are taken for granted as prominent pillars of our modern life that reflect society’s values, power, and norms. The institution of education, therefore, is a lens by which we can study the realities of inclusive education. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) explained:

Institutions produce, circulate, and maintain the dominant culture’s norms, values, definitions, language, policies, and ideologies—and do so in ways that are above as well as below the surface of cultural water. Institutions are directly connected to (and reflective of) larger dynamics (interests, power relations, fears) of a given society. (p. 103)

I intend that the questions guiding this research will reveal an understanding of institutions as formations, whether they be teachers, students, or families. Pursuing insights about intersections between communities and the institutions that serve them supports capturing change, and “transformation, as a form of practical labour, leads to knowledge” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 173).

As this research occurs in the province of Alberta, it is important to understand the work of Tony Booth, Mel Ainscow, and Alan Dyson (2006), *Improving schools, developing inclusion*,

as it significantly influences the policy direction for many school boards, including those in the urban site of this study:

School improvement becomes far more than a technical process of raising the capacity of schools to generate particular measurable outcomes. It involves dialogues about ethical principles and how these can be related to curricula, approaches to teaching and learning, and building of relationships within and beyond schools. Discussions about school improvement must make explicit the values that underlie the changes seen to “improve” them. (p. 9)

The ‘values’ that the authors refer to underlying change are ones that are contested, re-evaluated, and sought out in terms of implications for practice. The authors acknowledge and address the values tension throughout their work with the understanding that principles of “inclusion” are flexible and dependent on the i) context of local sites and ii) how policies are articulated and sustained by school boards. This is noteworthy in that we may understand how Alberta Education (2013) takes these principles into consideration when developing inclusive education parameters. Also, the authors identify an opportunity for localized contexts to be heard and seen as part of the overarching conversation of how inclusive education is lived and experienced – which relates directly to the focus, questions, data collection and analyses of this research study:

It is a tension between the attempts to put values and principles into action, and the complexities of schools and education systems. The book is about engaging with the current realities of schools and exploring ways in which they might become more inclusive. (p. 11)

In Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, and Zine’s (2003) comprehensive work, *Removing the margins: The challenges and possibilities of inclusive schooling*, we can better

contextualize the notion and definitions of community, family involvement, and inclusive education in Canada. The importance of school engagement with families and community members is not a new or undocumented approach within the literature (Dei et al., 2003), and studies also address the various forms and benefits of local community involvement. Dei et al. discusses literature that reports the ways in which parents, families and community members fulfill “educational obligations to schools (e.g. local community involvement in school activities, the promotion of students’ prior learning activities in the homes/families, and the performing of educational advocacy and school governance)” (p. 5). The key idea emerging from this body of work is that schools must work from a place of trust and grassroots level with communities. Dei et al. explain that the realm of parent-school relations cannot be viewed without acknowledgement of the effects of power and knowledge, or the social construction of relations that reflect the “white middle-class experience” (p. 6), and markers of race, class, gender, and sexuality. The authors conclude that: “schools, therefore, cannot disregard power relations, community cultures and differing locations of parents when it comes to parental involvement” (p. 6). Furthermore, this work highlights the historical impact on minoritized communities in their agency and ability to engage with schools: “In Euro-Canadian/American contexts, minority parents have defined parental and community responsibility in education in ways that reveal deep anger over the long history of exclusion and marginality” (p. 7). The marginalization of cultural, minoritized, and diasporic groups raises crucial questions regarding inequities present in the school system. The reality is that schools are better equipped to meet the needs of the majority or dominant body of students (as reflected in mainstream society) while “disengaging others” (Dei et al., 2003, p. 8).

Based on the discourse that school structures operate as a reflection of dominant Euro-centric values, ideals, and conditions, it can be argued that there is a need for a counter-representation to the norm, and to “construct different cultural scripts” (Dehli, 1996, p. 86). Dei et al. (2003) argue for the need to re-conceptualize approaches in the study and structure of community-school relations, with the first endeavour being to broaden the notion and understanding of who comprises the community and family of students. In addition, Dei et al. promote a disruption of “white, middle-class assumptions and challenges the idea of simply inserting parents and communities into hegemonic structures of schooling” (p. 8). The agency of parents and communities has been examined in Ontario with key examples that speak to the varying degrees of advocacy, re-positioning according to local contexts, and challenging of, “rigid definitions of parent, community and family responsibility” (p. 9). Mediatore (2000) furthers this argument explaining that our intersecting (racialized) identities are “conditioned and constrained by the social and political institutions regulating notions” (p. 119) of diversity and policies of inclusion.

Dei et al. reflect that, even with a comprehensive examination of community-school relations, the notion of inclusive education is problematic. The following excerpt draws our attention to the critique of inclusive education as a means and an end:

Inclusion is presented as an insertion of minoritized “cultures” as auxiliary or peripheral to a core dominant curriculum which remains intact as the legitimate site of knowledge/power. Similarly, we also recognize that “inclusivity” has been problematized in terms of its inadequacy to support substantive transformations in the social construction of power, privilege and difference beyond an assumption of universal entitlement to “hold one’s own” place, opinions, or views. (Dei et al., 2003, p. 13).

The argument for a more comprehensive and critical examination of how we view and enact inclusive education is an important and significant area requiring careful examination. The literature and discourse of inclusivity in education exists as a collective understanding of policy and practice which can be informed more fully by studying how it is lived through experiences. The interactions between school sites and families investigated in my research has the potential to reveal a transformative praxis within an inclusive education site.

### **Summary**

This review of literature is relevant to the parameters of this study and reveal a need to further understand a localized context, that being in Alberta, Canada. Specifically, the current study seeks to assess how inclusive education is experienced and lived by those who are the objects, not subjects of intention in developing equitable, diverse, inclusive school sites. By incorporating the tenants of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical lens and examining multiculturalism in education in Canada as a policy, I have shown the disconnect between intentions and resulting limitations when working within a diverse and pluralistic society. Furthermore, the practical approaches of multicultural education and anti-racism education have been reviewed to address the gaps between the ongoing intentions for equitable practice and current realities of marginalization among minoritized groups. This is not limited to classroom practice but, instead, reflects the overall institutional paradigm of how diversity is seen through policy and discourse. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological approach of this study as an extension of how inclusive policy can be studied through the experiences of racialized minority communities.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study employed qualitative research methods through critical ethnography. This chapter includes discussion of the study design, beginning with the underlying theoretical framework and epistemological foundations. This is followed by key understandings regarding researcher positionality, namely, how reflexivity and subjectivity are attended to throughout the study design. Next, I address the site of research, recruitment of participants, method of data collection, followed by a discussion of the data analysis. The consideration of ethical concerns relevant to the study including, the risks, limitations, and the implications of the results conclude the chapter.

#### **Study Design: Critical Ethnography**

##### Overview

Critical ethnography is the “research methodology through which social, cultural, political, and economic issues can be interpreted and represented to illustrate the processes of oppression and engage people in addressing them” (Cook, 2008a, p. 149). This method requires an attention to both systemic understandings whilst creating opportunities to analyze how these are experienced in individual and group structures (Creswell, 2007; Willis, 2007). With its underpinnings in traditional ethnography (Cook, 2008a), critical ethnography came as a departure based on critiques that the social structures within society and lived agency of people, were in large part ignored (Cook, 2008a). In the 1970s, critical ethnography in education was taken up as “the convergence of traditional ethnography and composition pedagogy, providing new sociology of education that highlighted both neo-Marxist and interactionist perspectives” (Cook, 2008a, p. 149). Critical ethnography has changed over the years; I have focused on the works of Carspecken (1996) and Madison (2012), to guide the design and analysis of this study.

Critical theory is embedded within critical ethnography, and it “begins with an ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* (emphasis in original), domain” (Madison, 2012, p. 5). Madison (2012) explained that critical ethnography itself, “is a meaningful and conscious enactment of learning from and entering into an ethnographic domain of immense possibilities” (p. 49). This learning through the enactment of possibilities can be found in educational institutions, the site of this research. Education sites are comprised of knowledge, power, and people (Ahmed, 2012). School sites are where this research resides to examine multicultural education through the lived experiences of students and families.

The interdependence between theory and method in critical ethnography is a core part of critical ethnography and requires careful attention throughout all stages of research (Carspecken, 2006; Cook, 2008a; Madison; 2012). This research includes “focused, theorized studies of specific social institutions or practices that aim to change awareness and/or life itself” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 47). Furthermore, there is a transformative component whereby attention is given to the possible changes among participants, in how they perceive school communities. Critical ethnography is a method that, in part, belongs to the community of participants and aims to interrupt dominant discourses through the experiences of participants within schools, specifically highlighting how inclusive education is seen, felt, and heard. To better understand the larger social structures under study and conferred meanings, the philosophical foundation of epistemology requires thorough attention.

The collection of data is a compilation of those experiences meaningful and held close by the participants (Madison, 2012), and this imposes ethical responsibility on the researcher. Smith (2010), in her writing on equity and academia, reiterated, “storytelling is a profoundly political

act” (p. 43). Throughout the study, I was intensely aware of Smith’s (2012) views, and was attentive and careful to faithfully reflect the reality of the stories shared in this research so that they are lived in entirety by the participants. Critical ethnography is employed to examine peoples’ experiences with social, racial, cultural, and economic oppression and subordination (Cook, 2008a). When experiences encompass race and racism, these are stories that, “are a bridge between individual experience and systemic social patterns. Thus, their analysis can be a potential tool for developing a more critical consciousness about social relations in our society” (Bell, 2003, p. 4). It is an examination of systemic structures through the collective experiences of individuals. Smith (2010), explained “how the storyteller frames and tells the story of equity also has the power to shape how we see, or fail to notice, the social practices of equity and inequity” (p. 43). As the researcher/storyteller employing critical ethnography, each component of this study demonstrates the care for and attention necessary in holding this responsibility. The responsibility of care extends to the location of this research, recruitment of participants, conducting of interviews, ongoing field notes of observations, the participation in key social sites by the researcher, and subsequent analysis of data (Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2012). A duty of care in these matters comprises comprehensive attention to ethical considerations.

#### Theoretical Framing and Epistemology

The framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education informs my conceptualization of the methodology consistent with critical ethnography as “critical theory in action” (Madison, 2012, p. 28). With CRT, there is a goal to identify and address systemic inequity (Marx, 2008), specifically centering race, as participants share their experiences of racial inequality. Furthermore, the understanding is that race is a social construct, not a singular biological fact, and embedded in social structures and power dynamics, such as education (Dei,

2014a; Donner & Ladson-Billings; 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2016; Madison, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Razack et al., 2010). The theoretical frame serves the purpose of naming and acknowledging the advent of this form of research and the lens by which the findings are analyzed. Madison (2012), explained that,

Critical Race Theory analyzes the complex machinations of racialization in the various ways it is created, sanctioned, and employed, but it also illuminates the various ways race is an effect of our imagination and how racial symbols and representations determine our understandings and attitudes about race in the first place. (p. 87)

This passage is especially important as it highlights the fact that a singular narrative surrounding race and racialization can lead to a simplified understanding, void of complexities. To understand race as a “consequence of social thought and relations” (Irby et al., 2019, p. 198), there is a balance required in discussing, addressing, and engaging with participants. To negotiate a shared understanding of the impact of race, the experiences of racial dynamics are determined by the participants, and then the researcher is required to interpret how racialization resides within societal structures:

It is by documenting, understanding, and interpreting the interactions between actors within the site and their references and representations to broader societal structures that critical ethnographers can begin to examine cultural forms of oppression and engage people to address them. (Marx, 2008, p. 149)

I recognize that it is necessary and critical to state my subjective positioning in my role as researcher. Subjective positioning must be balanced by knowing that, “critical methodology is based on critical epistemology, not on value orientations” (Carspecken, 2006, p. 22). Instead,

subjective positioning requires understanding that, “we work up our theory from holistic, pre-differentiated human experience and its relationship to the structures of communication” (p. 22). There is an interdependence with one’s epistemological understanding as “justification for particular methodologies (i.e., the aim, function, and assumptions of method)” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 90). Carspecken (2006) described this function as follows:

Critical epistemology will include an understanding of the relationship between power and thought and power and truth claims. We also see that this epistemology will provide a precise understanding of what values are, what facts are, and how they are connected. (p. 10)

With this understanding, I recognize the body of knowledge that permeates the research method and analysis employed in this study. In the words of Butler-Kisber (2010), this creates an overlapping understanding in which space I can “move away from the dichotomy that separates methods from the overall inquiry process, and (to) show the overlap and complexities that exist when trying to situate a study within a particular perspective” (pp. 1-2). It is my hope that the aims and questions will situate this study in critical epistemology and that the research findings can be disseminated as part of this larger body of work, specifically as, “improved concepts of social structure, power, culture, subjectivity” (Carspecken, 2006, p. 27). To further investigate my researcher position within this critical ethnography, I will explore the aspects of reflexivity, subjectivity, and insider/outsider status.

## **Researcher Positionality**

### **Subjectivity and Reflexivity**

The design of this research allows for both the positionality of the researcher to be i) named and ii) examined within the study, in order “to contribute toward changing those

conditions toward greater freedom and equity” (Madison, 2012, p. 17). Conversely, “ethnographic positionality is not identical to subjectivity” (p. 10). Subjectivity is an important cornerstone in critical ethnography; however, positionality “requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or subjective selves” (p. 10). Instead, it is in my engagement with and representation of others, that confirms a relational understanding that is not limited to understanding my subjective self. Carspecken (1996) explained, “orientations provide reasons why people conduct their studies;” however, an important distinction needs to be made that these value orientations of the researcher do not determine the whole study.

Instead, critical ethnography considers my value orientations, but resides in a “critical epistemology” (p. 8). The role, therefore, as the researcher is recognizing one’s “value orientations” (p. 10), which are concerned with various implicit and explicit socio-cultural structures. In addition, Madison (2012), stated that the critical ethnographer has a duty to “resist domestication” (p. 17), within their location and to contribute to the need for a socially just environment:

It means that she will use the resources, skills, and privileges available to her to make accessible – to penetrate the borders and break through the confines in defense of – the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach.

(pp. 17-18)

My experiences are linked to my personal, professional, and academic life while, as importantly, I hold a keen desire to better understand and question forms and ideologies pertaining to Canadian multiculturalism and anti-racism education. I identify as a second-generation Indo-Canadian, Punjabi-Sikh, woman of colour who holds a critical understanding of how multiculturalism exists in this country. As a mother of two, a wife, a daughter, and

granddaughter, my life experiences have been filled with negotiations and the challenges of being “Indian,” “Punjabi-Sikh,” and “Canadian,” according to familial, cultural, and societal expectations.

Professionally, I have taken on roles and work in diversity settings and participate in multiculturalism and discussions relating to multiculturalism as a community member, volunteer/activist, public school teacher, and emerging scholar. From these different perspectives, I locate myself as a knower of my experiences and regard this personal framework as contributing to the research. Madison (2012) posited that, “positionality is vital because it forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects” (p. 19). At the same time, Madison (2012) contended, “we understand that our subjectivity is an inherent part of research, but in critical ethnography it is not my *exclusive* [emphasis in original] experience” (p. 22). It is a site where I, the researcher, am responsible to attend to my subjectivity as relational, in terms of how this informs my engagement with and representation of others. Positionality also relates to the role of being an insider/outsider.

#### Insider/Outsider Status

The experience of being an insider/outsider to one’s research is one that I first recognized in my master’s research, exploring the experiences of visible minority women teachers (Aujla-Bhullar, 2012). Being an insider/outsider is used to, “describe a situation where the researcher is part of the topic being investigated” (Sherry, 2008, p. 433). As mentioned above, I identify as a parent and member of a minority community. I am a Punjabi-Sikh woman. Being an insider/outsider has the potential to have a far-reaching impact on the research process, including the following: how one enters the field, the researcher’s responsibilities toward the community

being researched, and maintaining contacts with participants throughout the study which reflects forms of gaining the participants trust and confidence (Sherry, 2008). As a researcher from a post-secondary institution I occupy a reflexive position that requires trust, openness, and critical reflection on an ongoing basis.

The participants recruited for this research reflect the benefits of having an insider/outsider positioning. My position allowed for contacts to be established in a trusted network deemed by participants to be worthy of their time and energy. My insider role shaped how they first heard of my research and considered speaking with me. Ultimately, it was the assurance that I was a racialized researcher, which led many of the participants to participate and share their experiences with me. Connections with the research participants were based on their pre-established “knowing” that it was very likely that I would understand their perspectives, without resorting to a lengthy and strenuous explanation of what it means to be a racialized minority in Alberta’s school environments. In comparison, an outsider researcher is likely to see and be seen through a different lens regarding how her/his race and identity are experienced by potential research participants.

The responsibilities of being an insider also requires an accountability regarding the research’s responsiveness, sensitivity and respect for the concerns and questions of the participants. In almost all my interviews, participants asked how my research would be used to build an understanding in school systems and districts. They articulated that they wanted their experiences, to be heard/read, and ultimately understood by schools in order to heighten inclusivity of racialized students and communities. It was based on this premise that the deeper albeit more uncomfortable experiences were shared with me. Attention to using sensitive

language and at times cultural awareness was required and held to the highest standard of accountability on my part as the researcher.

Lastly, I have been, and will continue, my ongoing communications with all participants in this study. When I completed the interviews and prepared the transcripts, I emailed them to the participants and invited them to review and make revisions. I asked the participants to clarify, if necessary, any points made during the interviews. Changes were minimal. For example, some observed how often they overused filler language (e.g., “like”).

I am aware of the benefits and the responsibilities as an insider. Hertz (1997), explored the need for reflexivity that interweaves the research with the position of the researcher. She explained that, “it permeates every aspect of the research process, challenging us to be more fully conscious of the ideology, culture, and politics of those we study and those we select as our audience” (p. viii). The benefits in terms of how others saw me and constructed me in relation to the research topic could also be a limitation, i.e., where doing research within one’s community is considered “indigenous” (Bolak, 1996, p. 97), because the insider status is recognized. However, there is potential tension where the “indigenous researcher runs the risk of being blinded by the familiar” (p. 97). I was aware and continue to be conscious of the need to avoid characterizing a homogenous sociological grouping of racialized minorities as one entity (Mohanty, 2003). Furthermore, my role as a researcher separates me from the participants, since my role requires me to be responsible for analyzing, interpreting and disseminating their experiences to a larger public. This responsibility I do not take lightly, because the results of the research weigh heavily with the participants’ expectations of positive actions in the future.

Balancing insider/outsider awareness and perspectives requires ongoing reflexivity around the impact of the relational rapport with participants and the nature of data collection.

Reflexivity does not occur in isolation nor at a singular point of time. Within research, it is ongoing and “changes with time and experience” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 19). This requires an ongoing attention to reflexivity and rigorous analysis of my relational position regarding the research. I believe that my insider/outsider role has strengthened the study and is supported by Madison’s views (2012):

critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among others, one in which there is negotiation and dialogue toward substantial and viable meanings that make a difference in others’ worlds. (p. 10)

### **Location of the Research**

The city of Calgary is one of the two largest cities in the province of Alberta, with a population of just over 1.2 million residents (Calgary Civic Census, 2016), and a visible minority population of 18.4 percent (Statistics Canada, 2017). The two largest school boards in the province are in Calgary, namely, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) and the Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD). In addition, Calgary and the surrounding school districts have numerous private and charter schools. Rocky View School District, for example, is the fifth largest school district in Alberta. It surrounds the west, north, and eastern areas outside of Calgary’s expanding city limits. The Rocky View School District includes the cities of Airdrie and Chestermere, the town of Cochrane, and numerous rural communities (i.e., Springbank). The participants of the study lived in one or more of the above locations.

It is also, important to note that Alberta was the first and only province in Canada to establish charter schools, which are autonomous public schools. As defined in the passing of this legislation in March 1994, “a charter school is a public school that provides a basic education in a different or enhanced way to improve student learning” (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 1).

Charter schools have created a significantly different landscape regarding how public education is developed and implemented.

It is mandatory that all educational programs must adhere to the Alberta Education's Program of Studies regarding the curriculum itself and educational outcomes. Furthermore, the "Inclusive Education Policy" is part of Alberta Education's mission to provide inclusive learning opportunities to all students in K-12 schools (Alberta Education, 2013, p. 5). Indeed, as stated earlier, inclusive education is a focal point of this research study.

## **Participants**

### Recruitment

Prior to participant recruitment and any form of data collection, I received ethics approval from the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) at the University of Calgary. Recruitment of participants occurred through the posting of public notices (Appendix A) primarily through social media, email call-outs to colleagues (Appendix B), and word of mouth. The recruitment channels resulted in a chain effect, in that many individuals gave me names of community leaders and interested families. I contacted potential participants by accessing networks and distributing letters (Appendix C), which outlined the research aims and goals. My initial planning included presentations at school council meetings; however, this was not necessary as the recruitment methods garnered a total of 18 participants. The data derived from participants aligns with a key principle of qualitative research. The call for in-depth attention that focuses on quality of data, regardless of sample size, as opposed to large quantities of participants. As mentioned previously, I did not contact specific school boards in order to recruit participants, and neither have I included the school districts' names in the study.

The recruitment of participants focused on students and families who were currently enrolled or recently completed their time in junior high, middle, or high schools. Moreover, recruitment included, but was not limited to, individuals who self-identified (in part or whole) as being a visible minority based on race, ethnicity, culture, religious, or linguistic diversity. This included individuals with origins in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, South America, the Caribbean, and African nations. As mentioned in the introduction, (excluding Indigenous people) nation-wide, 22.3% identify as a visible minority, and in Alberta that percentage stands at 23.5% (Statistics Canada (2017)). Once again, excluding Indigenous people, amongst school aged children, between the ages of 5-24 years, 26.5% identify as visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2017).

#### Demographics/Identity Markers

A detailed biography of each participant and their family grouping is provided in this section. Participants chose their own pseudonym for the purposes of this study and articulated how they identify themselves in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion, racial identity, and gender. Following this, a table summarizes this information in terms of the following: self-identified visible minority marker, and family grouping (consisting of parent/child). In total, there were 8 family groupings.

##### 1) Jada and Jimmy

Jada is the mother to Jimmy and identified as Arab, Muslim with Lebanese nationality. She speaks both Arabic and English fluently and was born in Calgary, Alberta. She grew up in Canada as a young child and then Lebanon as a teenager. She had her son, Jimmy, in Calgary, Alberta. As a first-generation Canadian, she recognized the limited understanding of layers to her

identity by other Canadians. She identifies herself as a moderate Muslim and an “Arabic speaking Brown person.”

Jimmy is a high-school student, born and raised in Calgary, and identified his minority status by acknowledging his darker skin in contrast to being White. He identified with having a Lebanese background and did not feel that his religious affiliation was necessary to state. At the time of this study he was in grade 11 in a Calgary area high school.

2) Emaan and Pamela

Emaan is mother to Pamela and identified as a Muslim, Pakistani Canadian woman. She was born in Pakistan and had all her children in Canada. Her children attend school in the NE and NW quadrants of Calgary, Alberta. Her daughter, Pamela, was in grade 7 at the time of this study. She identified as a Muslim Canadian with her background being Pakistani.

3) Simran, Jordi, Ushna, and Shahmeer

This family grouping was the largest in terms of participants residing in one household. Simran immigrated to Canada from Abu Dhabi, U.A.E., and is mother to Jordi, Ushna, and Shahmeer. She self-identified as South East Asian and Muslim with strong ties to both Pakistan and Arab culture/ethnicity based on her lived experiences.

Jordi, at the time of this study, completed his grade 12 education at a Calgary, Alberta area school. He self-identified as someone with a Pakistani background and was born in Abu Dhabi. He was preschool age (2-3 years old) when their family immigrated to Canada.

Ushna is the eldest child, and was born in Pakistan before moving with her family to Abu Dhabi and then immigrating to Canada. She self-identified as South Asian, female, Pakistani background with strong religious beliefs being Muslim. At the time of this study, she was in her

early 20s and a post-secondary student. Her schooling experience in Calgary began in the junior high years (grade 7-9).

Shahmeer was the middle child and eldest son of Simran. At the time of this study, he was in his early 20s and spoke about his identity reflecting how it was seen by others as Indian/Pakistani, Iraqi/Middle Eastern. He self-identified as a visible minority, born in Pakistan and raised in both Abu Dhabi and Canada. His schooling in Calgary began in the elementary years (grades 4-6). He shifted his self-identification as being Arab, “Emirati,” to stating that his being from Pakistan was the primary form of his identity and that being Canadian as secondary to that. All family members did indicate that their home languages were Urdu and English. And all 3 children were part of the public education system in and around the Calgary area.

#### 4) Sherry, NN, and KK

Sherry is mother to daughters Ninja-Night (NN) and Kinkajou (KK), both of whom were the youngest participants of this study. Sherry was born and raised in Dubai, U.A.E. before immigrating to Canada with her children and partner. She self-identified as Muslim, Pakistani, Canadian, Brown, mother of 3. At the time of this interview, both girls were entering Grade 7 in a Calgary area school. NN and KK both self-identified as Muslim girls, aged 11, born in Dubai. Both girls attended Canadian schools since Kindergarten in the public system and more recently were part of a private, faith-based school.

#### 5) Joan and Isabella

Joan and Isabella were a mother-daughter pair and both have had their schooling experience in Canada. Joan, mother to Isabella, was born in Jamaica and immigrated with her family when she was preschool aged. She self-identified as a Black Caribbean woman. Isabella self-identified as having Jamaican, Caribbean background, and as part of the Black community

in Calgary. At the time of this study, Isabella was in a junior high school entering Grade 7. She indicated the breadth of diversity in her public-school population, in terms of language, religion, ethnicity, and race.

6) Soha and Kaiser

Soha is mother to Kaiser and was born in Lebanon and immigrated to Canada as a teenager. She attended public schooling as a high-school student. She self-identified as a Shia Muslim woman with a cultural identity tied to her Lebanese nationality. Her son, Kaiser, self-identified as being Canadian first and foremost, as he was born and raised here. At the time of this study, he had recently graduated from high school and was entering his post-secondary education.

7) Ayanna

Ayanna is mother to 2 school-aged children and explained her self-identification as first being “mixed race.” She speaks of being bi-racial, with White and Black parents, but self-identifies as a Black, mother of 2, teacher, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied and English speaking. In her self-description, she indicated that she is light-skinned and that how people identified her was a main factor in how she self-identifies.

8) Ashley and Tyrone

Ashley is the mother to Tyrone and self-identified as an East-Indian, Sikh woman. She was born in Canada and attended school in the public system. Tyrone is her eldest child and, at the time of this study, was in Grade 8 in a junior high school. He self-identifies as a 13-year-old East-Indian male of the Sikh faith. They both indicated that Punjabi and English were their home languages.

**Table 1: Participant Profiles**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Parent/Child</b>	<b>Self-Identity</b>
Jada	P	Lebanese/Muslim
Jimmy	C	Lebanese/Muslim
Emaan	P	Pakistani/Muslim
Pamela	C	Pakistani/Muslim
Simran	P	Pakistani/Abu Dhabi/Muslim
Jordi	C	Pakistani/Canadian
Ushna	C	Pakistani/Muslim/Canadian
Shahmeer	C	Pakistani/Muslim
Sherry	P	Dubai/Muslim
Ninjanight	C	Canadian Muslim
Kinkajou	C	Canadian Muslim
Joan	P	Jamaican/Canadian
Isabella	C	Canadian/Jamaican
Soha	P	Lebanese/Muslim
Kaiser	C	Canadian Muslim
Ayanna	P	Black/Cis-gendered/Canadian
Ashley	P	Punjabi/Sikh/Canadian
Tyrone	C	Punjabi/Sikh/Canadian

## **Data Collection**

### **Field Journal**

Working within the school site as an observer, teacher, and being a racialized (Brown) woman, the realities of diversity are at the forefront of my position as researcher, and are an entry point to the dialogue between the individuals being interviewed and me as the interviewer. As part of the data collection gained from interviews, I maintained a journal containing my own

observations, reflections, and thoughts both before and after the interviews. Prior to this, however, field notes were kept throughout the time of my work as an educator working within schools of diverse student body populations. All of these are part of the knowledge base on which I draw to support emerging meanings and themes. In the realm of educational research, there are everyday circumstances that may call our attention, especially as a teacher working with students and their families. Arising from my observations made both in and out of classrooms, there have been ongoing questions about how school staff engaged with communities of colour at various levels. Race (2008) explained that, “teachers at all levels who conduct research should be encouraged to address issues that they encounter not only in the classroom but also in the school staff room and within senior management teams” (p. 242). Many notes, reflections, and questions permeated my previous teaching journals, and beginning this research with a field journal dedicated to this study, was another reminder of my subjective and reflexive positionality.

My field notes were a core component in the development of guiding questions used for the interviews in this study, which will be detailed in the following section. Madison (2012) referred to the importance of field notes as follows: “your field notes will be an invaluable source and frame of reference as you contemplate your questions” (p. 29). This method of data collection proved to be most important as it allowed me to actively engage in the reading of policy and write memos around inclusive education discourse, as observed at the school sites. My notes allowed for deeper reflection into how inclusivity was seen and felt, and the surroundings that may be apparent in any public education setting. This attention to “information gathered by the senses” (Firmin, 2008, p. 191) gave me the opportunity to embed myself in the role of researcher and record my observations and thoughts concerning the inclusiveness of

school sites to which I was privy. Whether these were shared with my participants or not, it garnered a consciousness of how I perceived race inclusivity for families and students. In one of my entries I compared this to being a “vigilant witness” (Field Notes, October 2019). The field journals were sources for recollections and for recognizing the nuances of my own thought processes as I embedded myself in the role of researcher before, during, and after data collection as it occurred, in the form of participant interviews.

Additionally, the reading of text and documents on inclusive education policy and guidelines, was addressed as an additional resource as part of my field notes and serves as part of my analysis and discussion. The use of written texts as part of the data collection was best explained by Perakyla (2008):

Qualitative researchers who use written texts as their materials do not try to follow any predefined protocol in executing their analysis. By reading and rereading their empirical materials, they try to pin down their key themes and, thereby, to draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which the textual material is a specimen. (p. 352)

The intentional application of these documents was a running theme in my field notes and provided an important backdrop to the development of guiding questions and knowledge in moving forward to the primary source of data collection: the interviews.

## Interviews

The primary data to be used in this research comes through the interviews conducted with participants. Consistent with the methods of qualitative interviews there was a constant knowing there was always more to understand through listening and being present with the discussion at hand. As Josselson (2013) explained, “to base a research project on interviews is to assume that

there is some knowable reality beyond our own minds” (p. 2). The interview process within this critical ethnography, from the structure of the interview, question formulation and technique, to the active participation of all parties in the interview, required a careful attention that as a researcher I engaged in a form of participatory action-based lens; “we are interested in the grand possibilities of building solidarities and also the intimate and sustaining spaces of inquiry where we cultivate a fragile ‘we’” (Torre et al., 2018, p. 495). This solidarity is one that resonates in the insider/outsider status as a possibility whilst recognizing that racialized minority experiences are not a cohesive group and cannot be homogenized as one. Hence, a thorough approach to the primary source of data collection of interviews is outlined here.

The one-on-one qualitative interviews with participants at a location of their choice allowed for direct means to find answers to the guiding questions identified at the beginning of this dissertation. Those questions came from the time I have spent and engaged in “puzzlements,” the practice of listing questions and clustering them into groupings (Madison, 2012, p. 33). This initial stage of the interviewing process is of great significance in qualitative research (Carspecken, 1996; Cook, 2008b; Josselson, 2013; Madison, 2012). There is ongoing attention to one’s epistemological grounding in recognizing “that reality is socially constructed and that we have a part in creating, through our framing of questions and our forms of investigation and analysis” (Josselson, 2013, pp. 1-2). The guiding questions for these interviews were developed prior to meeting with participants and adhered to the requirement of the critical ethnographer in “spending time closely listening, observing, and interacting in the field while compiling extensive field notes as a foundation of knowledge and experience upon which you may begin to craft your questions” (Madison, 2012, p. 41). As a critical ethnographer, I recognized that “belonging precedes being” (p. 28), and that my position and thoughts are not

neutral nor objectively placed outside this study; instead, they come from an “informed prior analysis” (Campbell, 2006, p. 93). As the research began in my own field notes and observations, I re-visited my questions and engaged in re-developing the questions established in two models described by critical ethnographer, Madison (2012), as being “tried-and true methods” (p. 29).

The “Patton Model” (p. 29) uses six forms of questions, all of which were applied in the planning for interview data in this research study. These included questions on behaviour/ experience, opinion or value, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographics (Madison, 2012). The “Spradley Model” (p. 31) explained the forms of descriptive, structural/explanation, and contrast questions, all of which enhanced the questions that developed during the interview. For example, in asking participants to describe an experience in more detail, allowed for an in-depth understanding about the impact of a critical incident – how they felt, saw, and experienced key moments. Interviews are especially key, as they allowed the researcher to “reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people’s subjective experiences and attitudes” (Perakyla, 2008, p. 351). Seeking the lived actualities of the participants guided this research and allowed an in-depth understanding of these intricate “inclusive” education experiences. The semi-structured interview setting allowed for the participants to take the lead on particularizing key points and experiences, in that,

Semi-structured interviews can make better use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues by allowing much more leeway for following up on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewee, and the interviewer has a greater chance of becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide. (Brinkmann, 2018, p. 579).

In the arrangement of interviews, each participant was given the choice of interviewing independently from their family members or as a group. All participants chose to interview as a family unit (i.e., parent and child) except for one participant whose children did not participate. This resulted in a unique structure of interviewees and interviewer as a dyad unit comprising of parents, children, and siblings engaging in the topic with one another. This interview structure was important, both for comfort and reliance of family members to co-share the telling of their experiences, while maintaining their individual voice in relaying their perspectives. Additionally, family discussions were productive of additional perspectives, comments, and understandings.

Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' permission, both verbally and written, and ranged from one to 2.5 hours in length. These were then transcribed into a Word document and then emailed to participants for their review and to allow for them to clarify/revise content. The transcripts were especially important as they provided an accountability on my part as the researcher to show the flow and discussion of the interview as participatory between all members. As this research at its core involved issues of how inclusive education is received through the lens of being racialized, I strived to support my participants to express their experiences accurately, as they interpreted them. This was facilitated through asking open-ended questions and ensuring that I listened attentively to the participants as they expressed their experiences in as much detail as they felt comfortable elaborating on; I was guided by the concept that, "good listening means exposing ourselves to the unknown: it involves giving up our usual frameworks and immersing ourselves, intellectually and affectively, in the viewpoints and experiences of the Other" (Josselson, 2013, p. 80). These interviews created interactions as the sites of how we, interviewer and interviewee, "construct memory, meaning, and experience

together” (Madison, 2012, p. 28). Centering the experiences of participants through active listening and thinking, culminated in my analysis of the data.

### **Analysis of Data**

From the in-depth qualitative interviews, there is a rich source of information and data around the understanding of how education is viewed, practiced, and lived in the lives of those connected with schools. In reading and learning about analysis techniques in qualitative studies, I appreciated the deep significance of how much care and attention is required in listening to and engaging with participants (Madison, 2012). The synthesizing of theoretical knowledge and information about lived experiences is where critical ethnography has its roots (Cook, 2008a). I recognized the ideological foundation embedded in critical ethnography and understand Cook’s (2008), words regarding writing the analysis, that it requires the researcher “to outline a research stance that can accommodate both negotiated meaning and the existence of larger social structures, great attention must be paid to the philosophical issues of ontology, epistemology, and the validity of critical ethnographic research” (Cook, 2008a, p. 150).

I began my analysis through both coding and logging the data, whereby I engaged in the “process of *grouping together themes and categories that you have accumulated in the field*” (Madison, 2012, p. 43, emphasis in original). This developed into an organizational structure that identified major themes and categories which fit into either high-level or low-level coding (Carspecken, 1996). High-level coding refers to more abstract ideas and low-level includes concrete data. I then explored the data, examined the abstract ideas and possible patterns relating to identified themes residing in a cluster of interviews. This structure of analysis provided a more detailed understanding of the layers, complexities, and distinct categorizations. Ayres (2008) explained that,

coding facilitates the development of themes, and the development of themes facilitates coding. In coding, portions of data are separated from their original context and labeled in some way so that all data bearing the same label can be retrieved and inspected together. (p. 868).

The grouping of larger themes gave way to an organizational structure that I created through visual graphics that allowed for a method of “displaying the connections, hierarchies, and distinctions with more clarity” (Madison, 2012, p. 45). The multiple readings of transcripts were a means of deeper engagement to comprehend the contexts and connections to the research aims. It was a space where, “the researcher’s analysis serves as a magnifying lens or, better, a house of mirrors to enlarge, amplify, and refigure the small details and the taken for granted” (Madison, 2012, p. 36). As the transcripts consisted of participant groupings (8 groups totaling 18 participants), the analysis required a substantial amount of time for reading, reflexive practice, and re-readings. Once the main themes were distinct, I began writing the analysis of my findings.

#### Valuing Participant Voices

In many ways, the interviews themselves were community spaces between myself and participants, being formed in the questioning and collection of their experiences. As the researcher entrusted with these stories there is an accountability not to be taken lightly, “it is the responsibility of the researcher to include the voices of others in the representations of research as a function of demonstrating the dynamic ephemeral qualities of research that exists as community activity” (Finley, 2008, p. 4)

It is important to note once more that I conducted interviews with family units, a dyad which often had me in the minority, in terms of numbers. As the researcher, I held the responsibility of “including members of the community who might otherwise be silenced or

marginalized during the processes of doing research” (Finley, 2008, p. 4). I was humbled that the data gathered from the interviews was a “mass of information” (Madison, 2012, p. 43). This led to extensive transcripts comprising multiple layers of perspectives laden with emotionally charged recounting of lived experiences. With my analysis, I realized quickly that participant voices would need to remain intact, as much as possible, in the dissemination of results.

Hathaway, Sommers, and Mostaghim (2020), reflect this critical factor in qualitative research:

Acquiring the most credible and deep appreciation of human lived reality through social interaction requires that we immerse ourselves in the social worlds of others. In so doing, field researchers seek to cultivate relationships that grant us access to the data we may not otherwise be privy to. (p. 108).

The access I gained through these interactions is reflected in how I attended to the voices of the participants throughout this process, as each ongoing thematic analysis allowed me to see similarities and distinctions between participants. In the writing of my analysis, there are large block quotes of participant voices, without interruption or interference from my voice, as participants often engaged in a longer train of thought in conveying their experiences with the issue(s) at hand. I further explore this unique element in more detail in Chapter 4.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The history of research (Smith, 1999), and the history of North American/Canadian education systems as presented by a number of authors (Banks, 1996, 2009; Dei et al., 2003; Ng, 1995; Nieto, 2010), describes the oppression and marginalization of minority communities. The voices, stories, and those participating in creating schools and learning environments have been and are still largely from a dominant, privileged position (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Working in the field of critical ethnography opens one to witnessing inequities within society. In

researching this topic, I was keenly aware of becoming a witness to the experiences of the participants as they revealed them. There is also a need for a critical self-awareness that I have come to recognize in working with and for communities that have experiences with systemic hegemony. Madison (2012), explains, “as critical ethnographers, we are compelled to act morally; in other words, we feel the responsibility to make *a difference in the world* [emphasis in original]—to contribute to the quality of life and to enlivening possibilities of those we study” (Madison, 2012, pp. 97-98). Both the research and the researcher need to be critically aware of contributing to a system of power that renders participants’ voices diminished in the findings or disenfranchised; for this reason, “researchers need to be caring about the human tendency to know “what’s best” for others—based on their own worldviews and experiences—such that community-based research can become colonizing in the same ways as can expert-directed research; the experts are just differently named and larger in number as constituents of a community” (Finley, 2008, p. 100). It is within this paradoxical space that I have proceeded with caution, transparency and ethically, to honour the voices and experiences of my participants in interviews and in the process of my analysis and the discussion of study findings.

From the planning stages to the writing of this dissertation, I recognized the adherent risks for participants engaging in the research interviews and possibly naming experiences such as racism, exclusion, and power differentials that may exist in their lives and interactions in school and community circles. Josselson (2013), explained that, “as researchers, we must maintain an ethical attitude at every moment of the research process and must be attuned to the ethical dilemmas that arise” (p. 117). The principles and practice of community-based research (Glass & Newman, 2015; Strand et al., 2003; Wallerstein & Duran, 2008), create a means by which we can attempt to decolonize dominant discourses and open possibilities to deconstructing

the obscure yet powerful boundaries between schools and their surrounding communities. Community-based research is intended to “act on the most important problems in society, such as disparities based on race, class, gender... [and the] need to produce knowledge that clarifies and seeks to change unequal distributions of power and resources” (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008, p. 33).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, ethics clearance was obtained through CFREB at the University of Calgary and was the cornerstone to the data collection and subsequent analysis of this study. In recognition of this space that the participants and I occupy, I acknowledged at the forefront of the study, that confidentiality and possibly anonymity is necessary for the participants to engage in sharing and discussing topics, which render them vulnerable. This is of key importance, especially when working through a critical feminist race lens. Chase (2008), in speaking about her own research in an educational context, stated:

Importantly, these feminist lenses opened up new understandings of historical, cultural, and social processes. Furthermore, as feminists approached women as subjects rather than objects, they also began to consider their subjectivity—the role that researchers’ interests and social locations play in the research relationship. (p. 63)

There is hope, I believe, for a dismantling of oppressive constructs that impact marginalized and vulnerable populations through careful research practices (Smith, 1999). Furthermore, it is of acute importance that I recognized and acknowledged the role of participants contributing to the pursuit of knowledge in the research domain and as I engage in critical reflexivity throughout the planning, implementation, and reporting of this work. Glass and Newman (2005), explicated this as follows:

Diversity is critically important precisely because of the entanglement of ethical and epistemic matters in research: if we are to produce warranted truth claims, then it is consequential who has equal standing to contribute to the collective pursuit of knowledge. (p. 26)

As well, Madison (2012), emphasized the role of advocacy and the need of the ethical researcher to “actively assist in the struggles of Others” (p. 98), and further,

advocates represent who and what they are advocating for: their names, narratives, histories, and logics of persuasion, as well as imagining what more is needed in the service of advocacy. All of this requires labor that is entrenched in power relations and representations that are inextricable from ethics (Madison, 2012, p. 98).

Finally, delimitations include what I bring inadvertently from a personal perspective to this study. The complex forms of my positionality as an insider/outsider and my position as a teacher may influence participants, who may be reluctant to share their experiences with one who is part of the very system that is marginalizing the voices of the Other. My role as the researcher will continually be in the forefront in the ways I communicate my understanding and knowledge about the workings of school practice and inclusive education discourses.

### **Summary**

This research aims to “produce a kind of knowledge that makes visible to activists or others directly involved the order they both participate in and confront” (Smith, 2005, p. 32). So, the “who” of this research study is a pivotal viewpoint. The study uncovers knowledge about and makes visible how “diversity work” is enabled, enacted, or overlooked as a meaningful entity in building inclusive school sites through examining participation (and/or absenteeism), of visible minorities and marginalized community members.

The work of critical ethnography captures experiences, research, and theoretical applications. My aim is to add to this body of research and to forward an understanding of the feats and complexities of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusive practices within school sites. It is an in-depth examination of a small window into the systemic structures relating to inclusive education. Madison (2012), emphasized that the “method is not simply a means to an end” (p. 61), but rather, it is a “meaningful and conscious enactment of learning from and entering into an ethnographic domain of immense possibilities” (p. 61). The experiences of the participants, the people, are what drive the research question. From the subjective realm of the researcher and her questions, with my identity as a teacher, colleague, and diversity “worker” in a school system, I am aware of the critical position I occupy as I delve into a study that hopes to create a space for the voices of the Other and promote constructive dialogue by revealing what is hidden or unrealized in dominant discourses.

Critical ethnography is the vehicle through which my research is attentive to the voices and experiences of the participants. Within the traditions and challenges of the power and systemic structures presented in critical race theory, this research is designed to pursue action in the advocacy about those experiences that can inform a field of educational research pertinent to the inclusivity of racialized communities. The inquiry herein is an interdependent theoretical framing that reflects the complexity and nuances of research arising from current events and reflecting the historical and present-day constructs of the Other. This research study is meant to enter a space that provokes our understanding of inclusive education and race, by revealing the perspectives and the lived experiences of those directly impacted in the school system: the community of students and their families.

## Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

### Introduction

The research findings are all at once daunting, mesmerizing, and chaotic when the process requires the reading of interviews and field journals. The method of sorting through the interview data served to organize and support analysis, while honouring and respecting the issues and experiences of participants. The findings are layered with multiple issues identified at various stages of reading through the data. This chapter will begin by detailing the process of analysis through subjective positioning and identifying the key issues. From here, the Canadian context is set through the participants' reflective process in regards to self-identification. This chapter ends, and in some way begins, with the framing of key findings into the first thematic analysis concerning interpersonal relational spaces with schools.

Through the engagement of the methods, theory, literature, and findings derived from the data, the analysis is disseminated into 2 key themes: i) relationships developed in inclusive school spaces, and ii) established systemic structures that obstruct inclusivity of diverse communities. The participants' experiences disclose how inclusion is felt, seen, and heard at the school sites through their relationships with teachers and administration. The examination of these experiences forms an understanding of systemic inclusion in education. The latter theme is examined in Chapter 5.

### Process and Perspective: Subjectivity in Research

To begin, there is a correlation between the research and researcher when subjectivity is recognized. The technique of 'writing as analysis' in critical ethnography, is a process by which the research and researcher come together to make meaning and through the study open the interpretations and questions to an audience. This is also known as "critical analytical processes"

or CAP (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018, p. 821), in ethnography. There is an interconnectedness between the process and the product – a positioning of subjectivity, reflexivity and theoretical framing (Chase, 2018). In the chapters preceding this analysis, I have articulated a form of “personal biographical experiences” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018, p. 825), that makes my subjectivity explicit. Furthermore, the theoretical and methodological lens or “commitments” (Chase, 2018, p. 551), applied throughout this study are embedded in an understanding of historical and societal contexts. Chase (2018) explained this as, “instances of social action, [when] researchers began to treat narratives as socially situated interactions embedded in interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts” (p. 547). There is a recognition of interviews as being the stories, or narratives, that are distinct to each individual participant, while also being interactions contributing to forming insights into collective racialized experiences.

Furthermore, in sharing space with these participants, there was always an awareness of my own experiences working in and for diversity as a racialized teacher, parent, and student who went through the Alberta public school system (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016; 2019; Hertz, 1997; Reinharz, 1997). In addition to CAP, I have encompassed “conversation analysis” (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2018, p. 676), as a “site where intersubjective understanding about the participants’ intentions is created and maintained” (Heritage & Atkinson, as cited in Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2018, p. 678). This is an intersubjective construction of meaning through connection with the subject and persons of this study. With my previous research (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016), I critically examined my location in the in-between spaces of the various roles and positions attributed to being a woman of colour and a Canadian-born, educated professional teacher. I examined the concept of third space and hybridity as explored by Bhabha (1994), in my analyses of visible minority women teachers’ experiences working with students and families. There was a frame of

reference by which ‘we’ could understand our collective experiences while recognizing the layers of complexities in individual narratives. In locating myself as the researcher and holding authority in the analyses of this study, I recognized that individual narratives needed to be lifted as much as possible, as many of these parents and students did not feel as though they were being heard at their school sites.

There is evidence that the participants also occupied a third space positioning (Bhabha, 1994, Dunlop, 1999). Exploring this positioning may lead to a deeper understanding of race, culture, ethnicity in the classroom setting. Throughout chapter 4 and 5, there were times where participant voices dominate, uninterrupted nor condensed, by my editing as previously discussed in Chapter 3, “valuing participant voices.” Krog (2018), explained that, “we have to find ways in which the marginalized can enter our discourses in their own genres and their own terms so that we can learn to hear them” (p. 490). Throughout the analysis we see how these narratives represent the “way humans account for their actions and events around them and shape their everyday experience” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 63). It is a deliberate, ongoing attention towards building an understanding with respect to how participants expressed themselves:

Understanding performative writing as something relational means you are writing for an audience of readers and you *care* about them. Writing that is consciously *embracing* [emphasis in original] in writing that is welcoming and encompassing and aims to meet the reader with both affect and affection (Madison, 2012, p. 220).

In the dissemination of the results, the first theme regarding relationships formed in inclusive school spaces, centers on interactions and was derived from the layers of understanding about relationships in various contexts. The definition of relationship for the purposes of this study is, “the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state

of being connected” (dictionary.com, n.d.). In all interviews, the concept of relationship was understood to be between parents and teachers, students and teachers, families and administration, and students and curriculum. The concept of relationships amplified the way inclusion was felt and seen through the lens of racialized families and students. Chase (2018) aptly captured the value of narratives of experiences or relationships in making meaning:

Personal narrative is a distinct form of communication: it is meaning making through the shaping of experience; a way of understanding one’s own or others’ actions; of organizing events, objects, feelings, or thoughts in relation to each other; of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions, event, feelings, or thoughts over time (in the past, present, and/or future). (Chase, 2018, 549)

The second thematic analysis progressed from the context of interpersonal experiences into understanding the broader systemic and institutional experiences of education (Chapter 5). The concept of institutional emotional spaces that are embedded in race and ethnicity, became evident in the questions and recollections of participants. Ultimately, the concept of inclusion was critically analyzed through the lens of being a racialized minority in a diverse Canadian society.

These narratives shared in the study are both personal and compelling. To begin, I provide a Canadian context to situate the findings in my thematic analyses. It is a context of how participants engaged in identifying themselves and felt represented amid discourses of diversity and multiculturalism in Canadian society.

### **Canadian Consciousness: Where Are You From?**

The contextual understanding of identity formation and participant subjectivity are significant in understanding the uniqueness of each narrative. It also honours the voices of, and

knowledge expressed by, participants in their relationship to their communities and schools. In addition, a contextual understanding of being “Canadian” serves as an ongoing frame of reference for this analysis, as we delve into the relational issues between schools and families.

The racialized identities of the participants were self-determined and often explained in the context of key events that shaped their perspectives shared during interviews. Many of the participants described their ethnicity, culture, religion, and gender identity, stressing the importance of naming and recognizing the intersectionality of identities. Furthermore, it was interesting to note that defining oneself as being Canadian, was not always an immediate marker that participants discussed. For participants born in Canada, there seemed to be more ease in describing themselves as Canadian. Interestingly, all participants held Canadian citizenship or permanent residency, but there was a general reluctance to identify themselves as being Canadian. Some participants expressed indifference or refused to identify themselves as Canadian. This is indicative of occupying a third space of existence and living between cultures (Dunlop, 1999). This third space applies to education for minorities as described by James (2001):

Race, ethnicity, and, correspondingly, language are part of the subjective ways in which we and others make sense of who we are, the places from which we speak, our encounters with others, the relationships we have, and the experiences we have (p. 3).

Participants communicating how they felt about belonging at school sites, both the challenges and successes was, “ongoing, iterative, and fluid” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 69). In my employment of “narrative positioning” (Chase, 2008, p. 73), the analytical lens aimed to support an understanding of

stories as both enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances. These include the possibilities for self and reality construction that are intelligible within the narrator's community, local setting, organizational and social memberships, and cultural and historical location. (Chase, 2008, p. 65)

The communicative nature of storytelling and narratives “educates and thus transforms the public life of local, national, and global communities. In these contexts, individuals’ stories become a collective story” (Chase, 2018, p. 555).

However, there is an inherent danger in potentially homogenizing the experiences of the participants as one large category of being a racialized minority. Again, the concept of third space position and hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994), is one through which we can understand a collective experience, while attending to the unique racialized lived experiences. Each participant specifies unique aspects of their lives and these distinctions shed light onto relational spaces of schools, without limiting them to a grand narrative glossing over the critical lens employed to diversity within ethnocultural and racialized minorities of Canada.

Shahmeer, a student who began his schooling in grade 4 after immigrating from his birth country, United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), explained,

*Shahmeer:* I always personally thought I was truly from the Emirates, Abu Dhabi. And, I remember there was a White kid who is my classmate and September 11th attacks happened. He did, you know, call me names, Osama bin Laden and what not, right? That's when I started to question, you know, like where we stand in the world? What our reputation is basically, right? And, it bothered me for a little while, but after that, I did get over it and then all the way to grade nine I, for some reason I used to tell them that I'm from Dubai, I'm from Abu Dhabi, right? Even though at home we used to speak Urdu.

Because I was born there and lived there for, you know, less than 10 years maybe or whatever. But then it wasn't until grade 10, 11, 12 when I met a few Arab friends, one of them which was from the Emirates. You know, by blood right?

They used to tell me, "oh no you're not from Emirates you're Pakistani, right?" And, then I was like, "Okay, yeah I am Pakistani but I was born and raised there," so I did consider myself an Emirati.

Shahmeer's racialized identity and positionality is subject to political and cultural tensions that are not easily accounted for as being attainable through one's education or learning at the formal level of curriculum in Alberta public schools (Alberta Education, 2020). In Canada, the education relating to Canadian identity has not permeated a holistic learning or understanding that is like Shahmeer's experience of reflecting on, "where we stand in the world."

Understanding where we stand in the world is a phenomenon that has been studied (James, 2001; Bannerji, 2000; Rezai-Rashti, 1995b), and continues to concern youth today.

*Shahmeer:* So, the same, this makes me question like...the Canadians they do feel like, yeah? This is their country even though we all know, you know, back-back way back it was just the natives, right? The Canadians do feel like it's their country so when somebody else comes in here and they consider themselves, you know, of a different background.

They come here they consider themselves, you know, Canadian which they're actually not if you think about it, right?

Well, that doesn't really affect them too much or doesn't right? Always that question always arises in my mind, that's why, that's why I always just stick to my roots. I'm like, "I don't wanna make that same mistake again." You know, me trying to be someone I'm not really, you know...my background.

*Sonia:* Would that kind of apply to you identifying yourself as Canadian?

*Shahmeer:* That's why I would consider myself Pakistani first, Canadian second.

For many of the participants, the question of Canadian identity and subsequent reflections regarding being a Canadian, is neither inherent nor explicit in the learning at Canadian schools (See also Bedard, 2000, for further discussion). Issues of belonging are painful and common to many racialized persons. In fact, “most children or young people who just want to fit in and be like everyone else, and those who are racially and/or ethnically different face a particularly painful time” (James, 2001, p. 5). At times, the experiences shared in the interviews were very agonizing to hear. The interviews were emotionally charged with despair and frustration simultaneously. There is a conscious understanding of one's identity as being problematic in how we learn and see ourselves interconnected as a multicultural nation. All 18 participants stated that there was a marked discrepancy between the demographics of the student population and the teaching staff. In each school, the student body was extremely diverse, yet the diversity of the teaching staff was virtually nonexistent. Particularly, in public schools, all participants noticed not having any racialized teachers at the younger grades. This changed, to some extent, at the senior high levels with perhaps two to three teachers being visible minorities. This trend is on par with data from Statistics Canada (2016), which determined that 84 percent of elementary schoolteachers were female and White.

James (2001), described the ways to remain ignorant as “remarkable” (p. 4), because of our shared education as being one reason that we could recognize our interconnections as a society, “we live in the same country, are educated together, and work together. Despite all this—despite our lives being intertwined socially, culturally, economically, and politically—we still manage to be ignorant of each other” (p. 4). Not much has changed in terms of a formal

focus on Canadian identity within school curriculums here in Alberta. Although, drawing on my 14 years as a public-school teacher, there are more instances where teachers and students engage in knowing about and celebrating differences as being important and a joyful aspect of Canadian society where some members exist in this 3<sup>rd</sup> space as visible but invisible to formal/official curriculums of education.

The need to examine race in Canadian education begins with an understanding of how experiences of racial Othering is implicated in Whiteness. The demographics, “implore us to look deeply at Whiteness and its relationship to teaching, particularly as classrooms are filled with children of colour” (Picower, 2009, p. 197). With regards to specific school districts in this study, at the time of this writing, none are engaged in the collection of race-based data, regarding either students or teachers. This limitation is important to acknowledge, because students and their families are quick to identify whether their presence is acknowledged or ignored in the classrooms that they occupy.

Isabella, a grade 7 student, who self-identified as a Black Canadian, described the diversity of students at her middle school and drew attention to her perception of those who are not part of this mosaic of diversity:

*Sonia:* Your mom was saying it’s pretty diverse. So, what are the demographics kind of like?

*Isabella:* There is just like a lot of mixed people. There are different cultures there and-

*Joan:* Many cultures-

*Isabella:* There is lots of people from Pakistan. There’s lots of people from Africa. There’s lots of people from all over China and Asia. And just all over the world. And then there’s lots of people who are just pure, pure Canadians.

Isabella's reference to "pure, pure Canadians" is indicative of how she sees European-Canadian descendants, who are White, as the Canadian status quo. Even with a strong history of diversity across this land, we are subject to an identification by racial category. Jennings (2001), boldly captures this Canadian phenomenon:

Ethnicity is more a construct of language, culture, and traditions that it is of historical life conditions. Race, however, does not depend upon language, culture or traditions. It is a societal construct that aims to explain and prop up inequalities that have been legislated to provide unequal advantage to one group, to that group privileges denied the other group. I am sure that most people characterized as being "visible minorities" in Canada never thought of themselves in those terms prior to their arrival in this country...to me that is clear and convincing evidence that race has more to do with racism than it has to do with who one is and how one identifies oneself and those of the same group. (p. 147)

These means of self-identification are both limiting and necessary to understand how inclusion and race are connected by students in school settings day in and day out. Conversations I have been privy to over my decade of teaching in these very school environments confirm students' self-identifiers.

In revisiting the factor of teacher diversity, very few teachers were racialized minorities. Ushna, identifying as a Pakistani-Muslim woman who had completed her public schooling in Canada, reflected on this reality:

*Ushna:* There wasn't much inclusivity...but let's move on to high school. So, onwards [from elementary years] there was a difference. So, from junior high, then when I got into high school, it was different where I had teachers of different ethnicities.

So, I had an Indian teacher in science, I had another Black teacher...then you see more diversity. So, I feel like in the education system is kind of like...there's more – at the time there was more diversity going higher in your ranks, in your grades. But, it was harder because you want more people that are like you around you when you're younger 'cause you don't know yourself, right?

This is an example of where participants recognized a “deviation from the norm” (James, 2001b, p. 152), as part of their everyday school reality. All participants, unanimously, expressed the need for diversity in teachers in schools as a positive factor for students, of all backgrounds. As Ushna expressed, it was a way to potentially “know yourself,” which is especially fascinating as she identified herself through her ethnicity, specifically, her religion and gender as being a Muslim woman. Having a teacher as a person of colour in her high school years was a moment of hope and comfort, a finding I consistently encountered in my previous research (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016)

Similarly, Sherry, a mother with two daughters, NN and KJ, who identified as a Brown, female, Muslim, Pakistani-Canadian, contrasted experiences of having her daughters, KJ and NN, attend 2 different schools due to KJ's learning needs. Here, Sherry expressed the positive impact of having teachers of colour amidst an all-White staff:

*Sherry:* With KJ's school, like I said, it's always about...we've always felt like it's about KJ's education first, and both her teachers were from minority groups and they've been very sensitive. For instance, I don't shake hands with male members, and that's never seen and her teacher would extend his hand and I'd be like “I'm sorry, I can't shake your hand because of my faith.” That's fine...completely alright. The dialogues have ever been,

always been... I've never felt...to be honest it's a very stark difference from NN's school to KJ's school.

In NN's school, in her classroom I think she was the only person of colour. But I did see a few in [name of son – *not part of interviews*] classroom. Again, I feel like they would stay to themselves rather than, say... [at the] end of school there was this party for families – and just a couple of parents would just be by themselves. And the rest of the group is a huge group and there...it's just yeah, you know what I'm saying Sonia.

The increase in diversity in schools is, “one of the distinctive features of schools in North America” (Lopez, 2013, p. 1). All participants mentioned such an increase in diversity in schools in Calgary and the surrounding areas (see also, Goddard, 2007). It is a reality that calls for schools to address the varying social locations of both teachers and students to effectively address misconceptions and differences based on background and life experiences (see also Lopez, 2013). In the interview, Sherry's experiences were retold as moments of angst in the retelling. As someone who ‘gets’ being visible as the other (Adler & Adler, 1997; Bolak, 1997), Sherry was more comfortable sharing her experiences, and said, “*you know what I'm saying, Sonia.*” This insider moment existed as a reality of my own intersubjective experiences as they brought forward the issues of existing as an outsider – when one is the only racialized family in school settings. This connection with Sherry, works to deepen the understanding of how relations impact feelings of inclusion or exclusion. The suggested commonalities between participants and myself are “cues that the interviewer had been positioned in a way that reinforced his ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’ status” (Hathaway, Sommers, & Mostaghim, 2020, p. 111). It is an entering into the third space positionality, participants and researcher, that continues as a Canadian context of the interviews.

From the experiences of these participants in conveying how they locate themselves as Canadian (or not), we can see there is a need to “counteract dominant cultural stories and visions” (Dunlop, 1999, p. 58). This is evident in how they (and I) express an identity as Other-Canadian. It is in this third space positioning (Bhabha, 1994; Dunlop, 1999), where Yee (1993), succinctly captured this Canadian consciousness: “we are all (including First Nations people, ironically), familiar with that seemingly innocent assumption-laden question: ‘Where do you come from?’ (p. 13).

The next section delves into the relational spaces between participants and staff at school sites, both the tensions and successes, as the first thematic analyses of the findings.

### **Analysis 1: Relational Spaces in Schools**

Scanlan and Johnson (2015), explained that the relationship spaces found at schools can be understood through the metaphor of social frontiers: “social frontiers bring out boundaries: places of intersection. Boundaries are ambiguous middle grounds, where something is held in common, while much remains apart” (p. 163). The following analysis details a dynamic view of these social frontiers in the relational spaces held at school sites.

The relationship between the participants and teachers was dense with evidence of experiences that shaped how families and students viewed instructional spaces. With instruction, we predominantly focus on classroom spaces; however, interactions between teachers, students and parents (i.e., parent teacher interviews, school councils), are all reflective of relationships formed as part of routine school interactions. Topics of trust, confidence, and knowledge were all discussed in the interviews and encompassed positive interactions between families, students, and teachers. This is not surprising, seeing that multiculturalism has been a predominant focus for its comforting and celebratory aspects that normalize diversity as a visible marker of the

Canadian landscape (Bannerji, 2000). The contradiction to this occurs when we apply an anti-racist framework to how power, privilege, and dominant discourse create discomfort for, and marginalization of, racialized populations (Dei & Calliste, 2000). Both these frameworks are further explored below, beginning with supportive practices in schools.

#### Supportive Practices: Celebrate Culture

When teachers create instructional spaces that reflect a knowledge of the diverse backgrounds of their students, there is a feeling of being welcome and being a part of the school environment. Participants, Emaan, and her daughter Pamela, who both identified as Muslim, Pakistani-Canadian, explained the school's visible diversity:

*Emaan:* So, her [Pamela] school is actually 98% Brown – like Pakistani, Indian, Asian, so really, it is all inclusive really. I don't feel that any more needed to be inclusive because the whole environment of the school is great. I'm also part of the school council become so they're (school staff) very sensitive to occasions like Eid and Diwali and all of that. And these guys (students) have a uniform, but on certain days, they are allowed to wear their own traditional clothes.

*Pamela:* Yeah they always make sure like you can go to the office too and be like "holidays are coming up" and then everyone has a chance to express their culture by wearing cultural clothes or whatever they feel like wearing.

*Sonia:* And, how does that make you feel?

*Pamela:* It's good because you get to share with people how your culture is like, because some people, they don't know, right?

*Sonia:* Yeah, so how does it work between the teachers and students? Do they start teaching or talking about it in class? Like, "with this Eid coming up...?"

*Pamela:* Yes.

*Emaan:* They [teachers] come to students to learn about it, but since there's already so many generations before that at the school, students were Brown, they already know a lot about it [celebrations that students participate in].

The multicultural celebrations at this school are in response to the demographics of the school. This is an example of multicultural education through a lens of diversity and equity building (Banks, 1996; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003). The ease of having cultural and religious events understood by teachers was appreciated, even when it wasn't always understood in its entirety. Soha and her son Kaiser, who identify as Canadian-Lebanese, relayed their experiences with Ramadan and Eid in school:

*Sonia:* Do they, teachers or school in general, acknowledge Eid or other celebrations in any way?

*Kaiser:* Well, definitely. They use to put up like Eid Mubarak.

*Sonia:* Okay.

*Kaiser:* Kinda... like more like a banner on the wall. And the long breaks of...everybody knew what Ramadan or if it was Eid.

*Sonia:* Yeah, yeah. And do kids take time off or accommodated during that time at your high school?

*Kaiser:* For Eid Mubarak, yeah.

*Soha:* But for my daughter, she was fasting one day – she doesn't do it every day – because she was younger. And then she went into gym, and she was like, "I just couldn't run. I was tired and I couldn't drink water."

*Sonia:* Yeah.

*Soha:* So, the teacher, she told him, “I can’t run. I’m fasting.” And he goes, “That’s not my problem.” He said something like, “why you would do that? Go drink water, or do whatever. I don’t know why you guys do that.” Right?

So, she came home in tears saying, “I don’t know what to do – he knows it’s Ramadan. He knows that I’m fasting. But he just wouldn’t accept the fact that I’m fasting. He goes, “you need to deal with it.” So, that affected her in a sense...I mean, he was making them run, run, run but she couldn’t have water and she’s tiny. And she didn’t do it every day...

Soha attributed this to one teacher’s ignorance and then expressed her gratitude that, overall, Eid and Ramadan were known and accepted. She contrasted this with her own experiences as a teenager coming to Canada where this kind knowledge was very limited and/or non-existent. In some ways, Soha found some comfort in the perceived progression when she compared her own experiences to that of her daughter,

*Soha:* When I came in it was a fear. I was scared from everyone like, “what are we going to do here?” I didn’t like it here. So, to me I wanted to go back, no this is not us.

*Sonia:* This is not home? Not comfortable?

*Soha:* This is not us. Compared to my kids, they [kids] will never see what I experienced

For parents, like Soha, who had experiences with schooling systems in other countries and were new immigrants to Canada, they expressed appreciation for teachers asking questions on their background. In Sherry’s case, her daughter’s teacher (who was a visible minority), actively pursued more information about her daughter’s schooling and background:

*Sonia:* And did they ask questions about your background things because they’re visible minority, or did they kind of already know? Like how did that...

*Sherry:* They did because when we first got into KJ's school, the teacher wanted to know what our experience was like when we moved out here, what was her [KJ] education like back there? What kind of things was she doing? How did she fit into the classroom, because KJ did have challenges in the classroom. At that time, she wasn't identified as a gifted student, so she was in a regular classroom, so we moved her to a gifted program. So, our...the fact that we immigrated to Canada...that was talked about. And, that was the first time, and I thought "Ok, this is nice."

*Sonia:* Would you say that you felt included?

*Sherry:* Absolutely. They wanted to know. What experiences we've had, an understanding and asking of family background, being new to Canada.

The relationships formed with teachers who were passionate in learning about their students' lives and family connections was an area of importance to many of the participants. Nieto (2010) contended, "student learning is not simply a personal discovery, but also a social act; it is also deeply connected with the beliefs and daily practices of teachers" (p. 27). The statements used to describe these teachers ranged from, "safe and welcoming" (Participant, Jada) "not authoritative" (Participant, Kaiser), and "gets to know the families" (Participant, Soha). A relationship of mutual respect was highly valued and speaks to the transformative factor of multicultural education. In Nieto's (2010), work, *The light in their eyes: Creating multicultural communities*, she captured this critical need in transforming students to having light in their eyes, a "powerful metaphor for learning because it can illuminate the work of teachers and it can be a beacon for the learning of others" (p. 27). For some families, these relations have maintained their value after students have moved to another grade or teacher:

*Soha:* [name of teacher] needs to come back to teaching.

*Kaiser:* Yeah.

*Soha:* She's the one who he [Kaiser] said would be interested in this research.

*Sonia:* Okay. Yeah, so tell me more, what were the qualities you liked in her teaching?

*Kaiser:* She would communicate with you like you're a friend, do you know what I mean?

And, she wouldn't have like no authority over you. You know...she wouldn't try and control you and like tell you what to think. Like a lot of other teachers would do.

*Sonia:* So, she didn't have this authority over students? A different kind of teacher that might talk down to students or anything?

*Kaiser:* Yeah, yeah, she didn't have any of that.

*Soha:* No. And, she actually comes to our home now. Like she's family, she becomes a family member with everybody.

These supportive practices lead to intensifying feelings of belonging and acceptance for the participants. We can recognize the successes of multiculturalism in the celebrations and acknowledgement of community events in schools where the diversity of the student body is predominantly racialized minorities. There is also indication that the learning of new and unknown details of family backgrounds, as in the case of Sherry, is important for families to feel that they "belong even if you don't fit in" (Participant, Sherry). It is important to note that these encouraging interactions were possible with a positive and friendly relationship between key teachers with families, a form of critical allies (Lopez, 2013).

Conversely, the incidents of negative interactions between families and teachers was laden with far-reaching implications that surpassed the teacher-student relationship. In some cases, families were left feeling dejected and frustrated by the lack of having their concerns

addressed in a meaningful way, and enacting any viable change seemed out of reach. This included the prevalence of biases, stereotyping, and racism unchecked.

### Harmful Practices

In understanding the interactions between families, students, and teacher interactions as a formation of relationship, we can see the promises of multicultural education in a viable way. These incidents of positive relations occur by understanding that, “teaching practice is, in many ways, individualistic. However, regarding teaching as nothing more than individualistic, limits an analysis of the visible patterns” (Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003, p. 56). The deeply entrenched issues of being Othered through issues of racism, negative perceptions, and patronizing interactions fuel a divisive and harmful environment for these families and students.

These unaddressed issues become counterproductive when there could be a “pool of professional educators who share the language of antiracist, multicultural education with our students and who will increasingly model the antiracist classroom practices we want our students to develop” (Tatum, 2001, p. 52). The school site failing to embody inclusion, in this regard seems counter-intuitive. This applies to how racialized minorities cannot be assumed to have the tools and understanding to address issues of race and equity, including approaching teachers because, “any teacher might not understand the role that racist and classist systems and structures play in perpetuating the status quo and maintaining White privilege” (Milner & Laughter, 2015, p. 343). The following experience of Ushna highlights these complex perceptions and the impact on her both emotionally and academically,

*Ushna:* With teachers I had you know, social [studies] was my favorite subject. I was all about politics and social sciences and all that. Even up until high school that was the case. But, I guess in grade 12, all of a sudden, my position paper marks are going down. And, I

was very like passionate and prepared for these type of things, right? And, so when you do your comparison, if you have other class scores in the same class, the same room and the same topic and you just compare the marks, there was a drastic difference. And, me being so passionate about a certain subject, I didn't understand what was going on. So, after kind of talking to my mom about at the time, she came in and had a meeting set up with the teacher. When she met him...just from his tone, you could kind of sense that maybe he had a preconceived idea that maybe my English is not good. Or maybe like I don't know what I'm talking about.

My mom had to spell it out for him. Like, "just so you know, you know, my daughter has had these marks in her previous social classes as well as her favorite class." And, and then she had to go into background, like you need to know where we come from, "English is taught in our country, this is a system that we've been schooled in throughout our lives." The next time he marked an essay or position paper, he was like two or three better grade differences, right? And, that was a time where I felt I was like okay, "So, he's just judging," based on maybe how I look or what I have on [reference to her *hijab*] is what my assumption was.

*Sonia:* And would you say this is a critical incident that impacted your schooling? By critical incident I mean a memorable or significant moment that changed something for you?

*Ushna:* That was critical. Funny enough because of that critical incident, I didn't pursue that route, right? Cause its grade 12, University is next. It's just so interesting how one little thing can like just break it or make it for a child, right. So, I'm so demoralized. And, obviously you're about to pick your University classes, your courses and [it] just took one

teacher, one position paper...one event and I said, “Oh, you know what, I have no future in this. I’m not doing this. I’m not going to this again.” It’s those key things. Those years, very key.

*Sonia:* It’s interesting how you say when your mom came in that kind of changed the whole tone, right?

*Ushna:* Absolutely. Yeah.

What Ushna experienced here demonstrates the impact of harmful practices where negative stereotypes are left unaddressed between the authority of the teacher and authority of the family. Although the parent, Simran, attempted to rectify this by providing time and space for dialogue with the teacher, the result was not one of relief or resolution. Still important to note is the role and responsibility on families, like Simran, taking on a critical approach to countering harmful stereotypes. The following section brings forward more examples of how these biased perceptions impact the relationship between racialized minorities and school sites.

#### Seeing Racism: Biased Perceptions

Contradictory perceptions of one’s culture or religion came under scrutiny for being viewed as a form of non-compliance and disruption to the norms of day-to-day learning. Pamela and her mother Emaan had differing perspectives on an incident involving her gym teacher:

*Emaan:* There was actually one incident where she didn’t feel it...but I felt like the teacher should have been more sensitive. So, we just went through Ramadan and she was fasting for a couple of days, and the teachers knew that obviously a lot of the kids were fasting. But one of the teachers said, “Oh yeah, even though you’re fasting, that doesn’t excuse you from gym, so you have to do the whole gym outside as it is.” And then he like literally like threw the frisbees into the field and he’s like, “Go get the frisbee and stuff.”

*Pamela:* Yeah, but he said it was a joke.

*Emaan:* It was an insensitive – I don't feel like it's a joke. It's an insensitive joke.

*Pamela:* But we already have our energy. So, it's like it's okay for us.

*Emaan:* Yeah, it's summer, it's hot outside. The kids are fasting and you're making them run around the field. I mean, that's fine. I understand that's part of gym, but you don't make...don't say that. You know, just be a little bit more sensitive. And then drinking water in front of the kids and saying, "Oh, ha ha, too bad, you can't drink water. Look, I'm drinking water."

*Pamela:* He didn't say that.

*Emaan:* Pamela, you told me.

*Pamela:* No, he just said it as a joke and I didn't...I took it as a joke.

*Pamela:* It's not a joke.

*Sonia:* So how did your mom find out? Did you tell her?

*Pamela:* No. I said it as a joke and then she didn't take it as a joke.

*Emaan:* My kid is thirsty and somebody is standing in front of my kid and saying, "Ha ha, you can't drink water. Look, I'm drinking this whole bottle of water. Look, I'm eating ice cream."

*Pamela:* They didn't say that. They just drank water and they looked at me and I said, "okay." That's it.

*Emaan:* Anyways, after that, I found out that [name of school district] had actually posted a whole notice that said that Ramadan is coming up. Some kids will be fasting, please we provide them with as much flexibility as you can give them, especially around gym and outdoor activities.

*Sonia:* Okay, so that was up there? Like as a bulletin or email that came out?

*Emaan:* Yeah, it was on the [school district] website I think...on one of their notices and I think some teachers may not have read that notice. And, I also heard from some parents that they were...little bit...miffed. Saying, “Oh, you know, why do some kids get?” Because some teachers were sensitive to this and they would let some kids, you know, excuse them from gym, for example, if they were fasting. And some parents were like, “Oh, why are they being excused from gym? Just because they are fasting,” which didn’t really make any sense because it’s not really affecting your child if another child has been excused from gym for whatever reason. But, yeah.

We can see that the conversation around difference is in a space that is unsafe, uncomfortable, and rife with tension for both Emaan and Pamela. For Emaan, as a parent, she is affronted by the lack of humility and understanding presented by the teacher. On the other hand, Pamela was visibly uncomfortable with her mother’s perception and attempted to de-escalate the tension by sharing her perspective of a light joke understood by students. Chapman’s (2013), study on student experiences with race and racism in high schools, explored this phenomenon of race as being an unsafe space for students to engage in, “students tried to minimize their presence as much as possible by remaining quiet and unobtrusive” (p. 623). Pamela’s perception that it was not a big deal, resisted her mother’s belief that it was insensitive and needed to be addressed by teachers in the school setting. There is a need for teachers to gain knowledge of how significant cultural/religious observances are for students (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016). And, by validating this in interactions with students through day-to-day learning activities, there is an “understanding how school life is experienced by members of the Muslim school community

offers insight into the particularities of the needs and interests of Muslims from their own viewpoints” (Schlein & Chan, 2010, p. 264).

In many schools, including the sites of these participants, there is the reality of diverse groupings being a part of the school demographics (Goddard, 2007). Nonetheless, negative perceptions are more common than positive ones. With participant Sherry, she expressed dismay at how interactions with teachers were premised on a perceived inability to understand or speak English. The following excerpt voices the discrepancy between being attuned to diverse experiences and not understanding enough about a student and her background living in an English-speaking country:

*Sherry:* They talk a lot about diversity and wanting to know, but I don’t feel like it’s actually being practiced at all. I felt that way.

*Sonia:* And, you had said you felt this way many times?

*Sherry:* Many times.

*Sonia:* Do you feel that the school understood diversity – the challenges and benefits to it? Or, did they focus more, from what you’ve spoken about, more the challenges?

*Sherry:* I think it’s more the challenges. For me, I just feel like they automatically assume I have trouble with the language. For some reason, and it’s like...her choice of words, or her tone, and that was not the first time I picked that up. We were in another school before moving onto this one, before we even homeschooled, NN was in grade 1 at that school. My goodness, the teacher would speak to me as if I had trouble hearing, so deliberately loud, or deliberately slow, and she would nod like this [demonstrates nodding]. And, I’d be like “why are you talking to me this way?” And, it’s not the one time, and we’ve talked about it

and we've spoken, and then it'll come up again, and she'll talk to me in a certain way again.

*Sonia:* Were you able to, ever say to her, like, "no, I understand."

*Sherry:* Yes, "I understand exactly what you're saying." And, once they actually had a language interpreter? So, they had, and I'm saying, "no language is not a problem. I don't think language is a problem here, I understand exactly what you're saying and I'm hoping you can understand too, you have, we've had these meetings before. I don't see the need for one right now."

*Sonia:* So, that was another example of something being assumed? But not communicated to you until you're sitting there, going "wait a minute, because in Dubai...isn't English one of the main...?"

*Sherry:* Yeah, it is. It's Arabic and English. Those two are the official languages.

With these negative experiences, participants would often express a yearning for a more nuanced understanding from school staff on the diversity of their student population. This is an ongoing challenge for many schools. Schelein and Chan (2010), explained this as being a need to, "increase religious and cultural understanding [which] is especially important for schooling in culturally diverse societies, such as Canada and the United States" (p. 254). The racialized identity of persons is a key to diversity discourse and was a factor in the harmful interactions between teachers who were White and parents who were racialized. For both Sherry and Pamela, the seemingly mitigating factor was religion, as they both are visible in terms of wearing the *hijab*<sup>2</sup>. In a post 9/11 world, the dynamics of anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia are

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<sup>2</sup> *Hijab* refers to the head covering worn by some Muslim women in public settings.

realities for Muslims and often occur with how they are perceived through all racial distinctions (Aujla-Bhullar, 2020; Kassam, 2007; Schlein & Chan, 2010; Tatum, 2017).

For the students, the negative perception of race was pronounced in ways that did not require a formal interaction. Jimmy and his mother Jada, reflected on their experiences when considering their designated neighborhood high school where racialized students were perceived as “troublemakers” by school staff:

*Jimmy:* But at that school, there’s a lot of racism.

*Jada:* ... Yeah, now it’s got a lot more racism.

*Jimmy:* Yeah, the vice principal sent literally like majority of people of colour that are like “bad kids,” like not really bad. But they just like to have fun and just like they hanging and they’re loud. She sent most of them to the [name of school] Like just...not because they were failing classes...

*Sonia:* And, this was seen by like your peers and families as being...?

*Jada:* Those ‘Brown’ kids.

*Jimmy:* Brown kids, Somalian kids...the visible minorities. If you go to that [name of school] right now, you won’t find a single White person. It’s for rebellious kids.

*Sonia:* The reason being, you can clearly see how many visible minority students are there?

*Jimmy:* Oh yeah. I’ve went to watch my friends’ sports game there and I’ve been like threatened by the Vice principal saying, “Oh, if you keep this behavior up, you’re gonna face consequences.” [She] thinking that I went to that school even though I didn’t. So, I’ve been threatened with expulsion from a school I didn’t go to.

*Jada:* He was just there to cheer on his...

*Jimmy:* I’m not kidding. Yeah, I was just there.

*Jada:* It's just interesting and I think [it is] one of the reasons why I chose not to go there as our designated school. When we first went there, signed him up, you know, you don't get a sense of welcome anyway...

*Jimmy:* It has a bad rep to it.

*Jada:* And then it had that reputation. So, you don't wanna feed into the reputation.

*Sonia:* And when you say that, you don't want to send him to that school? [Because] the reputation? Because you'd just fall into another...?

*Jada:* It would be the same situation we had.

*Jimmy:* Technically, the troublemaker kids.

The "association" that Jimmy and Jada speak about was a factor that was consistent with their overall schooling experiences. In attempting to make a choice about high school, Jada was attempting to separate them from these stereotypes, if possible. Her recognition of being Othered was concurred with by Jimmy's brief but problematic experience in visiting the school as a guest. It is what Bhopal and Rhamie (2014), found in their research on teacher perceptions holding a far-reaching pull across schools:

Research has shown that teachers are not well prepared to teach diverse students whose cultural values are different from their own, and that many White teachers hold negative stereotypical views about minority ethnic children and have little knowledge of cultural diversity. (p. 310)

Similarly, Simran, a parent recounted her own determination to counter the stereotypes of a Muslim woman held by her son's teachers in his elementary school:

*Simran:* You know, it's very important. That's what I tell other parents to, "Show your face around, volunteer, be active." Somehow, just be there so that if you're missing completely,

and the teacher has their own image of the parent. Number one, they assume, it's you know...there are stereotypes definitely. And, then they'll say, "I hardly see her mom, she must be a battered woman at home, look at the way the child is behaving here."

So, it's important for, because I was a single mom and my son, by personality, like at that time, he was very quiet and very shy and he wouldn't do eye contact because it's in our culture, right? They don't do eye contact with elders, people of superiority, or teachers, out of respect. And, that teacher thought that he [son] had no respect for women.

*Sonia:* Did she say that to you?

*Simran:* She even said that to me. She said, "Oh, your son, Shahmeer, it seems like he has no respect for women. He doesn't even look at me." So, I had to give her a good piece of my mind at that time. Like, that is not an option, "he is being raised by me and I'm like a feminist borderline."

And, that inspired me to do some volunteer work. To go into the university as a parent leader, and give some speeches and, you know, some short presentations to the student aids. The teachers who were becoming teachers' aides. So I could tell them about multiculturalism, what signs to see in the students and what body language [is used] or what means what. How it's translated. That really helped them. So, I had to do that in order to...and I had to keep in touch with the school principal when I was going through my early days here. It was...very challenging as a single mom. There were days...for me to keep going and interacting with them so that they know that this is her child.

For Simran, there were barriers associated with "being a veiled Muslim woman" (Zine, 2006, p. 240). She took it upon herself to not only speak with the teacher, but also proceeded to make viable systematic changes through her volunteer work at the school level. In doing so, she was

enabling agency in her third-space positionality by addressing the institutional gaps she viewed as problematic. It is another example of, “existing and living critically in that space between cultures” (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016, p. 64). Simran’s reaction in taking up an agency and responsibility to address discrimination, was not reflected in the work of schools at that time. This leads to an understanding, unfortunately, that it is again up to individual parents to identify and address negative stereotyping and biased perceptions of the school staff. In both these cases, with Ushna and Shameer, Simran took it upon herself to be a voice to address the issues. A different form of agency was enacted by Jada, who sent Jimmy to a different school entirely. However, families who are unable to respond (as either of these families did), to negative school staff perceptions and behaviours are at a disadvantage. Problems are unaddressed. Negative interaction patterns continue. Difference and diversity are recognized as being negative and accordingly, adversely impact the families’ sense of belonging.

Unfortunately, yet not surprising to participants, there were ongoing negative incidents where racism took place in the form of sterner disciplinary measures. The next section highlights the impacts concerning how diversity results in negative discriminatory practices.

#### Naming Racism: Surveillance and Discipline

Ayanna, a mother of two, who identified as a Black, able-bodied, heterosexual woman, shared very harrowing experiences throughout her son’s schooling. In tracing back to the time when his race became a point of contention, she expressed the sadness and dismay felt by herself and her family with how her son was being treated:

*Ayanna:* [name of son] had a teacher...he actually was his teacher until we switched him out of that French Immersion program, so he wasn’t his teacher anymore. And [name of son] said he [teacher] would always just pick on him like. He would be in a group and he

[teacher] would come over and he would yell at the group, and he would just say like, “[name of two students]. Just the two Black kids, and then nobody else.”

Even the other kids were like, “Why is he only picking you two? We’re all here doing it.”

And so [name of son] was like, “I don’t know, like he just hates me because I’m black?” \

*Sonia:* So, those questions came up...

*Ayanna:* Those came up. And so... I did eventually write to the teacher.

He [son] didn’t want us to write the teacher often because he felt that it was awkward. So, when he told me, “Yeah, I want you to write the teacher.” I was like, “Oh, he must really be upset about this.” So, I said, “You know, like, you’ve kind of introduced my son to a world where he wonders if someone doesn’t like him because of the colour of his skin.”

And then we got this email back from the principal, and we just emailed just the teacher, [so we were] thinking like, “I just want you to know that you had a chance to like make a difference and care for people, and what happened was the opposite.”

And...the principal was like, “We can’t believe that you’re accusing this teacher of racism.”

I was like, “I wasn’t really accusing the teacher of racism, but like this is how you made my son feel.” Like excluded from the school, right?

This exclusion felt by Ayanna and her family is an example of how the principal and teacher may have felt a form of “racial stress” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 100). Specifically, DiAngelo explains that this type of challenge results in the exercise of White fragility, including but not limited to, “suggesting that white person’s viewpoint comes from a racialized frame of reference (challenge to objectivity)” (p. 103), and receiving feedback that the teacher’s behaviour had a racist impact, a challenge to “White racial innocence” (p. 104). Such responses leave little room for a

constructive conversation and no tolerance to try and understand what the student and family is feeling and experiencing. What proceeded after this initial contact made between Ayanna's family and the school, continued into a pattern of racism causing more division with a looming legal threat. The relational space omitted this family's racial experience:

*Ayanna:* And then...and then he got really upset and he [principal] said, "We'll be contacting our legal team." Yeah. And so then...they were so much more upset about even the suggestion that the teacher might have bias. Then they were upset about how [name of son] felt at the school. And, then this whole thing, "Well, we're gonna contact our legal team..." And then we were...upset about it. Like, it was this power dynamic suddenly. That they were gonna sue us for talking to them. Like...and so then, [name of son's father] got quite mad. He [Ayanna's husband] was like, "They are using White privilege on us? I'm using White privilege too." [laughter]. And so, he wrote them back and said, "No, we're gonna contact our legal people or whatever." And then, the teacher was like, "I don't know why you feel like my email was aggressive." And then...we just left it because we just – I don't know, I've just learned that it's not...never going anywhere. I don't think they take it seriously, and they don't want to take it seriously, and they don't wanna do anything. They don't...they seem more worried about being called racist than they are about the racism.

With conversation centred on racism, the intensity of emotion is felt and heard. Because of this, there is an impact on the relationship between school and families. Ayanna's employment of laughter and their ability to make a joke of the situation was necessary in re-living the pain of the experience (see also, Rogers, 1994). With that said, the impact bears down on students as well. In this case, her son. We can feel the discomfort and apprehension in how Ayanna explains that

her son was reluctant to have them, the parents, involved. As both a teacher and parent, I appreciate the amount of trust and courage expressed within their family unit while simultaneously they were being failed by the school and the inability to connect with the family and racialized experiences (for fuller discussion see, Dei, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2002). I question if there is an opportunity and willingness for teachers and administrators to “engage in self-interrogation for their own biases, prejudices and assumptions (Lopez, 2013; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003). Discourses around diversity and multiculturalism, by virtue of not directly addressing understandings of racism, are negatively impacting the relational spaces for racialized communities.

At the classroom level, in-class disciplinary measures are part of the teachers’ role. When students and families begin to question the patterns of surveillance, discipline and control and connect them to issues of being racialized, the relationships with authority figures begin to deteriorate. Jada and Jimmy recounted an incident involving an altercation with another student:

*Jada:* Okay, so fast forward to grade nine and we had another incident. The first time was in grade eight, was when he was suspended. The second time, in grade nine, he was suspended again. And I was like, “What the heck is this?” It’s now become a routine. And, it’s, again, another kid that initiated this and turned out to be a troublemaker.

*Jimmy:* He was a year older than me.

*Jada:* There was no reason for this kid to talk to my son on social media or intimidating him, causing rumors, right?

*Jimmy:* We came to school and I talked to one of my friends that knew the kid, and he was like, “Oh, that kid wants to fight you.”

And, then like...I had no problem with this kid throughout the year. This is closer to like springtime.

*Jada:* Oh, yeah, spring break.

*Jimmy:* Yeah. So, [the] year's almost over. And, I'm like, "What do you mean when he wants to fight me?" I was like, "Whatever." Like, I'll just let it slide. And then the kid...he started poking at it the whole day. And he would just come and he just started instigating stuff the whole time and I would just leave and then h e came. He approached me in the middle of the hallway. Right beside the office, right beside the staff room. And he starts to be racist.

*Sonia:* What did he say?

*Jimmy:* So, at the last part he said, "Oh, what? Apologize for what? What you gonna do? Chop my effing head off, ISIS?" And, that's what triggered my mind. I'm like, "You know what? I'm done with this ignorant White kid." And, I grabbed him and I hit him.

*Jada:* And, he [Jimmy] had justified that to me. He's like, "He saw me coming. It was no surprise when I hit him. I was approaching him. He knew I was gonna, you know? And, it wasn't...it wasn't funny. The thing is, what I was annoyed with 'cause here again – the immigrant side of things – like the culture. Like how disrespectful. Your teachers stepped out. Your principal stepped out, you know? This happened in front of the office. They followed him...to the other side of the school. [They] went back to the cafeteria, stepped in with friends. Like this is happening under their nose, right? So, whatever. Maybe it's a fight they didn't pay attention to. But then when the teachers said something like...

*Jimmy:* But it wasn't like...this wasn't a school that was like, "Oh, there's always fights going on."

*Sonia:* So, a school that is pretty quiet when it comes to [physical] conflict, right?

*Jimmy:* Right.

The evident race-based talk within the altercation is of concern for Jada and comes from her surmising a possible pattern in disciplinary measures taken against Jimmy for 2 years, regarding ongoing issues with a group of older students. Her concerns are reinforced by research into intensified disciplinary action against minority populations in schools, which has been documented and identifies issues for racialized communities (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Dei, 1996; Milner, 2020). Both Jimmy and Jada were emotionally charged in the retelling of this incident. The fact that it had been addressed exclusively by way of suspension as opposed to dialogue, deepened the stress and impact on them both. In Jada's mention of the bully's dismissive language regarding "immigrant side of things," was a reference to both that Jimmy was being regarded as a racialized minority. Her own feelings were compounded by frustration with the racial basis of the altercation and offers a clear example of feeling like the Other.

Returning to Simran, she spoke to the experiences of her son, Shahmeer, in elementary school. She felt that the disciplinary actions that were taken were based on her family's ethnicity and being associated with terrorism. She recounted her experience in dealing with this form of racism:

*Simran:* So, elementary is where the issues are. There are issues. And, even in high school wherever they were. So, for me as a mom, I have tried my best to be very hands-on and very available, there for the children. So, my son was once given detention wrongfully. He came home very late and I was like, "What happened?" He said, "I got detention."

I asked, "why did you get detention?"

The teacher said he was making origami daggers. Daggers. Origami. And so, I asked him, “Why were you?” He said, “All my friends, they're into cartoons.” You know?

*Sonia:* Yeah.

*Simran:* And, so Shahmeer said, “Mom, I was making them with my Korean and Chinese friends and they all did it, and I did it. My teacher said, ‘Oh, you like to make weapons and things like that.’” And, you know...

Anyways, then the next day I went and I spoke to the teacher. I’m like, “How could you?” She said, “Oh, he was bullying the other students and blah, blah, blah.” Uh, I was very smart at that time because of my situation. I wasn’t working full-time and I felt I had, you know...I wasn’t in a very strong position and I knew about the welfare system. I knew about all of these things – that they can, you know, highlight and misuse. So, I was careful about that. I educated myself on those things. And then, I didn’t pick up any fights with her [teacher]. I was very smart. But I came home and me and my son, we cried a lot. I told my son, “Remember, you’re not to draw or to play with guns or swords or anything to do with weapons. The reason being, you’re a Muslim boy. And, if any other boy draws a sword or a gun or plays with a sword and gun, it’s just they’re having fun, you, you will be [seen as] trained to be Taliban.”

I had to have that conversation with him, and he cried because his passion was knights and shining armour and horses and fighters. He had to stop it because of that. Because I said, “You know, any time, if they come into our house and they try to look at your stuff and they’ll say, ‘Oh, see, he had a history.’”

[Laughs] So, I was very paranoid at that time, and I had to. So, I was very smart.

*Sonia:* Yeah, you were very careful.

The impact of this incident remained with Simran and Shahmeer. It demonstrates the pattern of racism and discipline as being part school culture and evoked fears of repercussions at the system-level with the possibility of child-services becoming involved.

With both Jada and Simran, they critically reflect on their position being Othered as parents, with no viable solutions apparent or available to have racism addressed as a factor in disciplinary measures taken against their children. These experiences illustrate that families are being disempowered. They are reluctant to challenge the authority of school staff and the school's disciplinary structures. The relationship that endures is a consistent sense of being marginalized and disempowered as racial minorities in schools:

Another significant issue is the way in which authority is constructed within educational settings, often in an arbitrary and unilateral fashion. This approach can lead to feelings of disempowerment among students, many of whom have legitimate grievances and are left without any institutional means to effect change (Dei, Mazzuca, McIssac, & Zine, 1997, p. 111).

For Shahmeer and Jimmy, the intensity of emotion is understood both as an internal and external reality for them as racially minoritized students. Long lasting implications of this can be heard through Shahmeer's recounting of this incident.

At the time of this interview, Shahmeer and his sister had graduated from high school, but both vividly remember feelings of exclusion. Only the presence of their mother supporting them through incidents countered discrimination based on whether they were either dangerous or incapable of meeting perceived standards to belong. The following excerpt is shared by Shahmeer, following up on this particular experience:

*Sonia:* And, Shahmeer, I think you you're saying in grade four? That was the one, and the way your mom...?

*Shahmeer:* Yeah, grade four. Yeah, we had a teacher named [name of teacher]. She's very nice to me at first, but I did notice that after some certain events around the world regarding, you know, Pakistan or Afghanistan anything to do with a "stan." She did, um... started judging me. For example, there was a White kid who's making origami, right? He made like a knife or something out of origami. And, then I made one too. So, she picked on me only because I was a visible minority, right?

And, that's what really upsets me [because] she got very scared, you know, as if she felt threatened. You know, "maybe he's up to no good." Even though, I was just a kid, right? So, that means I would – these kinds of things I can't forget them because they happened at such a critical part of your life. And, as for your question [reference to critical incidents]. For guys I would say it's more to do with like facial hair, right? We, as you know, we are darker here, right, compared to the *gorays*<sup>3</sup>. So, what happens is, let's say grade five to grade nine, right? My mustache, you know, obviously it grows faster on us. And, it was very dark to, to made me look older. And, back then it wasn't in fashion, right? Just having a mustache was like, you know, you're like, an uncle or [people are thinking] "what are you doing?" Because everybody, all the David Beckham, all these all these stars [are] clean shaven, you know. So, everybody wanted to be like that. So, me, you know, I had no...I was very scared to shave my mustache. I didn't [do it] until grade 11. I just bit the bullet. And, I just, whatever, took a razor, shaved it because I did know it's going to change my look a lot, you know. That was very...I would say it's very trying to blend in basically,

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<sup>3</sup> *Goray*: an Urdu/Hindi/Punjabi word, in reference to White people.

right? But, now if you see them, if you see my little brother, if you see their generation, he wants to grow his mustache, right? So, things have changed. Because in my era, it wasn't like that.

It is evident that Shahmeer draws on these incidents as defining relational moments in being included/excluded in schooling as a racialized minority. These incidents were ones I connected with, as similar moments have occurred in both my own personal and professional experiences. These are telling examples regarding how “inclusive” education as a concept and practice are challenging when assumptions and Eurocentric frames of reference occupy positions of power in our schools:

Notions of “hidden curriculum” are also connected to theories of reproduction about how teacher’s attitudes and assumptions affect patterns of differential socialization, evaluation, and treatment. These attitudes and assumptions correspond to the reproduction of social outcomes that are based on racialized, class-based and other hierarchies. (Dei et al., 2003, p. 173).

The hidden curriculum is examined in more detail as a systemic design in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

The visibility of race and ethnicity is apparent in the multicultural approaches taken in schools that celebrate and encourage diversity. Families are appreciative of this form of inclusion and see it as important to the educational spaces they belong to. However, there is an ongoing harm being lived in schools that has impact on racialized families. Although this is not a new phenomenon in research scholarship, it is concerning to know that this ongoing discrimination, with little to no means of breaking patterns of racism for families, occurs in a relational space of uneven power distribution. The premise and aim of inclusive education in Alberta (2013) is:

In Alberta, inclusive education is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all students. It is a value-based approach to accepting responsibility for all students. It also means that all students will have equitable opportunity to be included in the typical learning environment or program of choice. The creation of a truly inclusive education system in the province requires a shared responsibility of all educational stakeholders. (p. 5)

Stakeholders include families and students. Their responsibility to ensure their sense of belonging is impacted by the inequity of power in their relationship with the instructional spaces and with school staff. There are examples of supportive measures taking place and this speaks to the benefits of multicultural education. However, the ongoing negative experiences impact the relational value for families and students. Through their words, we can perceive and feel the depths to which these experiences shape the relations of those participating in the school system and more fully understand how inclusive education can be seen and felt by racialized communities. To further comprehend the power of systemic structures of schools, in the next chapter I will further deconstruct the impact of racialization and ethnicization in educational spaces.

## Chapter 5: Analysis and Synthesis of Findings

### Analysis 2: Schools as Systemic Structures

The discourse concerning diversity and the transformative potential of education permeates school sites. There is an expectation that education will be transformative for students, and that schools will be a place where learning and growth shape the minds of future generations. How this transformation is viewed and enacted are at the root of the thematic analysis in this chapter. From the data derived in this study, a paradox is made apparent by the identification of a deficit in school structures in the engagement of issues of race, power, and inclusion. In this analysis, the systemic structure of schools will be examined with a view of schools as *emotional spaces* in which *racialization* and *ethnicization of identity* are negotiated. From here, I engage in a deeper study of the institutional structures related to inclusion and the policy frameworks guiding education and learning in Alberta.

It is important to note in the context of this study, that none of the schools attended by participants offered any explicit anti-racism, inclusion, or diversity professional development opportunities for staff. As a teacher, I have created and led professional learning for colleagues that I worked with (see example in Aujla-Bhullar, 2011), but do not know of other similar opportunities to increase teachers' learning and professional development in such issues at the system or school level. More recently, in the USA and Canada the widespread protests aligning with Black Lives Matter in 2020<sup>4</sup> have been reflected in publicly available statements (see example in Appendix D) by school districts asserting their commitment to anti-racism and equity work. Hopefully, this might ignite more dedicated learning about these issues at the system level

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<sup>4</sup> In the USA, the Black Lives Matter movement began (2013) when Trayvon Martin's murderer was acquitted. It was a call to end the disproportionate police brutality against Black Americans. On May 25, 2020, the murder of George Floyd by a White police officer, garnered international attention and sparked protests across the world, including Canada, raising mainstream awareness of systemic racism in policing and other institutions.

and trickle down to school structures. Currently, there is also the question of how often issues of racism are being raised and addressed within schools. At the time of this study, there were no formal channels for tracking such issues, no procedures to report the issues of this nature, and accordingly, no data addressing race or racism was accessible in the school districts.

### **Emotional Spaces: Racialization and Ethnicization**

#### Systemic Gaps: Marginalizing Identities

Inclusive education is premised on the belief that all students – regardless of class, physical or mental abilities, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and religion – are included at every level of schooling (Ainscow, 2016). The identity markers of students are not mutually exclusive nor independent of one another. However, when attempts are made to limit a student's identities to a singular category, we marginalize entire groups of society (Crenshaw, 1991). The discourse regarding race and racial identity is important for individuals and within institutionalized settings, since it informs the larger discourse about how education is accessed by different segments of society. When understanding racialization and ethnicization in school spaces, it is important to perceive *intersecting identities* in these realms and recognize the complexities and impact of *emotion* relating to the encountering of structural oppression in the lives of students and their families.

Emotions are part of our lived realities and how we make meaning of critical incidents impacting our lives. Boler (1999), critically examined how education, resistance, and power are intertwined, stating that there is a “relationship between a person and their educational experience [which] is fraught with different emotions and histories” (p. 2). The emotions communicated through participants' narratives are how we comprehend their negotiations with feelings about being included within school structures, as seen in the analysis of relational spaces

discussed in Chapter 4. A minority participant interacting in schools is not in a position of power. Neither is she “an autonomous, self-sufficient individual who can detach herself from the historical, racial, and cultural markers” (Smith, 2010, p. 47). The interviews reflected the history and dynamics of interactions between families and teachers with authority within the system, which led to an emotional state for participants which they recognised and shared. Further, this finding extends to an essential recognition of the emotional spaces in which these incidents of racialization reflect the systemic structures governing schools.

In a study conducted by Zembylas (2010), on a multicultural school in Cyprus<sup>5</sup>, the primary focus was on the emotions held by both the majority and minoritized populations around issues of race and ethnicity through implications for students (Zembylas, 2010). Although this study relayed a heightened state of conflict with political boundaries being contested, it examined school structures as entities that “create inclusions/exclusions” (p. 253), contributing to maintaining the status quo. Both racialization and ethnicization are used as “categorizations of the ‘us-and-them’ form that is often taken for granted” (p. 253), which contributes to a systemic exclusion of racialized families. Zembylas explained, “the notion of the cultural politics of emotion helps to explore how emotions work to align individual and collective bodies in the school context of power relations that endow Others with particular (often negative) meaning and value” (p. 254). When participants describe their identity as being both visible and invisible in school settings, there are critical emotional responses to the ongoing challenges experienced from marginalization:

Invisibility, in this perspective, refers to the negation of self and identity which occurs in and through the everyday practices of schooling. These negations erase the social, cultural,

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<sup>5</sup> Cyprus is an island nation in the Mediterranean Sea. Its political boundaries include the northern portion being controlled by Turkey with many inhabitants identifying with Greek roots, including language.

historical, political realities of marginalized groups in society through exclusive practices of Eurocentrism. (Dei et al., 2003)

These emotional spaces open our understanding to how marginalization is seen and felt by participants of this study. Participant Joan, for example, described her intersections of identity, reflected on her parents' ethnic background, considered her own adaptation to "Canadian values," and then discussed being a parent who saw the impact of her stepdaughter's racialized experience:

*Joan:* I think a lot of immigrant parents...I was raised in Canada so I've kinda adopted a lot of the Canadian values and norms as well as the Caribbean side. But, when I was growing up, my mom would have never done any of that. She didn't go to any of the parent-teacher interviews, so I make it a point to make sure I'm there and be involved as much as I can. I try to volunteer at the school field trips and all that. It's a lot of pressure, but...I feel like sometimes when you're of colour – you want your child to have a positive experience. So, then you try to build those relations with the teachers and so that if there's an incident, it doesn't turn into a negative 'cause...I've had...I have a stepdaughter who's older too. She went through the school system and it can be very judgmental. She went to school in [name of neighbourhood.], the 'Hood,' they call it.

And she [step-daughter] was very much...there was very much race a kind of divide within the school and she was judged a lot on her ethnicity. She's bi-racial. And the teachers did the same as well, right? [They would say things] like, "Oh you have an attitude and blah blah blah." And, there was just always this negative connotation just because she was acting a certain way or being this way. So, I feel like the more presence you have as a parent in the school sometimes you can help build that relationship, but I

don't think it should always be on the parents... 'cause not all the parents have those skills or have the time to be able to do that. It's a luxury that I have the time to be able to take time off, sometimes I take my vacation days and I go volunteer at the school.

*Sonia:* Yes, because you feel that it is necessary to do?

*Joan:* Yes, but not everybody has that luxury to do that all the time. And, I think it's a struggle when the school board and the teachers don't do enough to communicate or have the time. [They need to] build into their lesson plan that they have to build that relationship with the parents and with the community as well.

Within this passage there are several issues that come to light. The first issue relates to Joan's sentiments about making the necessary effort to be visible, "when you're of colour." At the same time, the intersection between one's class and race is a deciding factor in how Joan recognizes that some parents may not have the time to engage in volunteering at their child's school. Finally, the racialization, and the social and relational impacts of this on her stepdaughter is a known entity to Joan, and understood because of her own lived experiences. Joan's agency addresses this "negative connotation" and is reflective of her emotional embodiment of experiences being a racialized woman. The excerpt from the transcript is an example of the multiple gaps occurring in the school structure, for Joan and her family. Similarly, Simran explained the need for visible minority parents to be visible as much as possible (see Chapter 4). In her case, it was volunteering her time to educate school staff in the culture, ethnicity, and even religion based on her identity and highly-charged emotional experiences with her children in schools. She was responding to the gap in systemic knowledge and action in educational sites.

It is a formulated understanding on how racialization, as seen in both Joan and Simran's experiences, is where "certain people are judged by others as belonging to a separate race

category” (Zembylas, 2010, p. 254), hence the focus shifts from racist incidents to the process of race as a social construct in schools (Irby & Clark, 2018; Razack, 1998). Similarly, “ethnicization refers to the formation of social boundaries aiming to protect the integrity of (presumed) ethnic-cultural heritages” (Zembylas, 2010, p. 254). As Joan contrasts her upbringing being raised by immigrant parents, she identifies the ethnic boundaries between her Caribbean heritage and her perceptions of Canadian norms and values. The racialization and ethnicization of Joan’s experiences widens the lens onto school structures as having limited scope in understanding the social constructs impacting these families. For Simran, as a Muslim woman, her fear of having her children thrust into associations of terrorism, violence and oppression resulted in her carefully treading through interactions with school. Razack (2010), questioned the treatment of racialized minorities in Canada at the government level with border politics and it resonates here in understanding Simran’s experience at an institutional level,

Are these simply moments of racial prejudice, as so many would have it, prejudice, nonetheless, that is officially sanctioned? Might they (only) reveal ignorance, incompetence, meanness, and arrogance? Or, are these glimpses into the racialized structure of citizenship in which people of colour, suspected of duplicity, must always be policed and kept at the margins of law and community? (p. 89).

These experiences display a structural inadequacy which may mean that schools are engaging deliberately and/or unintentionally in multiple forms of exclusion.

Correspondingly, Sherry’s experiences with the leadership at her daughter and son’s school also reflected this space of racialization and ethnicization in schools, where structural inadequacy impacted the relationship where families experience exclusion:

*Sonia:* Going back to that feeling when you felt like KJ's teacher 'got it' and it was easier to talk about diversity. Are there any formal channels to go through or to talk about diversity? Or, bring your experiences forward at the schools?

*Sherry:* Yeah, no formal channels. For sure.

*Sonia:* And so, if you had questions and concerns about diversity or challenges such as racism or stereotypes. Do you think that you as a parent, and this can be for you as students [Sonia speaking to the girls], would you be able to address it with someone? Or, is it just something that you just don't feel like you can talk about?

*Sherry:* I think we would be able to address it, whether something would be done about it – that's totally different. But, I do feel like I could talk to her teachers, and depending on the severity of the issue or whatever. But I've always felt I guess, even if I feel like I can't talk about it, I will talk about it, because it's important.

*Sonia:* So, that would kind of be encouraging if there's something else you needed to talk about, you could. In what ways, do you think the relationship between schools and community can be improved? Overall, what do you think could make it more inclusive?

*Sherry:* I think better communication for sure. Also, something [in place] where I don't feel like I have to go through the teacher first, before I can get to the school [leadership]. I feel like I should be able to voice these concerns to whoever is in charge, as in the principal, [where] I can walk in and have a meeting with her and say, "this is of concern and do you think something can be done about it?"

Like I said, when we first went in to talk about NN's enrollment, NN and [name of son], went to the same school, so it wasn't just NN's diagnosis. It's just that we are different, so I would have loved to talk about, "this is where we come from, this is what we think, this is

what we believe.” Because my child is different, and she is from a minority group in that school. So, she [needs to] feel like she is included in this school. These are our experiences, this is what we’re all about, plus this is her diagnosis. So, to have that dialogue I think it’s so important, at the time of enrollment. And then the school understands where we’re coming from, or what our challenges could be, what NN could be facing in our classroom, or [name of son] for that matter.

Here, we see how the intersection of identity, race, ethnicity, religion, special needs, for Sherry’s daughter’s is inadequately understood at the structural level. Sherry explains this as one of the reasons that parents should have an increased level of presence and direct channels of communication with school leadership. This epitomises an understanding that, “school space is racialized through everyday practices and policies” (Zembylas, 2010, p. 255). In lieu of this understanding, families are unable to occupy a position and a presence in a school structure designed to omit their needs. The racialized parents and students interviewed are aware of how their presence and voices are included at the school level and therefore enact a form of agency to the best of their abilities in accordance with their circumstances. However, how this agency is met and interacted with by school structures is limited if not unsatisfactorily resolved in these participants’ lived experiences. This illuminates the power relations and privilege that benefit the dominant group and highlights the heavy weight that befalls racialized communities to disrupt, question, to continue to hope for the best outcomes for their children through meaningful inclusion of racialized minorities in schools. A model of “success” (Dei et al., 2003, p. 169), requires an understanding of the multi-dimensional aspects of inclusion with the voices of communities and families at the forefront.

Participants Joan and Isabella in the extract below, identified the gaps in school where issues are identified by parents, but are either ignored or inadequately addressed by school leaders:

*Isabella:* There's probably been a few times where someone [another student] wasn't really thinking about what they were saying to another person and it just ended up being offensive. And the person took it personally. And it just ended up happening. The kid [was] talking about it to a few of my friends and to me and then to the teacher...and the teacher confronted of the kid and then he apologized. He said he wasn't really thinking about what he was saying. He didn't mean for it to be...

*Joan:* What he said?

*Isabella:* He said something...it wasn't something very nice.

*Joan:* To do with their race, their gender, their what?

*Isabella:* Race.

*Joan:* Oh, how did the teacher frame it? Like, were you part of that? You probably weren't part of that conversation?

*Isabella:* I wasn't part of the conversation. I just knew what happened.

*Joan:* 'Cause, it would be interesting how the teacher actually addressed it. If they addressed it as racism. Or they're just like, "You're not being nice." Or, "It's bullying in schools." Right? So, I think a lot of it gets shoved under the rug as bullying and not addressing it for what it is. And taking it more seriously...that's warranted. Right?

With incidents of racism, there was a working through of emotional spaces for parents and students coping with feelings of confusion and disillusionment. The focus on bullying in schools was not as frequently addressed in terms of racism, other than it being seen as an, "individual

risk factor for bullying and victimization” (Larochette, Murphy, & Craig, 2010, p. 390). Within school structures, that families are frequently carrying this burden goes unrecognized and there is little or no room for parents to call the critical incidents to the attention of teachers and leaders. The school structure is not equipped to engage in a process of confronting racialization and to resolve such issues with a view to creating/maintaining inclusive environments. Joan’s experience detailed below reflects how being reactive or proactive about incidents of racism at the structural level is not sufficient:

*Sonia:* And, what about in your experience in the parent community? With them [leadership] having to know you and addressing concerns?

*Joan:* So, I don’t think I’ve had direct kind of connection. I think I’ve had more of it in the sports areas [laughs] with parents than in school. There’s been, not with her [Isabella], her older sister [stepdaughter] again. Um, where she was called the n-word. She was...yeah.

*Sonia:* I’m sorry.

*Joan:* Yeah. She had really rough experiences in school and in sports because of her race. And, yeah, it’s hard to, like, deal with it because you don’t always. You wanna protect your kid and you don’t want to take it too far. And, you also want to set an example, but it’s a raw emotion that gets...right? So it’s...hard to. And I don’t think...sometimes people don’t put the label on it. And they just want to kind of make it look, “Well, they’re just not saying something nice, well, they weren’t politically correct.” And like it’s not, it’s not about that.

The inability to address racism, even when it is overt as seen in Joan’s experience with her stepdaughter, becomes an ongoing systemic deficiency. Solomon & Levine-Rasky (2003) recognized that

racism is often only counted as such when it is manifested overt activities such as physical or verbal attacks. Name-calling and inappropriate epithets for groups are commonplace. Yet even in these cases, some educators are not necessarily moved to advocate or implement a systematic program for the eradication of racism. (p. 27)

The ways that race and racism are addressed by schools seem to be strategically minimized, in the perceptions of participants. There is no doubt as to the emotional toll taken on by parents and students; however, the channels by which these may be addressed are also part of the structures of power and authority in schools through channels such as school/parent councils.

Ayanna's experience with joining the parent council at her daughter's school was another example of navigating the difficult emotional space of racialization in schools:

*Ayanna:* I mean, there's parent council that seems to be made up of just the White women in the school. Who are then deciding things about the school. Like, what kinds of art programs [are] coming in, and where to spend the money, 'cause they're making all the money. They [school] are dependent on the money that the parent council makes.

*Sonia:* They have a powerful role, would you say?

*Ayanna:* Yeah. So, we went to one and then they asked about the GSA<sup>6</sup> and then the parents were like, "Well, it's okay, as long as it's not just free sex." And I'm like, "Come on." And, nobody said anything and we didn't even say anything. We were just so annoyed by that point. Some people get listened to at that school – some people don't. And, there were these other White women who shared with me [the] emails that they had sent to the principal. And the principal wrote them back and was like, "Yes, we're dealing with your issues right away." And, the tone of the response– I was shocked when I saw the email that

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<sup>6</sup> GSA refers to Gay/Straight Alliance (or Gender-Sexuality Alliance) clubs, often formed by students with teacher support in Alberta schools.

they had gotten back. Because the tone of the principal's response to them was so different than his tone with us. Like, it was kind of dismissive.

And theirs was very urgent, like, "I'm going to attend to all your requests." And, I don't know, that just felt like...

*Sonia:* And you don't – you can't say [understand] why...

*Ayanna:* Yeah, I don't know if they [White women] did complain about teachers and then suddenly those teachers were like not teaching our kids anymore.

*Sonia:* Yeah, okay.

*Ayanna:* But when we would complain about things, nothing would happen.

The emotional space expressed by Ayanna and her partner exists within a racialized school site as they identify the White parents, who also hold authority within the governing power of the school council, hold power within the school concerned about the cost of engaging in inclusion of the GSA (Gender & Sexuality Alliance). This happened while other parent concerns from those outside of the formal council channels were dismissed. In processing her own experiences through the re-telling of school/parent relations, Ayanna recognized the emotional toll it had taken on her and her children:

*Ayanna:* But then I hear, like, how other White parents talk to the schools and I'm like, "Holy crap. That's what you said?" Like, it was so blatant and aggressive – and it got results in a way that you would hope. Like, they let them come in as a group. This group of White moms who got to go in and complain about...

*Sonia:* A teacher...?

*Ayanna:* Yeah. It was, a Black teacher. She wasn't really the best teacher, either. But, they got to go in as this little group of people. And, then she was moved out of teaching the kids the next year. Like, they demanded some changes.

I had to block one of those parents actually. Because when I didn't align with their group – she attacked my kids in emails and I said, “Don't ever speak to me again.” [laughs].

*Sonia:* Wow. That's like something out of a movie! Anyways, that's a side... conversation. So, sorry, [but] clearly the experiences that you as parents have had to work through, on top of talking to your children about that, leaves you in a lot of times...a hard position... And, going forward, because your kids are still in public education at this school – is there anything that you...it sounds like there's a weariness and almost expectation of what might come out?

*Ayanna:* I think we've learned not to have any expectations that things will be dealt with. Which is partially why none of my family wanted to do this [referring to being a research participant]. Honestly. They've done enough. They feel like they've spoken about it so much and nothing happens. And they're like...I feel like I have to keep speaking up because I have to know that I at least said something. But I also feel like, ugh, it's so much emotional energy.

These emotional spaces occupied and expressed by participants are where we can recognize that schools enable exclusion through the absence of structural inclusion measures. The marginalization of voices, experiences, and feelings of racialized families and students is a reality that the participants explain and embody through their lived experiences. It is an example of a systemic gap that contradicts policy in education that is dedicated to building inclusive schools.

In teaching, a pedagogy informed by what learners require in the next steps of their acquisition of a certain issue or concept is necessary to what will be taught next. For educators, enhanced pedagogy is acquired through professional development learning and opportunities. The following section critically examines this in schools: structured organizational learning through professional development opportunities for school staff.

#### Leaders Leading: Professional Learning Gaps

Professional development for teachers has established itself as an important pillar of teachers' capacity to engage and participate within the school and classroom environments (Grimmett, 2014). It is an institutional practice that seeks to address the professional growth and capacity of educators. Horsford and Clark (2015) illuminated:

Inclusive leaders are educated professionals prepared to create and maintain schools that are intellectually and emotionally dialectical spaces in which teachers, learners, and families work together against discrimination to bring about educational equity and justice for all students, especially the most marginalized and problematized. (p. 64)

The linkage between school leaders and school structures is a powerful factor when addressing issues that impact inclusion of minority students. The issue of race and racism requires, first and foremost, an acknowledgement by those leading professional learning opportunities. When there is a significant lack in action to address racism, we question the awareness, degree of comfort and comprehension of this far-reaching social construct afflicting Canadian schools (Dei et al., 2003). In an earlier chapter, Ayanna observed and spoke about the fear of the school principal and a teacher of being called "racist" rather than addressing the racism itself. Without the abilities to name racism, and to use race-specific language, coupled with strong emotional

responses to even the mention of racism, there is a sizeable learning gap in how staff rise to meet these difficult and uncomfortable discussions.

In contrast, naming race, racism, and racial identities serves to address these racialized school spaces, “using race-specific language as a resource for advancing organizational learning about the racialized nature of school problems” (Irby & Clark, 2018, p. 504). The reluctance for, or dismissiveness about, addressing race, as seen in the previous chapter on teacher and principal interactions with participants, stems from a school environment that exists with a colour-blind and “race-neutral” privilege led by administrators (Picower, 2009, p. 198). Below we continue with Ayanna and her son’s “Shakespeare” incident that demonstrated this limitation:

*Ayanna:* When [name of son] is now in this other school and the teachers had the kids do this [lesson on] Shakespeare’s insults to each other. This one group of kids all got up and called [name of son] a “half-face baboon.” And he was, like, really upset, and he said, “what the hell?” Like, “you can’t say that.” And then he looked at the teacher and the teacher just...didn’t say anything.

So, then we wrote to the teacher about that, and he wrote back and said, “well, I’m sorry that [name of son] felt that, but there’s probably some stuff I should explain about it.”

I was like, “there is nothing to explain.” And I said, “You know, when you didn’t respond, you taught the kids, all of the students that that was okay, and that that’s acceptable.”

And then, we had to talk to the principal. The principal said, “well, we’ll have to figure out who was affected by this incident.” And I said, “Everybody was affected by the incident.”

Because they’re not talking about it. They are not condemning it. [It] taught a lesson. The teacher didn’t do anything, and then the class ended. So, I said, “everybody needs to be untaught that lesson.”

At this point, it could be assumed that the principle had a limited understanding as to the far-reaching impact racialization has on all students, and especially those targeted by racism in the formal and informal settings of the classroom. From here, we are able to conclude that a structure of professional development may support the teachers' and administrators' professional understanding and perspective when taking a standpoint in addressing race and racism. However, the limitations evident in the teacher's approach to effectively deal with this situation, reflect the larger problem of structural gaps in professional learning at the school level.

*Ayanna:* He [principal] said, "Oh, yeah, we are gonna do this big lesson, and it's gonna address racism and it sounded good. And then, [name of son] came home that Monday and he said, "Well..."

[First], the principal, the teacher was gonna call [name of husband]. And the fact that [name of husband] has to deal with this and not me – is a choice that we make because ...we decided people probably listen more to him because he is White. And so, he's been the connector. Main partner. Yeah. And so, he didn't call us, and then [name of son] came home and he was like, "I don't know, we kind of talked about stereotypes." Because they were teaching Romeo and Juliet and he said, "The teacher said something like, what does everybody think about people in the northeast<sup>7</sup>?"

And then, "But then he tried just to show, like, that that's not true of everyone in the northeast because he [teacher] lives in the northeast." This is just what [name of son] took from this lesson.

[Name of son] said, "the teacher said everybody has groups of people that we just don't like." [laughs] And he said, "So then, some people share the groups they don't like." And

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<sup>7</sup> The City of Calgary is divided into 4 quadrants: NE, NW, SE, and SW. The northeast is notably associated with a higher density of population encompassing more immigrant and racialized communities than other quadrants.

some examples like, “maybe you just think you just don’t like all, like, Jacks.” And then they shared it and then, I think he was supposed to be like deconstructing these stereotypes, and then one kid said, “Well, I hate Persians.” And then the teacher said, “I hope you are Persian.” And the boy goes, “No.” And [name of son] was like telling it and he was kind of laughing. He was like...it was so extreme, like – what are you... And that’s all that [name of son] really got out of it.

So, we waited a couple of days, and then finally, we were like, “What is...?” They just move on. [Name of husband] called, talked to the principal again and said like, “What happened in there? I just wanna know, like, what happened? What was the big racism lesson?” And he said, “Oh, well, the teacher said he’d done this thing about stereotypes, and that was the lesson.” And we asked [name of son], “Well, did he do it or not?” And [name of son] was like, “I don’t know, he never said the word racism, so I didn’t know if that was the lesson or not.”

The educators’ inability to name racism and use such incidents as transformative teachable moments, demonstrate at best their lack of knowledge and training concerning how to address racism or, at worst, the incompetence of school structures to engage in meaningful inclusive and equitable action. This is problematic for all members of a school community, including racialized families and school staff, “when these struggles go unaddressed, staff members cannot work effectively toward school reform and educational equity” (Buehler, 2013, p. 630). Interestingly, the classroom teacher in this incident was a visible minority. This further highlights the need for all teachers, not only visible minority teachers, to develop the knowledge and skills to address race and ethnicity when intersected with one’s professional role as educators who teach in today’s racially demographic schools. Inclusion is a difficult feat when school

authorities are complicit – whether unknowingly, explicitly, or even covertly – in those structures, or are unable to name, address, and learn through the challenges and successes that come with recognizing racialized and ethnicized school spaces (see Aujla-Bhullar, 2020, for an example). Likewise, not developing teachers’ capacity to discuss issues of race is a reaffirmation of organizational stagnation, leaving little to no room for growth through critical discourses being available to educators:

The failure to account for the racialization of professional talk renders Whiteness invisible. It also subjugates the potential for race-specific talk to be understood as a powerful lever for change. Together, failure to consider how changing the way we race talk can change the way we work preserves individual and organizational immunities to change racist ways of knowing and behavior. (Irby & Clark, 2016, p. 506)

In the following excerpt, Ayanna spoke to the unintended impacts of racism on the teacher and students and concluded by highlighting the significance of the hidden curriculum:

*Ayanna:* Most of the people in this incident with [name of son] were not White people. Like, the teacher is Asian, and then the kid who made up the line was Cuban, and like...it’s not just about White people. It’s about everybody.

*Sonia:* And he didn’t directly or indirectly address the actual incident that happened?

*Ayanna:* I think that was the problem because we said, “teach this lesson, unteach it. But I do not want you saying the word baboon again, in relation to my kid.” Like, we could imagine the teacher going in and going, “[name of son] was called a baboon.” And, you know, we were like, “don’t do that.” But then they felt like, “well, we were trying not to talk about the incident, and we didn’t wanna bring up [name of son], so we just did this general thing about stereotypes.” So, I guess that’s how they were trying to figure it out.

So, I don't know. And then he also talked to him. He pulled him out [of class]. Which we were like, "all right." He [teacher] said, "I'm sorry you felt bad, but you know, Shakespeare did call people baboons because they were dumb and, if he wanted to say that they were idiots, he would call them baboons. So, it's like a Shakespearean thing." And it was probably a racist Shakespearean thing, right? [laughter]

Yeah. So, anyways, that way that they introduce... we should have two sides – this is how it was in the language. But, it's not sufficient for me enough. And, I just feel like people don't recognize that. We are the race. Like, we see this dramatic racism coming out in these videos that are coming, and the kids are bombarded by that, right?

I don't think people recognize that schools are participating in that. Through the hidden curriculum and through these implicit lessons that are taught in different ways.

The hidden curriculum referred to here is the sociocultural reproduction of both conscious and unconscious socialization which occurs within the structures of schools:

Hidden curriculum is often understood to represent the conscious and unconscious socialization of students through the norms, values, and belief systems embedded in the curriculum, the school, and classroom life, imparted to students through daily routines, curricular content, and social relationships. (Margolis, Soldatenko, Acker, & Gair, 2001, p.

6)

The hidden curriculum was visible to Ayanna. She raised concerns that the school structure, including staff, are seemingly unaware of or resistant to appreciating the immense power it wields in the schooling process. Irby and Clark (2018) note that leaders who address race using language in a meaningful and open way can think about the complexities and impacts of racialized school spaces. Furthermore, "school leaders encourage race-specific language use a

routine of professional practice, as it holds the potential to unlock more comprehensive thinking and problem framing amongst leader and teacher teams” (p. 505). Without this, there may be ongoing challenges in these school spaces that are racialized and ethnicized, because even when race is not talked about directly, there is still engagement in racialized thinking (Buehler, 2013).

If systemic, structural and individual forms of racism are not engaged with in professional practice, the risk of understanding how racism looks and feels can be a major problem where there is a “narrow way in which they view racism” (Ryan, 2003, p. 150). Administrators’ perceptions of racism and their abilities to take an active stance in acknowledging its presence, is likely to be replaced with either denial, and/or an ambivalence towards confronting racism. There is a reluctance to name it, but this results in implications for families and students impacted directly (Goddard, 2007; Ryan, 2003). An explication of the reasons for such reluctance are beyond the scope of this study; however, according to published studies, a possible explanation lies in concerns about being associated with implications of racism, because principals feel they need to convey a positive image in their schools to parents, families, communities and the district (Ball, 2010; Goddard & Hart, 2007). The ‘positive’ image of an inclusive and welcoming school, is however, contradicted by the lived experiences of negative emotional spaces revealing exclusion for Ayanna and other participants of this study.

The hidden curriculum in local school spaces also seems to evoke a link with geographical locations. As seen with the reference to the city’s northeast quadrant in Ayanna’s son’s experience, it is not surprising for those, including myself, who live in this part of Calgary. The northeast quadrant is commonly referred to in stereotypes with references to the high numbers of non-White racial and ethnic residents. In my own experience being born, raised, and schooled in the northeast, I know first-hand the negative stereotypes based on attending and then

working in northeast school sites. In attending city-wide teachers' professional development session and conferences, many colleagues referred openly to the northeast as being the least desired area for teachers to teach, and/or frequently referenced the difficulties faced in teaching students in this area (Field notes, February 2018). Such perceptions may explain how schools in certain quadrants approach diversity and race differently. However, generally, in the thinking of those in the larger school system, there are notions that racialized minority students have cultural and personal deficits, deficiencies, and tend to be regarded negatively. To address the educators' ignorance, stereotypes, and, for some, bigotry, we see the ongoing need for professional learning opportunities guided by knowledgeable, skilled professionals. Goli Rezai-Rashti (1995), explained, "teachers should be educated to relate to their students' life experiences and to learn from them firsthand about the structural and institutional barriers minority students and their families face in their everyday lives" (p. 14). There is the need for professional development seminars where teachers and administrative staff can engage in the difficult work of confronting individual and structural biases, and forms of discrimination and racism that impact negatively the populations they serve (Irby & Clark, 2018; Lee, 2020).

Continuing this understanding of location and hidden curriculum, the associations with having racialized identities is pronounced and spoken about in all participant interviews. Participant Ashley's connection to the northeast, even though she does not live there any longer, was part of her identity as a Punjabi-Sikh woman:

*Ashley:* Yeah, so [the other] parents will often ask us if we're born in India. [laughs]

*Sonia:* Other parents are asking you?

*Ashley:* Yes. Ummmm, you know, "when we came to Canada." [laughs] So I'm like, okay. We get asked often.

*Tyrone:* Yeah.

*Ashley:* And I don't know what the difference might be between the kids, the parents and I, you know, I feel maybe just in Calgary, immigration is "on" [gestures with hands] the northeast side of town. Maybe, it's not as, you know, prevalent as it is in certain other areas, right?

*Sonia:* So many people aren't really used to "immigrants?"

*Ashley:* Yeah. And, they're really just being curious. They just want to know, right?

Ashley's recognition of her identity as being a point of curiosity for others, and tied with a geographical location, is explicit in the field of identity and inclusion scholarship (Desai, 2001; Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2001; James 2001b; Shadd, 2001; Weber, 2001). There is recognition that one's racial and ethnic self is based on a geographical location, meaning where they live, and where [the country] they come from (James, 2001b). In digging deeper into the prevalence of such notions and subsequent conversations, we can confirm that the racialization and ethnicization of school sites is where we most often struggle with our feelings in regard to inclusion and exclusion. James (2001b), explained that, "all of our interactions, and indeed the educational process we engage in, are mediated by our race and other identities" (pp. 153-154). The areas where participants attend school, are superseded by their identity location and may require more care and attention through professional understandings led by school leadership. Without this, there is a deficit in terms of honouring and uplifting the identities of racialized families which is likely to result in experiences of systemic discrimination.

We witness this tension for both Jimmy and Jada when they retell their experiences with the principals at Jimmy's secondary school. Here, Jada was told that her child no longer had a place at the school, without being given an explicit reason. However, there was an implication of

his ‘trouble-making’ reputation (reference to disciplinary measures taken, see Chapter 4), leaving Jada to conclude that this may have been the reason that Jimmy was unenrolled without explanation. Eventually, Jimmy was re-enrolled after a meeting with the new principal and the existing vice-principal:

*Jada:* The principal told me a story about how he’s really big on, “putting out small fires,” he kept using this metaphor and he said, “because in grade nine last year, we had fights that were happening.” He was explaining this to my son. So, before Jimmy’s fight...he was saying about how, “If you have any problems, you come to me.” So, I had to bring an incident up to the teacher. I did not know that maybe one teacher didn’t tell the other. The one principal didn’t tell the other. I had to bring it up to the principal to say, “I don’t want this to cause...tension or cause an impression, I guess, on the new teachers.”

And then he’s like, “You know I had no idea that this had happened.” How did you [the principal] not know that he was accepted and rejected into this school?

He’s like, “You know what, as the principal, I’ve dealt with this and it’s a closed case. As far as I’m concerned he’s a good kid.” And the vice-principal – he’s older. He’s like a great guy but he is the one that said to Jimmy, “If you have any problems, come to me. We like putting out small fires before they get bigger fires.” And he said, “fights that were arranged outside of school time...but on the playground.” So, in school – they have to break this up ‘cause they were gathered in the parking lot.

*Jimmy:* When I was in the office and they came and questioned him [the other student] first. And [then] they questioned me. They made me fill out a report. And they sent me down there like, “So what is this we’re hearing about your cousins are coming to the school?” So, kids are spreading rumours ‘cause...

*Sonia:* They think that you'll retaliate?

*Jada:* 'Cause Lebanese people come in packs.

*Jimmy:* 'Cause Lebanese people like to come in packs.

*Jada:* 'Cause they're – they're living up to a stereotype now.

*Jimmy:* "His cousins are coming in four cars."

*Sonia:* So, they didn't ask you what had happened [referring to the altercation]?

*Jimmy:* No, they went right to that. And, then they asked me what happened. So, they were concerned about the well-being of other students in the school. Thinking...of course, he's [Jimmy] a threat, from what they heard from random students saying, "Oh, so your cousins are coming to the school?" And me being completely oblivious of what's going on, I'm like, "What do you mean my cousins are coming?" And they were like, "Oh, yeah, we've been hearing rumours that your cousins are coming to school."

*Jada:* You don't have older cousins older than Jimmy. I mean, I'm sorry – we do have cousins older but they don't drive. [Laughter].

As part of my insider/outsider status, I understood what the principal was alluding to, with his question about Jimmy's cousins arriving at the school. Often, the prevalence of, "the over-surveillance of students of color in majority white schools" (Chapman, 2013, p. 622), comes in the form of being associated with violent group confrontations when dealing with conflicts. This is an example of systemic stereotypes and understanding remaining unchecked, and school leadership, perpetuating the negative views and taking actions against racialized students. Another disciplinary conflict that occurred with Kaiser (Soha's son), resulted with the school resource, police officer having to intercede with the family:

*Soha:* And then again, he [Kaiser] had to help his friend – he thought his friend was getting hit. Remember? When they hit you and the police called me? When you hit somebody, and the police called me and he said, “He hit somebody really badly.” But it wasn’t his fault and his friend...

*Kaiser:* It was my buddy, [he] was fighting somebody else and so you kinda got to help your buddy. You know what I mean?

*Soha:* But he got in trouble and the buddy went home. So, the police called me and I have to give him [name of Constable] credit for that. He called me and it was [during] finals.

*Kaiser:* It was [name of Constable]. You know [him]? I hated that guy. [laughs] I hated [name of Constable].

*Soha:* But he was great with me as a parent. He called me...

*Kaiser:* Yeah, cause you’re the parent. It wasn’t – you are [not] in the school with him 24/7.

*Soha:* Dealing with kids like these where they have absolutely – so he called me and I was so proud of that because he explained the situation which I knew of but I didn’t know it went to that extent, to the police. [He said] “Because it’s finals and I’m not going to bother him or bother you guys to bring him in right now. I’m gonna give you until the finals are done, and I want you to bring him here.”

So, that was for ten days that he [gave us], “I don’t [want to] bother with it, but he needs to be here.” And, I took him and he was in with [name of Constable]. I was sitting outside, bawling my eyes out. But it’s so embarrassing going into a police station. So embarrassing. But to them [gesturing to Kaiser], what the heck? His dad is a corrections officer.

The systemic structures in place provide leadership that presents in the form of school-based police officers and administrators which is duly noted in this study. The need for positive leadership deepens the necessity for understanding how school staff, in this case the school resource, police officer, holds power in the spaces occupied by racialized students. The research dealing with the disciplining of racialized minorities, especially Black youth, highlights how schools collectively make sense of behavior-related problems and take actions which disproportionately impact racialized youth (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Dei et al., 2003; Irby & Clark, 2018; Milner, 2020). I question whether opportunities for professional learning that address this body of research on discipline and surveillance of minority youth, could be part of the learning on social inequities. Returning to the tenants of Critical Race Theory (CRT), it is a question of how ingrained features of the school landscape are part of a culture of power, available to select few (Delpit, 1988; Marx, 2008).

In turn, it is incumbent on school structures to create inclusive schools that embrace visible learning led by school leadership. By staying silent on issues of social inequalities, schools run counter to building and/or maintaining inclusive school systems. Dei, James-Wilson, and Zine (2002), confirmed that, “working for equity, access, and social justice requires an examination of power, representation and the distribution of resources. A critique of the *status quo* [emphasis in original] and an understanding of how it is used to maintain inequalities is involved” (p. 16).

Ahmed (2012), described the work of diversity in institutions as needing to be habitual and to change the status quo, “while habits save trouble, diversity work creates trouble” (p. 27). In a critical incident with Ayanna’s daughter, a different teacher and principal captured an

attempt to address diversity of opinions. Ayanna and her daughter were left feeling the burden of exclusion through the unaddressed racism and bias presented in the following lesson:

*Ayanna:* One time [name of daughter] teacher split them into two groups, and had them do a debate. The debate was, “Should First Nations people have to pay taxes like the rest of us?” And the kids had to fight each other, like had to debate each other. I was like, “what the heck?” Like, why would you even do that? And, it’s not even truthful information. It’s not even factual, and how could you possibly have students, like, debating against a group of Canadian...like a group of people who live here?

I tried to talk to the teacher, she wouldn’t meet with me, she wouldn’t answer my phone calls, and then they’re like, “We need to have this meeting in a group,” with the principal.

So, then eventually, I went in there and she [teacher] was like, “Well, it came from the textbook.”

When I looked at the textbook, it was like, they had interviewed some – it was like a weird interview with a White guy who said, “First Nations should have to pay taxes like the rest of us.” And I said to them, “Well, just because it was in the textbook, you realize that doesn’t mean it was right.” Right?

They were like visibly shaken by that, and then the principal told me, “Look, we’re in a school and we can’t just take sides. We can’t like be just presenting one side.”

I said, “Yeah, but this isn’t QR-77 [reference to local talk radio station] call in, everybody just say your uninformed opinions about First Nations people. You are educators, and you have to teach people to like...care for each other and understand each other, not take sides against people.”

The debate in this classroom setting is an example of accepting an institutionalized norm about how ‘sides of diversity’ are taught, leaving students with no mention of racism and discrimination implicit in the ‘sides’ of debate. In this case, the power of the ‘textbook,’ and presenting two sides to an argument, are left unquestioned and seen as having equal positions in society (Delpit, 1988). Ladson-Billings (2016) asserted, “critical race theory sees the official school curriculum as a culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (p. 24). To counter this requires the enactment of anti-racism education where we recognize the need to “critically analyze the representation and portrayal of individuals and communities in the curriculum” (Dei, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2002, p. 39). This example is part of a larger pattern in how knowledge and ‘truth’ privileges a dominant point of view while further oppressing marginalized communities (Dei, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2002; Lopez, 2013; Milner & Laughter, 2014; Ross & Berger, 2009). Professional learning at the structural level is an unused tool in the hands of leaders who aspire to build and maintain inclusive education at their schools. The hidden and visible curriculum are left to exist with no critical analyses or engagement at the systemic level. Without an understanding of racialization as a vehicle of exclusion, the impact is deep and long lasting. There is a need for “leading for equity” (Irby et al., 2019), so that there are fewer missed opportunities to advance a critical and more inclusive framework of race as a social construct in the operation of education. The first step is focusing on race to problematize the neutrality of dominant ideology, enacting the praxis of Critical Race Theory in education (Ladson-Billings, 2016; Marx, 2008). The next step is to recognize the structural norms that exist in education, and finally, to disrupt wide-ranging forms of oppression in educational institutions. Evasive techniques employed by leadership and systemic norms are visible to families and students who encounter in schools the maintenance of power over

marginalized experiences. Irby et al. (2019), explain this form of racism as, “*race is a consequence of social thought and relations* in which dominant groups racialize groups based on their interests at a given socio-historical or spatial moment” (emphasis in original, p. 198).

Today, many of the issues identified continue to impact the core of educational aspirations for racialized and ethnicized communities.

### **Summary**

The relationships formed between school leadership and student and parent communities are significant at the school sites and reflect the larger system of education. Leadership in schools is prominent in effective interactions and in how inclusive education is experienced by families. The participants in this study spoke about the emotional spaces related to interactions within schools. They revealed their racialized and ethnicized lived experiences which reflected both the challenges and possibilities. To address these challenges and uplift the possibilities, there is a required setting of Critical Race Theory (CRT) through the practice of anti-racism education. As Dei and McDermott (2014) specified, “a critical anti-racism practice amplifies the social construction of race, disrupting the hegemonized discourses of the invisibility of racism” (p. 2). The power to enact inclusion in school structures exists within the recognition of and actions related to knowing that the racialized and ethnicized school spaces we occupy serve to either include or exclude the experiences of historically marginalized populations. The understanding of systemic structures requires continuous efforts to disrupt, acknowledge, design, and enact the policies and procedures that lift the lived experiences of all the stakeholders who are invested in the betterment of relationships and structures in school communities.

## Chapter 6: Discussion and Recommendations

### Introduction

From the findings analyzed in Chapter 4 and 5, we can appreciate that the lived experiences of these participants reveal insights into ways in which inclusive school environments are seen, felt, and heard by racialized communities. Coming full circle to the earlier discussion about provincial statements regarding inclusion, this chapter will examine the policy and procedures identified in the Ministry of Education in Alberta, document: *Indicators of inclusive schooling* (Alberta Education, 2013). The discussion attempts to connect the measures of this policy to the inclusion of racialized communities in schools.

From here, I outline key recommendations as possibilities contributing towards transformative objectives for an anti-racist education system. The recommendations are outlined for educators, school leadership, school boards and governments based on the understandings derived from this study. I aim to address the analyses of the findings with the participants' hopes of achieving a more inclusive and dynamic school environment for future generations.

### **Institutional Inclusion: Cautionary tales**

The gravity of institutional pull is seen in the institutionalized policies, practices, and norms of large-scale organizations in society. The institution of education has embedded practices that can be susceptible to maintaining a social norm that can obstruct ways of knowing, leaving marginalized populations excluded. An example of institutionalized practices that may go unchallenged are the curriculum outcomes that often follow a Eurocentric point of view (Dei et al., 2000; Fleras & Elliot, 2003; James & Wood, 2005). This is an embedded practice that continues to remain unchanged at the systemic level, as James and Wood (2005), stated:

The degree to which education systems in Canada are able to respond to the needs of diverse school population is circumscribed by the historical legacy of an elitist, monocultural and assimilative education system. It is a system in which students for whom the school system was designed to serve and still serves—the economic, social and cultural elites of society, i.e., English-speaking (and, in Quebec, French-speaking), white, middle-class Canadians—are more likely to succeed. (p. 93).

As educators, the responsibility to teach the prescribed curriculum excludes the perspectives and histories of marginalized populations, accordingly, students do not see themselves reflected in the teaching and learnings at school (Aujla-Bhullar, 2016). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017), reiterated that, “when a form of social bias is institutionalized, it is reproduced automatically and no longer depends on the intentions or awareness of individuals; it is the default or status quo outcome of that institution’s work” (p. 225). Joan, a participating parent, drew attention to how an increase in differing perspectives (formal or informal) in curriculum would be beneficial to schools, whereas Kaiser expressed the monotony of a restricted curriculum:

*Joan:* Like those kinds of things would be a great opportunity for kids to really understand the impact in the communities, right? Or, like, if there is other stuff happening like the Black Lives Matter. Or, those other pieces that are going on in the world and...like, where there was a terrorist attack...

*Kaiser:* No, social studies is not needed. Like how many times do – did you have a conversation of what happened in 1810, you know what I mean? Like, I didn’t mind it. I studied well. I’m just saying like stuff that applies to real life nowadays. [Where] you get paid for skills, you know what I mean? Nowadays you get paid for your skills and like what you can provide to people like services. School don’t teach you shit.

In examining the “indicators of inclusive schooling” by Alberta Education (2013), we can deconstruct how “institutions can be thought of as verbs as well as nouns: to put the ‘doing’ back into the institution is to attend to how institutional realities become given” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 21). In attending to institutionalized policies guiding curriculum and practice, we can delve deeper into understanding the participants’ inclusion, as it exists within an overarching structure: the institution of education.

### **Policy: Indicators of Inclusive Schooling**

In 2013, Alberta Education released a guiding policy entitled, *Indicators of inclusive schooling: Continuing the conversation*, in response to government-led conversations across the province culminating in a 2010 report, *Inspiring education: A dialogue with Albertans*. The main premise of these discussions was to envision what education would look like in the year 2030.

The excerpt below captured this vision:

How do we ensure the child born this year can adapt to the many changes ahead? As importantly, how do we help children discover and pursue their passions? How do we help them make successful transitions to adulthood? And how do we help them become life-long learners who contribute to healthy, inclusive communities and thriving economies? (Alberta Education, 2010, p. 4)

In the above quotation, the reference to “inclusive communities” prompts the questions, *how does this exist in the institution of education? And thereby, how is inclusion being applied in schools today?* The provincial curriculum resource of indicators is organized into dimensions of

school improvement, effective instruction, and tools for implementation. It is a user-friendly document that addresses a myriad of principles and values.

In conjunction to the thematic analyses of this study, I have identified and compiled an assortment of sample policy indicators (Alberta Education, 2013, pp. 8-12), that potentially address some of the issues revealed in the findings of this study:

- Staff, students and parents share a commitment to creating inclusive learning experiences for all students.
- Diversity is valued as an enriching aspect of the school environment.
- Teachers create opportunities to build understanding of the interconnections between people and between communities.
- New students and their families are welcomed and oriented to the school community.
- Students have opportunities to share their experiences and ideas to inform school policies and practices.
- Students have opportunities to form relationships with positive role models and mentors.
- Staff, parents and external partners collaborate and communicate in respectful and meaningful ways.
- Differing viewpoints are valued and considered as resources for increased learning.
- Parent engagement is encouraged and valued by school staff.
- Parents have opportunities to dialogue with school leaders and inform school decision making.
- Students demonstrate pride in their communities and cultures.
- Teachers plan for learning experiences that reflect the characteristics, qualities and concerns of the local community.

- School staff are aware of and access community supports and resources.
- Community members are invited to the school/classroom to share knowledge, experience and talents.

The purpose in highlighting these sample indicators, is to illustrate how inclusive education has been addressed through institutionalized policy. It is critical to draw attention to the fact that these are not *requirements* for schools but instead, guiding directives for creating inclusive schools – practice is left to the discretion of school boards in Alberta. Due to this, the risk is run that implementation is not mandated as *necessary* to the building of inclusive schools. This can leave communities unheard and excluded. There is a predetermined absence of accountability for the institutionalization of the indicators in schools. Ahmed (2012), reiterated the risks of diversity work not being valued:

It is certainly the case that responsibility for diversity and equality is unevenly distributed. It is also the case that the distribution of this work is political: if diversity and equality work is less valued by organizations, then to become responsible for this work can mean to inhabit institutional spaces that are also less valued. (p. 4)

The value of creating inclusive schooling is held within the authority of school boards, school sites, leadership, and teachers. The practical work of diversity and inclusion would require a dismantling of institutional norms that do not heed or are unresponsive to these indicators, whilst simultaneously creating and implementing inclusive and equitable norms in their stead. Such norms go beyond the scope of multicultural education, celebrating and acknowledging holidays, culture, and festivals in schools.

In the inclusive education guiding policy, there is only one mention of racism and discrimination, namely that “the school community counters all forms of racism and

discrimination” (Alberta Education, 2013, p. 8). This, at best, is a sincere and necessary acknowledgement of the concerns raised in Ayanna’s example, as well as other participant experiences. At worst, it is a performative measure that does not adequately address the interpersonal and systemic issues impacting racialized and minority communities in society (Ball, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2016).

Even if the Alberta “indicators of inclusive schooling,” were mandated and school boards were held accountable at institutional levels, I question how schools would gain a more robust understanding of racism and discrimination. Would the lived experiences of racialized communities be heard and learned from? Would the participation of diverse communities in policy implementation at school sites disrupt practices that oppress marginalized populations?

Considering the findings of this study, these are questions that cannot be answered easily. Based upon the participants experiences and interactions with school staff, it becomes apparent that there are systemic structures that limit the opportunities of families to have their concerns understood or acknowledged. Furthermore, there is little to no transparency for families to confirm that school staff are engaging in unlearning their assumptions, perspectives and biases, and then using their knowledge to challenge dominant narratives in education. However, this research provides the opportunity to ask the difficult questions required in working towards creating inclusive education. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how and why racialized communities’ experiences are being undervalued in the discourse of inclusive education in a localized Alberta context. To validate and lift the lived experiences of racialized groups, there is the need to implement anti-racism education that questions institutional power and systems of dominance and to deconstruct the “non-racist illusion” (Dei, 2014b, p. 15).

Inclusion in the institution of education requires more than what is being presented now. I agree with Dei and McDermott (2014), that applying an anti-racism lens to diversity and inclusion is necessary, so that transformative actions can be enacted. If we are to address diversity through the lens of anti-racism, there is a recognition that:

the politics of anti-racism are grounded in the fact that our social world can and ought to be more equitable; anti-racism for transformation keeps its focus on an imagined utopia, but it amplifies the process of mundane (everyday, social, institutionalized) actions towards utopia rather than measuring its success by having reached this imagined space of utopia once and for all. (p. 2)

It is not utopia we expect to arrive at, but continuously walking towards a promising world of inclusion and equity. The following and final section of this discussion will outline recommendations for various stakeholders who take part in the pursuit of inclusive education. It is important to note that these recommendations exist as a cyclical formation as opposed to a linear or hierarchal structure. Each informs the other and reflects the need to address the complex problems of power relations between categories: each grouping is interconnected as part of the overarching systemic structure of education. The recommendations are grounded in the hopes and aspirations revealed by the participants and gaps made apparent by the related literature used in the analyses of findings.

## **Recommendations**

### Educators

- Engaging in critical self-reflective practice that acknowledges one's own racial identity and its impact in holding authority in the school spaces.
- Ongoing learning about students' histories and the intersectionality of their identity markers.

- Recognizing and centring the agency of community members in the advancement of inclusive learning conditions of racialized students.
- Engaging with diverse and racialized communities to better understand their backgrounds, histories, experiences, and aspirations for being respectfully included in the classroom.
- Seeking professional development in anti-racism education techniques, including the honouring and lifting of marginalized histories of historically underrepresented communities.

#### Leadership

- Engaging in critical self-reflective practice that acknowledges one's own racial identity and its impact in holding authority and power in the school spaces.
- Recognizing and centring the agency of community members/groups in the advancement of inclusive learning conditions of racialized students.
- Engaging meaningfully with diverse and racialized parent communities to better understand their backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations of being included in school-based development for inclusive education practices.
- Leading through example, and engaging with racialized students in meaningful ways to understand their behaviours and to develop appropriate disciplinary measures when and if needed.
- Providing ongoing opportunities for professional development of school staff and leadership, in the learning and understanding of anti-racism, diversity, and equity practices.

### School Boards

- Hiring and retention of more racialized teaching staff.
- Collection of race-based data, specifically gaining understanding of racialized staff and students.
- Centring the agency of community members/groups (as recognized at the school and classroom levels) in the advancement of inclusive learning conditions of racialized students.
- Creating system-wide channels to report racism and to identify other issues which are counter to and negate inclusive schooling policies, practices and procedures.
- Creating accountability measures for school boards to engage in the practice of professional learning and development for inclusion, specific to anti-racism research and best-practices.
- Enacting transparency in addressing issues which impact racialized and ethnicized communities, at all levels.
- Developing accountability measures with and for racialized communities at school sites, to ensure effective collaboration in the development and execution of anti-racism practice.
- Establishing consultation and accountability measures to include meaningful input of racialized community stakeholders.

### Policy Development

- Developing curriculum with the centring of racialized community members/groups agency and lived experiences.

- Undertaking transparent inquiry into institutional policies and taken for granted norms negatively impacting racialized communities.
- Developing evidence-based policies to address racism and discrimination in schools.
- Putting accountability measures in place to ensure policies of inclusion are visible in schools.

### **Future Research**

Moving forward, I recommend two directions for additional research based on the findings of this study. First, further research is needed that centres community lived experiences, agency, and voice. This requires consistent and ethical pursuit with great care and attention, in providing stakeholders committed to the development and progress of anti-racist, inclusive education structures. Second, studying the means by which anti-racism education is being practiced in school sites, districts, and individual classrooms within Calgary, Alberta, would be of great benefit to continue the understanding of how systemic structures are effectively challenged and addressed.

### **Conclusion**

This study began with an intention to better understand inclusive education in terms of its impacts on multicultural and racialized communities in Calgary. To hear and listen to the lived experiences of families was to bring both a face and voice to the ways that policy and discourse were actually felt and understood at the “front-lines” and “in the educational trenches.” What resulted was a far-reaching and deeper understanding of how policy, discourse, experience, and emotions exist as an accepted and taken for granted form of disparity. All too often inequalities as experiences were embedded in the interactions and systemic structures of schools enacted as inclusive education.

There was also an element of hope expressed by the students and families who participated in the study. The participants share a collective narrative that schooling may be open to change, and many expect better from a country in which they have found a sense of place and, for some, a home. Regardless of the challenges and barriers, all participants expressed that, in sharing their experiences through this study, they hoped for viable and visible change to occur for themselves and for future generations. This work is anchored in the scholarship of decades past and brings to the forefront, a narrative of structural inequalities as a reality facing schools in 2020 and into the future. Amidst the current state of the world, there are those walking forward while respecting those that have struggled before them. The participants of this study embody the courage and knowledge required to create, sustain, and celebrate inclusion as a lived reality within education in Alberta, Canada.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment notice



### **Crossing Borders: Inclusive Education in Our Multi-Ethnic Communities**

Do you identify as a visible minority in any of the following?

- race,
- ethnicity
- culture
- language
- religion

Are you currently enrolled or have an immediate family member enrolled in one of the following schools?

- junior high
- middle school
- high school

If yes, we are currently seeking interested parties to participate in a research study that is looking into the school-community relations as a form of “inclusive education” in our diverse and multicultural Canadian society.

Participation is completely voluntary and requires approximately 2 hours of your time to be interviewed around your experiences and perspectives.

For more information, please contact, Sonia Aujla-Bhullar at [sonia.aujlabhullar@ucalgary.ca](mailto:sonia.aujlabhullar@ucalgary.ca).

This study is, in part, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the University of Calgary, Eyes High Fellowship.

This research study has been approved by the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

## Appendix B: Email to potential participants



### Crossing Borders in Schools: Inclusive Education and Multicultural Communities

My name is Sonia Aujla-Bhullar and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education. I am emailing you today to invite you to be a participant in my PhD research around school-community relations through the lens of living in a diverse society.

In brief, this research actively seeks to imagine a future Canada through revealing and understanding present-day community experiences, highlighting diverse voices, while reflecting policy against reality in an evolving global context. Currently, I am looking for families and students who identify as visible minorities (i.e. racial and ethnic identity) to participate in a study that aims to gather their perspective's and experience around inclusive education within a diverse Canadian society. As this study requires a more in-depth form of conversation, I am looking to interview students who are presently in the middle-school/junior high/high school range and their parents/guardians. At the discretion of participants, interviews can be done either together or separately.

Participants who choose to consent in taking part in the research will be interviewed and asked questions about their perspective and experiences as visible minorities in the context of community relationships with schools. These questions will be in correspondence with the ideas around inclusive education. *Example: What are some of the challenges that schools have in being inclusive around diversity?* Audio will be recorded at your discretion. Participation is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate altogether, you may refuse to participate in parts of the study, you may decline to answer any and all questions, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you would like to participate in this study or would like additional information, please contact me at [sonia.aujlabhullar@ucalgary.ca](mailto:sonia.aujlabhullar@ucalgary.ca).

This study is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the University of Calgary, Eyes High Doctoral Fellowship.

This research study has been approved by the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

Thank you in advance for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sonia Aujla-Bhullar

**Appendix C: Initial contact letter to potential participants**

Dear (name of potential participant)

My name is Sonia Aujla-Bhullar and I am a PhD candidate at the University of Calgary's Werklund School of Education. I am emailing you today to seek out any interested persons that would like to potentially participate in my PhD research around school-community relations and living in a diverse, multicultural society.

Currently, I am looking for families and students who identify as visible minorities (i.e. racial and ethnic identity) to participate in a study that aims to gather their perspective's and experience around inclusive education within a multicultural and diverse Canadian society. As this study requires a more in-depth form of conversation, I am looking for parents and students who are presently in the middle-school/junior high/high school range.

This research actively seeks to imagine a future Canada through revealing and understanding present-day community experiences, highlighting diverse voices, while reflecting policy against reality in an evolving global context.

Participation is completely voluntary and more details can be found in the "informed consent" form (see attached). For any further questions or information please contact me via email at [sonia.aujlabhullar@ucalgary.ca](mailto:sonia.aujlabhullar@ucalgary.ca).

This study is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the University of Calgary, Eyes High Fellowship.

This research study has been approved by the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board.

Thank you in advance for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sonia Aujla-Bhullar PhD Candidate  
SSHRC scholar; Eyes High Doctoral  
Scholar Werklund School of Education  
University of Calgary

## Appendix D: Calgary Board of Education: Example of school board public statement

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### CBE Shares Our Commitment to Anti-Racism and Equity

Jun. 25, 2020

#### CBE CARES: Collaboration for Anti-Racism and Equity Support Advisory Council

We acknowledge racism exists in society and in the CBE. As a school system we know it impacts our students and families. Issues that must be addressed by our society must also be addressed in our schools. We continue to hear from students, staff and members of the public who demand that we do more to address racism and discrimination in our schools and workplaces. We take this call to action seriously. We are listening, we are learning, and we will work to do better.

The CBE has taken significant steps to promote equitable and inclusive learning and working environments, but we recognize more needs to be done. There is no room for racism or discrimination in any of our schools or workplaces.

We are pleased to announce that the CBE will establish an anti-racism and equity advisory council to hear directly from students, staff, parents/guardians, and the CBE community at large. The CBE Collaboration for Anti-Racism and Equity Support Advisory Council – or CBE CARES! – will meet starting this fall and will provide suggestions and advice on how to address racism in our schools and workplaces.

We have also introduced an equity factor to our resource allocation method to account for variability in student needs in schools across our system. This change will ensure that we better allocate resources to support student success where it will have the greatest impact.

In addition to the above actions, we will introduce the following during the upcoming school year:

- Provide supplementary teaching resources to support teachers with the teaching of anti-racism.
- Embed in the design of professional learning offered throughout the year, for all staff, discussions related to equity and anti-racism and how we address bias.
- Continue to respond appropriately to issues or complaints raised by students, staff and parents/guardians consistent with our parent concerns protocol.
- A bullying awareness and prevention training course for all CBE employees will launch this fall.

In the coming weeks and months, we will continue to listen with open hearts and open minds. We will review our current policies and practices and, if needed, develop new ones that specifically address racism and discrimination in our schools and workplaces. We will make time to engage in ongoing discussions and apply what we learn to change our behaviours. If we want

all students to be successful and achieve to the best of their ability, then we must confront our own biases and challenge assumptions.

Again, there is no room for racism or discrimination in any of our schools or workplaces. As always, we are committed to working with our communities to foster inclusive work and learning environments where every student, staff member and family feels safe and knows that they will be treated fairly.

Christopher Usih  
Chief Superintendent of Schools

Marilyn Dennis  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Trustee, Wards 5 & 10

Trina Hurdman  
Trustee, Wards 1 & 2  
Richard Hehr  
Trustee, Wards 8 & 9

Althea Adams  
Trustee, Wards 3 & 4  
Julie Hrdlicka  
Trustee, Wards 11 & 13

Mike Bradshaw  
Trustee, Wards 12 & 14