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## Inclusion of Muslim Students in Ontario Public Education: A Qualitative Inquiry of Elementary School Principals

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Graduate Program in Education  
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## **Abstract**

In order to include Muslim students in Ontario schools, inclusive principals are expected work to understand the inclusion of Muslim students in order to grant them with equal recognition and opportunities as other students in schools. In Ontario, school principals can influence students' learning and achievement through their leadership role and through their routine duties for leading schools, enacting policies, and ensuing quality of instruction at schools. As leaders, principals can enhance the inclusion of Muslim students through working with staff and teachers, and creating working conditions that support Muslim students learning. Ontario policies call for inclusion of all students through maintaining a sense of well-being and ensuring that students reach their full potential, as well as, promoting respect, inclusive education, and eliminating discriminatory biases and power dynamics that hinder students' learning and growth.

This dissertation examines how principals include Muslim students in public elementary schools in Ontario. I utilize a qualitative case study approach and employ semi-structured interviews with public elementary school principals in Ontario, focusing on four main themes: their understanding of the inclusion of Muslim students; the strategies they employed to include Muslim students; the challenges they experienced as they worked to include Muslim students in their schools; and the resources available for principals to include Muslims students.

My study shows that when it comes to inclusion of Muslim students in public elementary schools, principals' understanding ranges in between two categories on a continuum, i.e., less-inclusion and inclusion. Principals understanding of inclusion of Muslim students affect their actions, and actions are then explored within three

dimensions: (a) the strategies principals engaged in to include Muslim students, (b) the supports principals took to help include them, and (c) the ways principals viewed, and therefore, acted upon the challenges.

I argue that principals in this study work towards the inclusion of Muslim students by challenging their personal assumptions and accepting that the world may favor some groups over others. As well, principals in this study work towards inclusion by accepting that Muslim students have learning needs that are different than other students, that Muslims are part of the society we live in, and that in order to include Muslim students, principals need to include this group in all school activities. I later speak to how my study serves as an initial step at determining where gaps exist in terms of principal's work on including Muslim students in public elementary schools. And, how the findings from my study may help enhance principals' practices in regards to working with Muslim students in Ontario public schools. Voices of Ontario elementary school principals is the main theoretical contribution in this study. I aim to share my work principals in Ontario through organized sessions and presentations.

The dissertation also provides recommendations, contributions, and next steps for future research in this area. On a personal level, my study helped me become a dynamic leader by opening my eyes to alternative aspects of inclusive education. Further research on this topic should be the next step for my work.

*Keywords:* inclusive education, Muslim students, elementary school principals, Ontario, public schools.

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## Chapter 1

### Why this Topic, Why Now, and Why me?

In the past few decades, Canadian public schools have witnessed a demographic increase in racial and ethnic diversity (Duggal, 2014; Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016; Gerin-lajoie, 2012). Consequently, public school principals took measures to include diverse groups and make sense of racial and ethnic realities in schools (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2016; Duggal, 2014; Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016). A push for inclusion in schools was intended to ensure that all students attain the necessary skills required to fully participate in the society and the work force.

Principals are expected to include diverse student groups and work with them in schools for the best possible outcomes in terms of achievement, school climate, and culture (Leithwood, 2012, 2014; Nelson, 2013; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014; Spillane, & Lee, 2014; Zhang, 2013). In multicultural societies, like Canada, publicly funded elementary schools must actively recognize and support the diverse cultures of their students (Collet, 2007; Duggal, 2014; Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016; Gerin-Lajoie, 2012; Harper, 1997). This support of diverse cultures is written into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016), which dictates equal rights and treatment of all Canadians regardless of religion.

Muslims are one of Canada's major ethnic communities (Bramadat & Seljak, 2009), and schools are the primary social institutions charged with engaging children. Thus, there is a need for principals at public elementary schools to understand the

importance of the inclusion of Muslim students; to accommodate for their needs, including their culture, practices, and values as this is a constitutional right (Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016; Siddiqui, 2008).

### **Contextualizing the Research**

All religions have to be respected for their intrinsic values, and religion and culture cannot be left at home. As the Canadian sociologist Helen Harper (1997) asserted, “schools are expected to meet the needs of a population that is racially, culturally and linguistically diverse, [in order] to confront...racial and economic disparity and discrimination” (p. 192). Many educators are positive advocates of different faiths and believe that religions and pupils must be given the respect they deserve (Niyozov & Plum, 2009). However, research shows that some, yet not all, educators around the world understand and include Muslim students in public schools (Bramadat & Seljak, 2009; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Within Ontario public schools, some principals hold an understanding of diversity that “goes beyond the visible to also include invisible dimensions of diversity,” (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015, p. 70), while other principals still understand diversity based on visible differences.

Principals’ work has an important part to play in the process of including Muslim students in schools (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Ryan, 2013). The Ontario leadership framework, which was introduced in 2006, is a resource “intended as a compact, practical guide...that both school and system leaders can put to daily use (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2006, p. 5), and it emphasized that school principals’ leadership impacts student’s learning. This framework defined *leadership* as the

“exercise of influence on organizational members and other stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the Organization’s vision and goals” (Leithwood, 2012, p. 5).

Leadership is said to be *successful* when it is ethical and contributes to the progress of an organization. This success can be achieved through a principal’s role as a leader who facilitates the professional learning of teachers to meet student needs and enhance achievement in schools (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2008, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). In Ontario, the person in formal authority at a school is called a *principal* (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2015).

Considering the elementary schools’ context, many principals must take leadership responsibilities for enacting leadership practices (Leithwood, 2012). Yet, little is known about principals’ understanding of the Muslim student population and their needs and how principals work to include students from the Muslim population in public education in Ontario.

### **Understanding Inclusion**

Principals’ understanding pertaining to the inclusion of a diverse student population is necessary in leading schools and preparing all students for a democratic and multicultural society (Duggal, 2014; Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016; Gerin-lajoie, 2012; Harper, 1997; Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Kiemele, 2009; Riehl, 2000; Webber & Lupart, 2011). The concept of inclusion can be seen through diversity, which recognises that students are unique and that differences exist in academic level, ability, cultural background, personality, religious beliefs, and other areas. Thus, diversity can be

interpreted as the individualization of students and the celebration of differences (Gérin-Lajoie & Diane, 2012; Ryan, 2003). In the context of this study I identify that *students with learning needs* not only include students with obvious cognitive, physical, and developmental challenges; rather, more contemporary discussions suggest that learning needs also include the needs of “those classified as...members of visible minorities...[and]...young people whose cultures and religions are not main stream” (Webber & Lupart, 2011, p. 4). Principals must understand different *others* in order to “engender acceptance and reduce racism” (Ryan, 2003, p. 127).

**Inclusion with religious diversity.** Canada's religious demographic composition is heterogeneous (Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016). For decades religious studies scholars have engaged in debate about the most appropriate definition of religion. Researchers suggest that religion is a system of beliefs, which involves the worship of a divine being, and must be structured around a core institution or temple (Bramadat & Seljak, 2009). These debates acknowledge that not everyone operates out of an entirely consistent view. While it is hard to define religion, as there is no single unambiguous object that describes the term, in my research I define *religion* based on the definition used by Bramadat and Seljak. Instead of choosing one exclusive definition of religion and imposing it on a group, a pragmatic and functional definition of religion is used where I employ the language my study participants are using—if my participants call something or someone religious or Islamic, then will I as well.

The term inclusive education, also known as antiracist education, is defined as a type of education that aims to promote ethnocultural inclusion in education by developing

the knowledge and skills needed within school for staff and students in order for them to positively contribute to the society (St. Pierre, 2009).

**Muslim students in Ontario.** Islam constitutes one-fifth (23.2%) of the world's population, and it is the second-largest religion after Christianity (CIA, 2018). About 80% of Muslims are non-Arab and live in the Middle East and North Africa (Pew Research Center, 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2008), and the Muslim population is growing in Europe, North America, and Australia (CIA, 2018; Sirin & Fine, 2008). The literature shows that Muslims are the second largest religious denominational group in almost all Western countries, including Canada (Niyozov & Plum, 2009, Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008). Further, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world, including in Canada (Siddiqui, 2008). According to population projections by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, it is expected that the world's Muslim population will increase by about 35% in the next 20 years, rising from 1.6 billion in 2010 to 2.2 billion by 2030 (Pew Research Center, 2011). In Canada, the Muslim population is expected to triple, rising from 940,000 in 2010 to 2.7 million in 2030 (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Muslims are one of Canada's major minority religious communities, which also include: Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhist, and Jews (Bramadat & Seljak, 2009). Canada's Muslim population is around 940,000, accounting for 2.8% of the total population in Canada (Pew Research Center, 2011). The world factbook (CIA, 2018) suggests that 3.2% of Canadian population is Muslim. Most of the Muslims in Canada reside in Ontario; around 582,000 Muslims live in Ontario, which represents 4.6% of the province's population (Statistics Canada, 2011).

In Ontario schools, Muslim students face many challenges related to religious practices, dress codes, sexual ethics, stereotypes and biases, Islamophobia, and curriculum-related challenges (Ahmed, 2016; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Siddiqui, 2008). Some researchers assert that Muslim students feel they are under attack or scrutiny because of their religion; they face different identity tasks compared to their peers (Ahmed, 2016; Sensoy & Stonebanks, 2009). Thus, a “psychological dimension and fear of being an outcast is an aspect of [Muslim students] lives within the school context” (Sensoy & Stonebanks; 2009, p. 5). The association between Islam and terrorism causes Muslim students to feel like *the other* and they worry about visually and verbally self-identifying in order to avoid any discrimination, assault, prejudice, and disrespect (Ahmed, 2016). The Environics Institute (2016) suggested that Muslims in the West are a *poorly understood* minority group. A lot of misunderstandings and assumptions are made about Islam and Muslims. For example, the covering of women’s hair, the Hijab, “is seen as oppressive, degrading, limiting, forced, and antiquated” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 13). Yet, most girls or women who choose to wear the Hijab feel the opposite, and that it is “liberating, dignifying, freeing, equalizing, and very much a choice” (Ahmed, 2016, p. 13). As well, terrorism has been linked to Islam and Muslims, and accordingly, Islamophobic incidents have increased, especially within Ontario schools. This includes a January 2017 incident where six Muslims were killed at a mosque in Quebec (The Canadian Press, January 2017); the protesters ripped a Qur'an during an Ontario school board meeting and asked for Muslim prayers to be banned in schools (The Huffington Post, 2017); and a video shared online offered a \$1,000 reward for videotaping Muslim prayers at schools (Nassar, 2017a, 2017b).

## **Including Muslim Students in Ontario Public Schools**

Researchers call for an understanding of the learning needs, which are specific to Muslim students in schools (Ahmed, 2016; Guo, 2011). In Canada, the province is responsible for establishing policies, whereas school boards are responsible for developing the policies, while attending to the requirements of provincial policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). It is then the principals' responsibility to implement board policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). While there are policies in Ontario that aim to include Muslim students and engage them in schooling (Duggal, 2014; Joshee, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2001), it is the principal's responsibility to implement these policies.

Schools provide a means for recognition and representation of Muslim students through the modification of school curricula, dress codes, and provision of prayer rooms for Muslim students (Guo, 2011). In Ontario, many schools have "actively recognized the...identities of Muslim students" (Collet, 2007, p. 138), and thus allow schools to support Muslim students' identities. Nevertheless, in Ontario public schools there continues to be some principals who feel they need to maintain schools as secular environments, and accordingly, these principals choose not to accommodate for the needs of Muslims, such as allowing for prayer in schools (Guo, 2011). Principals play an instrumental role in inclusion in schools (Leithwood, 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Thus, principals' understanding of Muslim students, and the inclusion of this group in schools, is a topic that needs to be explored.



## **Positioning the Researcher**

I chose to consider Muslim students as my study's focus given that, as a Muslim who was raised in Canada, I believe that Muslim students have specific needs and challenges, which should be specifically responded to in public schools. As I study Muslim students, I also put in mind the current situation of Muslim students and how a world focus is filtered into, and is impacted by, schools, which is in return impacted by the work principals do in schools, as recently reported by mass media (Nassar, 2017a, 2017b; The Huffington Post, 2017; The Canadian Press, 2017).

My passion towards learning how principals include Muslim students in Ontario public schools stems from my personal experience as a Muslim woman. I was born abroad and later came to Ontario as an immigrant at the age of thirteen. I believe I am able to relate to the needs of Muslim students in public schools, because I went through similar experiences as a Muslim girl who went to a public school in Ontario.

In my school experiences in Southwestern Ontario, I observed that some educators were more inclusive than others. These educators seemed to understand differences and ensured that I was not intentionally excluded in school. With time, I understood how diversity enriches the educational experience as we learn from those with different and unique experiences, beliefs, and perspectives, and it promotes personal growth by challenging stereotyped preconceptions. My understanding of the concept of diversity grew even further throughout my journey studying inclusive education in Ontario. For us to prosper, we work to deeply understand and appreciate differences.

I am interested in exploring principals' understanding of Muslim students and their needs, and the work principals do to include this group in schooling, as principals

are mainly responsible for leading public schools in Ontario (Leithwood, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016; Ontario Principals' Council, 2015; The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). As I examine principals' understanding of Muslim students, I observed that there might not be enough of an understanding of Islam in Canada and worldwide. Through my enrollment in the professional Education Doctorate program at Western University, I planned to further explore how principals include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools.

### **Problem Identified**

The problem for this study is identified by how elementary principals include Muslim students in Ontario public schools, with four focuses: (a) how they understand inclusion of Muslim students in public schools; (b) their practices of inclusive education for Muslim students in schools; (c) the challenges they experience in including Muslim students in schools; and d) the resources available for their endeavors to include this ethnic group.

Federal and provincial policies call for inclusion in public schools. Yet, the growing qualitative research that is contributing to the body of literature suggests that Muslim students are not being fully supported in public schools (Ahmed, 2016; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Siddiqui, 2008). In Ontario, while some of the learning needs are being accommodated for, the needs of Muslim students in public schools are not always being met, and a strong understanding of those learning needs is still to be established in some schools (Ahmed, 2016; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Siddiqui, 2008). Researchers, therefore, call for an understanding of the learning needs specific to Muslim students in order to help their inclusion in schools (Guo, 2011; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Federal and provincial policies, which call for inclusion in schools, are translated through principals' work in schools, as principals are the main individuals responsible for enacting leadership practices in Ontario schools (Leithwood, 2012). Principals influence schools through their role as instructional leaders and by promoting the learning and growth of staff, students, and parents (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Thus, principals' leadership has an important part to play in the process of including Muslim students in schools (Leithwood, 2008, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Ryan, 2013). From that perspective, I chose to focus my study on the work principals do to include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools.

### **Research Question and Sub-Research Questions**

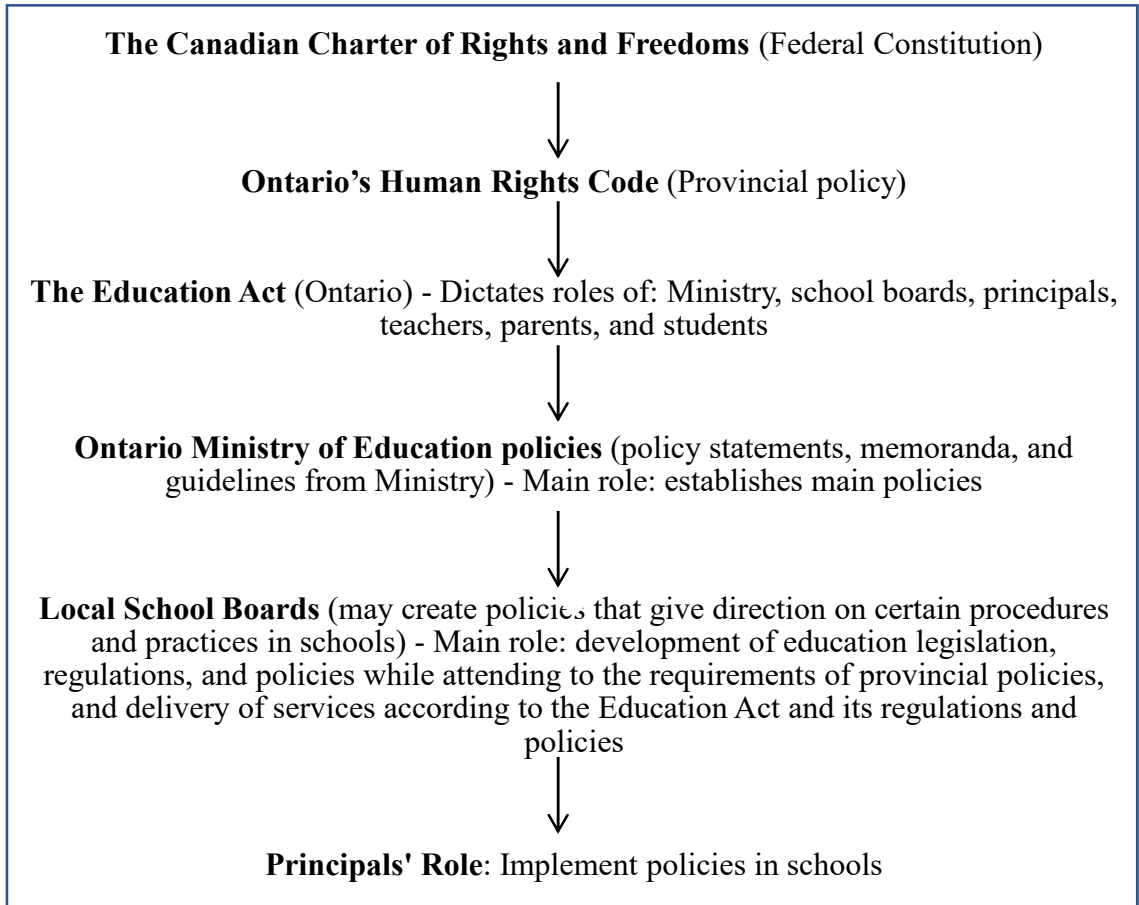
This study aims to respond to the central research question: How do principals include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools? Specifically, this study intends to examine the following four sub-research questions:

1. How do principals understand the inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools?
2. What strategies do they employ to include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools?
3. What challenges do they experience as they work to include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools?
4. What resources are available for them to include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools?

## **Policy Context: Education Law and Inclusion Policy in Ontario**

In the Ontario school system, inclusive education is defined as education where students, “see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 6), and Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (2009), this document defined inclusive education as, “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students” (p. 6). Inclusive education is always embedded in equity, which is defined as a condition of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all individuals, wherein fair treatment regards individual differences and needs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). For equity to be an established treatment of people, it is not necessarily the same, rather, it is based on the understanding of diversity (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Diversity is then defined as a wide range of attributes within a society including, yet not limited to, religion (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009).

In the Canadian educational system, a province establishes policies, school boards develop the policies while attending to the requirements of provincial policies, and principals work on implementing the board policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Figure 1 outlines the structure of education law and policy in Ontario.



*Figure 1.* The Structure of Education Law and Policy in Ontario. Created by author based on respective official documents.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is part of the federal Constitution (also known as the supreme law), which is the highest law in the Canada (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016). The Charter guarantees equal rights and treatment of all Canadians based on many grounds, including religion (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016). The Ontario Ministry of Education needs to ensure that their practices are consistent with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms including the provincial Ontario's Human Rights Code, which follows the county's Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016; School Advocacy Hamilton, 2016). The Ontario Human Rights Code is the provincial law that guarantees

the right to equal treatment and opportunities without discrimination and is applied to everybody in Ontario (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016).

**The Education Act and regulations.** The Education Act is the legislation governing Ontario's public education, which dictates the powers and responsibilities of Ontario's Ministry of Education's various school boards, principals, and teachers, as well as the rights and responsibilities of students and parents in Ontario schools (School Advocacy Hamilton, 2016). The Education Act can be supplemented via *regulations*, which provide detail in focused areas in Ontario education, such as the suspension and expulsion of a student (Education Act Regulation 106/01; Reg. 37/01); special education programs and services (Reg. 306); and identification and placement of exceptional pupils (IEP, Reg. 181/98). Thus, regulations govern many aspects of the education system in Ontario (School Advocacy Hamilton, 2016).

**The Ontario Ministry of Education and its policies.** The Ministry of Education is the governmental office in charge of education and is responsible for the development of education legislation, regulations, and policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

The Ontario Ministry of Education and local school boards may also create policies that give direction for how certain procedures and practices in schools need to happen. These policies take the form of policy statements, guidelines, or memorandums. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education issues policy and program memoranda, which outline procedures and practices and set guidelines for school boards: for example, the Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 119 entitled, "Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Equity Education Policies in Ontario Schools" (School advocacy Hamilton, 2016), which I will detail later.

**School boards.** Local school boards are responsible for the delivery of educational services according to the Education Act, and its regulations and policies (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

**School principals.** Principals are responsible for the organization and management schools, as well as budgeting schools using school the budget assigned to schools by school boards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Principals are also responsible for the quality of instruction and for student discipline at schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Principals are assigned formal authority and take personal responsibility to enact these policies through their leadership practices at individual schools (Leithwood, 2012; Ontario Principals' Council, 2015).

**Ministry documents related to inclusion.** In 2008, the Ministry released the document "Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education," which called for inclusion and recognized that equity and excellence go hand in hand (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The *strategy* was released in a 2009 document entitled, "Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). The strategy was said to promote fundamental human rights described in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). Details on policy and program memorandum no. 119 were released in a 2013 document entitled, "Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Memorandum no. 119 (2009) demanded that all publicly funded school boards develop, implement, and monitor an inclusive education policy, which contained a religious accommodation

guideline that reflected the requirements set out in the memorandum (No. 119), and the strategy document of 2009 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b).

In 2014, the document “Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario” was released and stated that, “every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other factors,” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a, p. 8), thus recognising students may be excluded based on religion. Guidelines for policy development and implementation were later realized in 2014 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). In order to achieve the goal of inclusivity, school board policies on inclusive education covered eight areas of focus, four of which may relate to Muslim students needs in schools: *inclusive curriculum and assessment practices*, so that all students feel engaged and empowered in learning; *religious accommodation*, which expects school boards to take appropriate steps to provide religious accommodation for all students; *school climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment* to foster a school climate that is free from discriminatory or harassing behaviour; and *professional learning* to increase staff, students, and parents knowledge and understanding of inclusive education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b).

**Implementation and resourcing.** The Ontario Ministry of Education expects that school boards demonstrate continuous improvement and evident yearly progress towards the goal of entrenching the inclusive education policy into all school board operations (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). Yet, school boards are at different



stages in the implementation process of an inclusive education policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). Nevertheless, the Ontario Ministry of Education provides practical strategies, advice, and templates in the guidelines to support school boards in developing, implementing, and monitoring their policy on inclusion (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). As well, the Ministry reviews and conducts research on practices in inclusive education, and distributes this information to school boards once available (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b).

**Ontario public schools and supports available for Muslim students.** For the purposes of this study, the terms *public schools* or *schools* refer to publicly-funded elementary schools. While policies exist to include Muslim students in Ontario public schools, implementation of policies that aim to include and meet the needs of Muslims students in schooling is still a concern (Collet, 2007; Niyozov & Plum, 2009). In the Ontario publicly-funded education system, schools are administered by district school boards. This includes: 31 English public school boards, 29 English Catholic school boards, four French public school boards, and eight French Catholic school boards. Ontario school boards are administered by one authority, the Ontario Ministry of Education. As of 2015, there were 3,974 elementary and 919 secondary schools in Ontario, and 2,003,253 students in Ontario schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015).

Ontario school boards provide accommodation for Muslim students to respect the *Pillars of Islam*, acknowledge Muslim norms, respond to some of the incompatibilities in the curriculum, and to address the issues that exist in regards to some extracurricular activities (Niyozov & Plum, 2009). Accommodations for Muslim students include

accommodations for daily prayer and Muslim holidays; allocated space and time for prayers in schools; and students allowed a holiday for *Eid-ul-Fitr*, *Eid-u-Adha*, and *Ashura*. As well, accommodations are made during the month of Ramadan, when students are expected to fast, and during hajj time (pilgrimage) if students wish to visit Mecca (Niyozov & Plum, 2009).

School boards encourage Halal (food that does not contain any Islamically unlawful ingredient) and vegetarian food, and clearly identify food items containing ingredients derived from pork (Niyozov & Plum, 2009). School boards also need to advocate acceptance of Islamic dress and have clear consequences for any harassment by intolerant peers. Teachers are also asked to be observant of male–female relations in student seating and group work. There are clear guidelines for accommodations in classes, such as physical education, music, visual arts, human sexuality, and dance (Niyozov & Plum, 2009). Accommodations are made in various main school boards around Ontario including the Durham District School Board (2010), Thames Valley District School Board (2011), Toronto District School Board (2011), and York Region District School Board (2014). Yet while board policies, which aim to include Muslim students in Ontario public schools, may be enacted, implementation of these policies is still a concern in some schools (Collet, 2007; Niyozov & Plum, 2009). Principals play an important part in inclusion of Muslim students by understanding their needs, engaging in ways to include this group, and recognizing the resources available for them in this process.

In the next chapter, chapter two, I will examine the literature that highlights principals' understanding of including Muslim students' needs in Ontario schools. As

well, I examine relevant literature that considers strategies principals employ to include Muslim students and the challenges they face as they work to include this group. I later describe what the literature reveals in terms of the resources available for principals to help them include Muslim students in public education.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

To include all students in public schools in Ontario, principals are expected to understand a diverse student population, including the learning needs of minority students whose culture and religion are not from the main stream population (Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Webber & Lupart, 2011). In the last decade, more studies have started to focus on educational leadership and the inclusion of diverse student populations (Duggal, 2014; Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016; Gerin-lajoie, 2012). Researchers have begun to recognize that while the literature speaks to the issues of diversity, inclusion of a diverse student population is a topic that cannot be solved by “a decisive research study or two in the area” (Ryan, 2013, p. 360). Rather, it should be taken more seriously within scholarship and be more of a focus, particularly within educational leadership. In educational administration, researchers and practitioners are now taking issues of diversity and inclusion more seriously and are becoming more cognizant about the ways differences are interpreted, valued, and judged and how this can influence students’ experiences in positive or negative ways (Guo, 2011; Gerin-Lajoie, 2012; Webber & Lupart, 2011).

Many researchers focus on the issue of inclusion, whereby students may be excluded by “virtue of their association with categories,” not just based on exceptionality (Ryan, 2013, p. 363). Students may be excluded as a consequence of race, ethnicity, and religion (Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). Muslim students are one of these groups (Bramadat & Seljak, 2009; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011). To counter this, school communities can welcome diversity among all learners and minority groups (Duggal,

2014; Gagnon et al., 2016; Gerin-Lajoie, 2012). When examining how Muslim students are supported in schools, researchers look for ways they are recognized, and the extent to which they have access to goods, rights, and responsibilities.

### **The Concept of Inclusion: Key Components, Origin, and Context**

Inclusion ensures that everyone is able to have opportunities for choice and self-determination (Mittler, 2000). In the field of education, inclusion starts from the belief that education is both a basic human right and a foundation for a just society (Farrell, 2013; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Gewirtz, 1998). Educational inclusion involves a process of reform and restructuring of schools, with the aim of “ensuring that all pupils can have access to the whole range of educational and social opportunities offered by the school” (Miller, 2000, p. 2). More specifically, educational inclusion is widely seen as equity of educational opportunity and outcome of marginalized groups (Farrell, 2013; Gewirtz, 1998), and it is highly related to the ideas of distribution and recognition (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Ryan, 2013). Distribution is defined as distribution of social and economic goods, rights, and responsibilities, and the distribution of goods as in educational services and resources; of rights, as in rights to practice religion and having a voice in education; and of responsibilities, as in the responsibility to get involved and contribute positively to the school (Farrell, 2013; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Ryan, 2013). Whereas, recognition is defined based on an inclusive educational system where Muslim students are being supported and recognized as part of the school and society (Ryan, 2013). For example, inclusion of Muslim students is not only concerned with equitable distribution of goods and material things, but it also includes non-tangible resources, such as being respected with the same value afforded to everyone else.

Inclusive education has evolved over time in history. The concept of inclusion was influenced by the adult disability movement, which was traditionally concerned with the rights of adults. Later, the attention shifted to the rights of children and initiated a demand for inclusive schools (Mittler, 2000). The movement towards inclusion in education has moved from exclusion, to special education provisions, to an emphasis on integration, which then helped establish the idea of inclusive education (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, special schools were established in Europe as a provision for children who were excluded from education. These special schools were separated from the mainstream schools (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013). In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, provision for children experiencing difficulties in mainstream schools were developed and grew, which resulted in a gradual recognition of students who are disadvantaged and poorly served in mainstream schools (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013). Emphasis on integration occurred as a result of educators wanting to explore ways to support segregated groups: to aid students in finding places in local schools and helping move towards a more inclusive education. This emphasis aimed at transforming mainstream schools and responding to all learners' needs (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013). A move from integration to inclusion was then established. Integration, which involves preparing students for placement in ordinary schools, implies a concept of educational or social readiness for transfer from special to ordinary schools; students must adapt without the assumption that schools have to change to accommodate these diverse students (Mittler, 2000). While inclusion, on the other hand, implies a reform of

schools to accommodate for diverse students in terms of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Mittler, 2000).

Focusing on *disabled* and *special needs* students may lead educators to not recognise other ways in which the engagement of a student may be obstructed. Thus, researchers proposed replacing the notions of *special needs* with *barriers to learning and participation* and *resources to support learning and participation*, which helps respond to diversity in schools (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006). Moreover, when inclusion is defined based on students *having special educational needs*, it is then associated with *bad behaviour* (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006). This may lead to exclusion, such as the exclusion of students from school for disciplinary reasons, as they are viewed as behaviourally *difficult* students (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006).

### **Alternative Definitions of Inclusion**

There are various ways of defining the concept of inclusion in education. For some, inclusion in education is an approach to serving children with disabilities, while for others, inclusion is defined based on the broader concept of supporting diversity among all learners (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013; Mittler, 2000). Waitoller and Krozleski (2013) defined inclusive education based on three dimensions: (a) the redistribution of quality opportunities to learn and participate in educational programs; (b) the recognition and value of differences as reflected in content, pedagogy, and assessment tools, and (c) the opportunities for marginalized groups to represent themselves in decision-making processes (Waitoller & Krozleski, 2013, p. 36). Yet, to conceptualize inclusive education, researchers work to understand who is marginalized by acquiring, “knowledge of the historical and contemporary mechanisms that produce the centre from which the margins

are produced” (Kozleski, Artiles, & Waitoller, 2014, pp. 246-247). Principals can help create inclusive environments in schools by helping staff and teachers increase their knowledge in, and shift their attitudes and beliefs towards, inclusion (Edmunds, & Macmillan, 2010). Thus, in order to examine the inclusion of Muslim students in schools, both an understanding of Muslim students, and the work of principals, needs to be examined.

The fourth definition of inclusion, which I adopt in my study, is a broader concept. This broader concept seeks to reduce exclusionary attitudes related to areas such as religion, ethnicity, gender, and social class by focusing on valuing diversity, not only by individuals, but also by policies, cultures, settings, and school structures. This view of inclusion as a matter of responding to children with special educational needs is now reconsidered to include “a wider set of issues relating to the education of all children who experience difficulties in school and, ultimately, of all children” (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2014, p. 14); thus, responding to a broader range of difficulties. Now, researchers take into account the complexities and uncertainties around current policy and practice (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2014). In particular: (a) *population changes*—developments in medical science reveal more cases of students with impairments, such as various forms of autism; (b) *problems of definition*—questions on how to define needs, as a child labelled with special educational needs in one school or district might not be categorised the same in another context; (c) *the emphasis on inclusion*—the definition of inclusion varies across the world (with respect to how one interprets inclusion and the extent it has informed local policies). In some places, the “co-location of special schools within mainstream school contexts is yet further evidence of a field that is in transition”



(p. 14); and (4) *difficulties in determining progress*—how best to measure the progress of learners with special educational needs (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2014).

**Inclusion of special educational needs.** The 1994, *The Salamanca Statement* was the first UNESCO document to call for the adoption of inclusive education policies around the world. In 1997, to support the UNESCO Salamanca Statement on Special Needs Education, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment by Command of Her Majesty, published a document entitled *Excellence for All Children*, which aimed to address meeting special educational needs (Department for Education and Employment, 1997). This document aimed to include special needs students in mainstream schools. This way of thinking assumed that inclusion is concerned with educating disabled students and students with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

**Inclusion of groups vulnerable to exclusion.** Inclusion of groups vulnerable to exclusion assumes a broader perspective on exclusion in education to overcome any discrimination and disadvantage of any group vulnerable to exclusion (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013; Mittler, 2000); this view holds an inclusion theme, which links issues in access and support for children with special educational needs and disabilities to issues for other disadvantaged groups, thus, holding a broader perspective of inclusion (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013; Mittler, 2000). Exclusion in education is viewed more broadly in terms of fighting disadvantage and discrimination for all groups vulnerable to exclusion (Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013; Mittler, 2000). Thus, this view is associated with the concepts of *social inclusion* and *social exclusion* in government documents, where social inclusion mainly addresses interventions issues,

such as for groups that may experience a threat to school access (e.g., pregnant girls or girls with babies) (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006).

**Inclusion as education for all.** The movement towards *Education for All* (EFA) was established in the 1990s after the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). This movement called for increased access to education, as well as enhanced participation in schools worldwide, and mainly in poor regions around the world. The *Education for All* movement was given a push by two main international conferences held by UNESCO in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, and Dakar, Senegal in 2000. UNESCO's conference focused on progress in areas such as including disabled children and the education of girls denied education around the world (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013). Yet, exclusion and barriers to inclusion occur locally and need to be examined within countries, regions, and communities in order to overcome them (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006).

**Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society.** Inclusion as a principled approach to education and society examines inclusion in greater depth by considering school's cultures, policies, and practices. This view holds true that barriers to learning and participation, and the resources available to support these areas, should be examined within a particular context and community (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013; Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2014). Thus, researchers should focus on how inclusion can be developed in schools, rather than what inclusion should look like; this approach focuses on value. Inclusion as a principled approach holds true as it values influence actions and the work towards action, as well as all practices and policies that shape practices within schools. In working towards inclusion, educators

need to examine the inclusive values that underpin actions, practices, and policies (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013; Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2014). As well, educators need to work towards attaining the necessary knowledge and skills to ensure circumstances and opportunities that support inclusion. Such knowledge and skills may be values concerned with “equity, participation, community, compassion, respect for diversity, sustainability and entitlement...honesty, freedom, achievement, spirituality” (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006, p. 23). Other *inclusive values* may include collaboration with others, recognition and valuing of various people, and acknowledging the role of education (i.e., local and global citizenship) (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006; Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2013; Ainscow, Dyson, & Weiner, 2014).

### **Inclusive Education in the Canadian Context**

In the past, during the 1700s and 1800s, people with physical and intellectual disabilities were excluded and ignored in Canadian society. Yet, starting in the 1950s into the 1990s, Canada witnessed a progressive inclusion movement in the field of education (Bunch, 2015; Brown & Andrews, 2014; Duggal, 2014; Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016). The progression moved from segregation (1900s-1950s), to categorization (1950s-1960s), to integration (1970s), to mainstreaming (1980s), and then towards inclusion (beginning 1990s) (Bunch, 2015; Brown & Andrews, 2014).

Schooling looked much different two-hundred years ago. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, many children did not attend schools, as they had to contribute to the labor-intensive economic era, where children learned skills necessary for various trades (Gaffield, 2015). In the 1600s and during the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, Collège des

Jésuites in Quenic offered a course in classical studies, grammar, and theology, and the Séminaire de Québec (later referred to as Université Laval) was founded by Bishop Laval (Gaffield, 2015). Instruction for females was limited to religious instruction and skills, like needlework. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, only a few children in Canada (called British North America at the time) received formal instruction from tutors or schools (Gaffield, 2015). In the 1760s, during the French-Canadian presence, the British authorities made various attempts to establish schools outside the control of religious authorities. Thus, education continued to be limited to households, rather than in classrooms. During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, schooling started to become more widespread among social leaders. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, school in Canada started to evolve as a result of educational leaders (school promoters) who advocated for education within formal schools (Bunch, 2015; Gaffield, 2015).

During the integration-mainstreaming period, students with exceptional needs were identified and placed in programs outside of the regular classroom (Bunch, 2015; Brown & Andrews, 2014). Public school systems developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century adopted a system of standardization where children were to be molded in a desired form. These children were viewed based on their levels of potential, and not until later did a view start to focus on the accommodation for different student abilities (Bunch, 2015; Gaffield, 2015). Technical and vocational courses were given to students viewed as unsuitable for academic study, and cultural and social prejudices played a role in assigning children to various courses (Bunch, 2015; Gaffield, 2015). Schools did not take into account the diverse society with various

religions and language communities, thus everyone had to conform to prescribed standards of school instruction (Bunch, 2015; Gaffield, 2015). Until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, girls attended home programs, which aimed to teach skills, like cooking and cleaning and idealized women as housewives and mothers. Young single women who became teachers were poorly paid and were supervised by male officials (Gaffield, 2015).

Over time, an understanding of the differences and specific needs of exceptional children evolved, and more focus was placed on differentiated instruction in the regular education system. (Brown & Andrews, 2014). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s educators started to recognize the problems with this special education approach, which gradually led to the adoption of inclusive education. (Brown & Andrews, 2014). The legal framework in Canada that led to inclusion in education included The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016), and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 (Collet, 2007; Gagnon, Raska, Van Dyk, & Schwinghamer, 2016).

### **Social Justice and Transformational Leadership**

Social justice addresses to the concern of marginalization (Gewirtz, 1998). Gewirtz (1998) described social justice as centered on marginalization and exclusionary processes, with a focus on aspects of respect, recognition, empathy, cultural justice, and autonomy. A definition that is also adopted by Fraser and Honneth (2003) and Ryan (2013). According to Gewirtz (1988) and other researchers, social justice in education adopts the notion that education is a basic human right that demands equity of educational opportunity and outcome of

marginalized groups (Farrell, 2013; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Gewirtz, 1998). Contemporary educational leadership considers a broader definition of social justice, which includes dimensions not limited to equity, participation, and empowerment, but also dimensions of democracy, social transformation, and ethical and moral work (Wang, 2018); a concept I use to examine inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario public schools. In my study, I consider how principals who work towards inclusion take initiative, stand strong against challenges towards inclusion, and seek approaches towards more inclusive schools.

Bogotch (2008) viewed social justice as only meaningful through engaging in educational leadership practices, and thus social justice is inseparable from educational leadership. Theoharis (2007) spoke to social justice leadership, which he defined based on principals making issues of marginalizing conditions central to their leadership and advocacy in schools, with aimed to eliminate marginalization. Thus, Theoharis's definition of social justice took into account both Gewirtz's and Bogotch's definitions of social justice. In my study, I consider how principals act as leaders in placing value on the inclusion of Muslim students as they focus on elimination of disadvantage and marginalization in schools. Wang (2018) also addressed social justice leadership, which he described as leadership that translates democratic and inclusive ideas into practices to eliminate practices of injustice in order to meet the needs of diverse groups. Wang (2018) examined how principals promote social justice to address marginalization and inequity, particularly in Ontario's public education. He suggested that principals who are social justice advocates focus on people, and thus employ a people-centered leadership practice by

placing students as the main focus and fostering positive relationships with parents and the community (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2018). A focus on students learning and well-being, as well as a focus on communication and reaching to the community, is a focus in my study.

Wang (2018) also considered obstacles to social justice including: constraint in principal' everyday work; financial constraints; socioeconomic inequalities (student poverty); and teachers' mindset (attitude, mentality, and values) (Wang, 2018). Many researchers, including Theoharis (2007) also addressed how principals faced barriers to inclusion and a push towards maintaining the status quo (Theoharis, 2007). In my work I examine the challenges principals faced as they work to include Muslim students in schools, yet speak to this concept from the lens of principals' work with the particular group I am examining.

Wang (2018) also included facilitators of social justice including teachers as facilitators in students' learning and promotion of social justice; students as facilitators in promoting social justice through wanting to learn about social justice; and parents and school boards providing external support. Wang's findings call for creative thinking, as well as professional and intellectual growth (Wang, 2018). In my work, facilitators revealed are based on principals experiences working to include Muslim students in schools.

In my study, I emphasize that principals work towards social justice, by being able to recognize practices of exclusion and inequitable practices, may not be easily identified (Ryan, 2013; Shields, 2004; Shields, 2010). Thus, the concept of

social justice suggests that inclusion is supported by examining unjust practices, ideologies, and policies (Bogotch, 2008; Bogotch & Reyes-Guerra, 2014; Shields, 2014). Promoting social justice in schools involves a focus on critical learning and the needs for individuals to challenge their personal assumptions (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Joshee, 2007; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). Leaders work towards social justice by understanding diverse student populations and the needs of these groups in schools, and then work on ensuring a positive condition for learning for these groups (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007).

Instructional leadership focuses on students' learning, and quality teaching in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003; Wang, 2012). Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) asserted that leadership is second only to classroom teaching and its effect on students' achievement in schools, which places focus on leadership in school and the way it should be enacted. Successful leaders enact leadership based on practices of: setting directions, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and improving the instructional program (Leithwood et al., 2012, p.6).

Leithwood et al. (2012) addressed these dimensions related to student's achievement in schools with a leadership model that is related to the theory of transformational leadership, yet with a focus on instructional leadership and how teacher learning enhances students' learning. The first dimension, setting direction, is focused on allocating time and effort for improvement in order to develop and maintain direction (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). To do so, instructional leaders focus on instructional quality by making it the top priority in the school and



work on enhancing student-centered learning environments (Wang, 2012); as well as work on maintaining high expectations for staff, teachers, and students by coordinating the curriculum used in school, supervising instruction, and monitoring student's progress (Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leaders emphasize developing their schools' goals, coordinating and evaluating the curriculum, as well as the instruction and assessment in schools and promoting a positive learning climate in classrooms (Marks & Printy, 2003).

The rest of the domains are related in the sense that they pertain to specific aspects of the school's improvement plan. These domains, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization to support desired practices, and improving the instructional program, focus on instruction and students' learning. By building relationships and developing people, instructional leaders pay attention to enhancing curriculum and instruction in schools, and work with teachers to improve students' achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Wang, 2012). Principals may influence schools through their role as instructional leaders by promoting the growth and learning of staff, students, and parents (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Leaders work on developing the organization to support desired practices by working with teachers to create working conditions that support students learning, thus, enhancing student learning and achievement in schools through principal's role as instructional leaders (Leithwood, 2008, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). The last domain, improving the instructional program, speaks to collaboration, which allows teachers to work together to examine their practices and decide on what may

enhance students' learning and achievement and what may not. Instructional leadership focuses on students' learning, and quality teaching in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003; Wang, 2012). School improvement teams and staff development are two areas of focus that can help with that work (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Therefore, principals who are instructional leaders play an important role towards inclusion in schools (Leithwood, 2012; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Leaders may work on improving teaching and learning by working with staff and teachers (indirect influence), to encourage motivation and enhance working conditions in schools (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Transformational leadership is concerned with empowering others to bring about change, in that it "provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 371). Thus, transformational leadership pertains to the "relationship between the leader and the followers" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 375). Transformational leadership speaks to change, where both the leader (i.e., the principal) and the followers (i.e., the teachers and staff) are working together towards a transformational process (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003). This demands developing its followers by orienting them towards organizational goals and by building self-interest (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003). Transformational leaders foster collaboration by encouraging the followers to contribute to Leadership and focus on understandings and skills of followers (Marks & Printy, 2003). Principals who act as transformational leaders work with teachers to develop solutions to current problems; encourage motivation

and commitment of teachers towards goals for implementation solutions; and make plans for long term growth for teachers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Nevertheless, transformational leadership emphasizes the ideas of change, innovation, and influence (Marks & Printy, 2003). In my study, a focus on change towards a more inclusive schools for Muslim students is a main theme.

### **Principals' Understanding of Muslim Students and Their Needs in Schools**

Principals' understanding of Muslim students is necessary in order to include them in schools (Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Kiemele, 2009; Webber & Lupart, 2011). This understanding can help them include and support the learning of this minority group (Ahmed, 2016; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008). Principal's influence student learning mainly through their role as instructional leaders (Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012), and in Ontario, principals are responsible for the quality of instruction at schools (Leithwood, 2012; Ontario Principals' Council, 2015; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Some literature speaks to educators' and parents' understanding of Muslim students needs at schools (Guo, 2011; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008), yet, there is a lack of literature that speaks to Ontario principals' understanding of Muslim students and their needs within schools. In Ontario, some of the needs of Muslim students are not fully understood or being accommodated for in schools (Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Siddiqui, 2008).

Canada is ethnically diverse, and therefore Canadian schools need to meet the needs of an ethnically diverse population. Former Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's official state policy of multiculturalism allowed for a better understanding of "what

constitutes a national identity within an increasingly pluralistic society” (Collet, 2007, p. 133). The official government policy of multiculturalism facilitates the recognition of inclusive education. This policy is intended to preserve cultural freedom and provide recognition for all Canadians of diverse ethnic groups in Canadian society. Ethnic acceptance, and the realization of structural inequalities, became a main theme after the federal policy in 1971, which was followed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, and the Multiculturalism Act of 1988 (Collet, 2007; Gagnon et al., 2016).

Many principals in Ontario indicate that at least two changes have impacted their work: increased student diversity and an increased awareness about diversity (Kiemele, 2009; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Pollock and Hauseman (2015) examined principals’ work by interviewing 70 school principals in seven district school boards across Southwestern Ontario, mainly from English-speaking public-school boards. In their study, 20 out of the 70 principals referred solely to visible differences when identifying diverse groups (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Nevertheless, patterns of disadvantage are not always visible or easily recognizable, particularly by the individuals who are advantaged (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). By only recognizing visible differences, principals may be unable to identify (Muslim) students and their needs in schools, and thus not be supporting them in school (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007).

In order to enhance the inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario schools, principals work to understand the learning needs of Muslim students in public school systems, so they are granted equal opportunities and recognition as their mainstream counterparts (Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008). While some inroads have been made in how educators and

parents understand educating Muslim students in public schooling in Canada and worldwide, (i.e., Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008), there is a lack of specific literature on Ontario principals' understanding of inclusion of Muslim students in public schools.

In Ontario, school principals are responsible for managing schools and enacting policies, as well as being responsible for the quality of instruction (Leithwood, 2012; Ontario Principals' Council, 2015; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). Principals influence student learning and student achievement in schools through their role as instructional leaders (Leithwood, 2008, 2012; Leithwood & Louis, 2012) and through working with teachers to create working conditions that support students learning. Principals must support student learning. They can educate teachers and staff through professional learning opportunities. Principals can also work with teachers to improve pedagogy, instruction, and assessment to make the school environment more inclusive for everyone. Thus, studying principals' understanding of Muslim students, and the work principals do to include this group in schooling, can contribute to the larger discourse of addressing the inclusion of Muslim students, in more fulsome ways, in public elementary schools.

### **Principals' Strategies to Include Muslim Students in Public Schooling**

Ontario policies aim for all students to be supported in order to maintain a sense of well-being and to ensure that students reach their full potential in schools. Students reach their full potential through an education that promotes respect, is inclusive, and identifies and eliminates any discriminatory biases, systemic barriers, and power dynamics that may stand in the way of students' learning and growth (Ontario Ministry of

Education, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2014a, 2014b, 2016). The work principals do in schools, and the practice of principal leadership, must support the practices of inclusion, which in turn helps promote inclusion in schools (Leithwood, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016; Ontario Principals' Council, 2015).

Some strategies can be utilized by principals to engage Muslim students in Ontario public schools. Ryan (2013) offered the following four strategies for the work principals do to engage diverse student groups in public schooling: (a) employ communication practices; (b) use critical learning strategies; (c) foster school-community relationships; and (d) exercise strategic advocacy.

**Communicating with others.** Inclusive leaders promote inclusion through communicating with others. Dialogue is the first step for achieving inclusion in schools, as dialogue can help establish relationships, as well as challenge existing exclusive beliefs and practice (Shields, 2004). To encourage dialogue, principals must work to establish relationships, understand others, and listen to others (Ryan, 2013). Principals must establish relationships and connect with teachers and staff in the school, as well as maintain networks with various community groups by being visible and approachable (Ryan, 2013). Principals should be visible when they come out of their offices and “put themselves in places where they will encounter others,” such as being present in school halls, school grounds, and out in the community (Ryan, 2013, p. 21). Principals are approachable when they display a caring attitude and present themselves in ways that will encourage others to trust and engage in dialogue with them (Ryan, 2013). Inclusive dialogue with others requires that the principals understand one another. To encourage dialogue, principals should also work towards achieving a mutual understanding with

others; mutual understanding is having knowledge of particular groups, as well as the efforts to comprehend what others have to say in face-to-face conversations (Ryan, 2013). As well, dialogue is encouraged when leaders focus on listening to what others have to say; leaders speak less and listen more and pay attention to power differences between speakers (Ryan, 2013). Inclusive leaders ensure that less-advantaged speakers are provided with comfort to say what they have to say. Ryan (2013) explained that *listening* entails: (a) a displacement of oneself as knower and evaluator, (b) abandoning the desire to assign relative worth to observations, (c) self-reflection on privilege, (d) suspending personal authority, (e) a willingness to admit one's ignorance, and (f) abandoning temporarily one's identity (p. 368).

Effective communication practices can help maintain an inclusive school environment by promoting mutual respect, understanding, and trust in schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cranston, 2011; Duggal, 2014; Henderson & Mapp; 2002; Rialsback & Brewster, 2003; Riehl, 2000). In order to promote learning and growth, communication in school settings must happen through dialogue amongst staff (Duggal, 2014; Riehl, 2000; St. Pierre, 2009). As well, communication practices can help staff to engage with families from diverse backgrounds and learn about their interests and needs. These practices happen through communication with families about ways they would like to be involved and by providing family members with opportunities to understand their rights, responsibilities, and roles within the education system. These communication practices also help to develop teacher leadership by communicating with families in person and by principals providing staff training for working with Muslim families (Railsback & Brewster, 2003).

**Promoting critical learning.** Inclusive principals focus on prompting critical learning in schools. Critical understanding entails being able to recognise exclusive practices that are not easily identified (Ryan, 2013), while critical reflection involves, “consciously pausing, stepping back from daily routines, and inquiring into one’s own and others’ thoughts and actions” (p. 370). Successful principals work towards justice by learning about and critiquing inequitable practices, not only to enhance achievement in school, but to also to enhance students’ life and interactions with others (Shields, 2010). They focus on the learning of staff, teachers, and students; that is, enhancing their knowledge and understanding, as well as their attitudes towards diverse student groups in schools (Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Ryan, 2013; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007; Webber & Lupart, 2011). Ryan (2013) suggested that learning happens mostly informally through experience, *in-depth fieldwork*, and *real-life situations*, as opposed to formal training through workshops and conferences, which usually have a limited impact on teachers’ work and attitudes (p. 370).

Promoting critical learning in diverse schools involves promoting learning about diversity and intercultural sensitivity among school staff (Hernandez & Kose, 2012; Kiemele, 2009; Webber & Lupart, 2011). This promotion of critical learning requires a strong understanding of social justice (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Joshee, 2007; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007) and the need for principals to challenge their own assumptions in schools (Guo, 2011). Scholars, such as Bogotch (2008) and Shields (2014), called for a focus on social justice and suggested that inclusion is supported by examining unjust practices, ideologies, and policies. Successful leaders work to understand the challenges facing diverse student populations and educators in schools. They also maintain good



conditions for learning by promoting a strong understanding and awareness of inclusionary practices through critical learning (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007).

**Fostering inclusive school–community relationships.** Fostering school–community relationships happens through including the wider community school activities (Ryan, 2013). Inclusive administrators work on fostering inclusive school–community relationships by building trust with, and including, the wider community in school initiatives and activities (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cranston, 2011; Henderson & Mapp; 2002; Rialsback & Bewster, 2003; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2013). While including parents and community members might be challenging in diverse communities, this can be done in two ways: *enablement* or *empowerment* (Ryan, 2013). Enablement of parents involves giving them a voice by altering structural arrangements, while empowerment, which does not deal with power differences or unfair structures, suggests that it is the responsibility of educational professionals to reach out to parents and community members and to encourage their involvement in their children’s education (Ryan, 2013).

Principals focus on establishing trusting conditions in schools in order to maintain a learning focus and overcome challenges and resistance (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Cranston, 2011). To overcome resistance to build a learning community, leaders seek to build trust amongst staff, students, and parents. Relational trust has been shown to have a direct effect on promoting collaboration and professional development in schools, and thus a direct effect on school improvement (Cranston, 2011). Consistency, communication, compassion, and competency are the four trust elements that contribute to building and enhancing learning communities in schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

Schools, that work to build partnerships with all families, respond to their concerns, and honour their contributions are successful at sustaining connections aimed at improving student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Schools that succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds tend to focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members. They are also able to recognize, respect, and address families' needs, as well as class and cultural differences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Later in this thesis, I describe how various associations and institutions in the community can support principals in including Muslim students in schools. Promoting trust, as a strategy, will help principals promote a better understanding of Muslim students and their needs, as well as to receive guidance and assistance in engaging Muslim students in schools. For example, The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) aims to protect the rights of Canadian Muslims and to challenge Islamophobia. They also offer support for principals to help them include Muslim students and parents (The National Council of Canadian Muslims, 2015). I will discuss other initiatives and community support in the support section and include support from the Muslim Educators Council (2005), the Muslim Association of Canada (2015), and The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (2015). By fostering inclusive school–community relationships and building trust with these and other various institutions and associations, principals can help promote a better understanding of Muslim students and parents in order to meet their needs and support them in schools.

**Exercising strategic advocacy.** Principals can also promote inclusion by advocating in strategic ways (Duggal, 2014; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2013; St. Pierre, 2009).

Being strategic means, “carefully assessing situations before deciding what strategies to employ, when to use them, and when to pull back” (Ryan, 2013, p. 375). For example, before making a decision, leaders consider the history of the issue, who is involved at the time, and how much they can *push* for the decision, while recognizing that some situations require that they pull back (Ryan, 2013). Acting strategically is developed through experience and from previous mistakes. Advocacy is often concerned with issues of access and equity (Scott, Lubienski, & DeBray-Pelot, 2009). Advocates support the idea and practice of inclusion as a way to promote social justice (Ryan, 2013). Ways to advocate for inclusion include imposing it, persuading people, and establishing links with marginalized groups (Ryan, 2013). In some cases, inclusive administrators work on making inclusion non-negotiable, yet, in other cases administrators enforce the notion that members adhere to inclusive policies and practices (Ryan, 2013). For members to voluntarily accept inclusion, principals may work on persuading them by employing various techniques, such as information-circulating, guided discussions, questioning, and provoking in order to convince members to value of equity (Ryan, 2013).

Inclusive principals may also be strategic in making decisions related to hiring staff and teachers, deciding on professional learning to engage and build capacity in staff, and building connections with schools and communities (Duggal, 2014; Riehl, 2000; St. Pierre, 2009). Inclusive principals work to include professional growth, and hire staff and teachers that are strong and inclusive. Principals build capacity in their staff by using strategies that invite participation and embrace diversity. Principals also provide professional development opportunities for the staff, such as the in-service learning of teachers through modeling and demonstrations of effective practices in classrooms to

enhance student learning (St. Pierre, 2009). As well, principals hire *strong teachers*, as strong teachers have the *greatest* impact on students' achievement (St. Pierre, 2009).

While being strategic, inclusive-minded principals pay attention to strategies specific to the learning needs of Muslim students at schools.

***Strategies specific to learning needs of Muslim students.*** Considering the Muslim student population in Ontario public schools, principals need to also be aware of the learning needs specific to this specific group, and to be able to lead educators to such an understanding (Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Specific to the Muslim student population, Haynes (1998) explained some of the strategies specific to the religious learning needs of Muslim students at public schools, which can be employed in order to include this group. I outline the strategies below.

Table 1

*Strategies for the Needs of Muslim Students in Public Schools.*

Needs	Strategy
Daily Worship (Salah)	Allow students to conduct their daily prayers in an empty room on during lunchtime and breaks (Haynes, 1998, p. 19).
Friday Congregational Worship (Jumah)	Allow students to perform the Friday worship in an empty room during lunchtime; or, allow students to be excused for the time required to attend a local masjid and to make up any missed work (p. 19).
Dietary Needs	Muslim students can be asked to bring halal meat dishes for parties, picnics, and potlucks. Vegetarian alternatives can be provided for Muslim students who only eat meat available directly from Muslim sources. Baked goods made with vegetable shortening need to be requested for such events in order to avoid products or foods containing lard or animal shortening. Teachers need to be made aware of gelatin as a source of pork derivatives when they provide treats (p. 19).

Fasting (Sawm)	If students eat lunch in a common cafeteria, Muslim students need to be allowed to spend lunchtime during Ramadan fasting in an alternative location, such as a study hall or library. Physical education teachers need to provide alternatives to rigorous physical exercise during Ramadan (p. 20).
Mixing of the Sexes	Well-meaning school personnel need to avoid putting unnecessary stress on youngsters by encouraging them to participate in what they consider <i>normal</i> socializing activities such as dances or giving the impression that a student who is not involved in these activities is antisocial or socially immature and need to be coerced into participation (p. 20).
Modesty and Muslim Modes of Dress	During physical education (Phys Ed.) activities, allow female Muslim students to wear long sleeved t-shirts and sweat pants, instead of tank tops and shorts, and male students to wear long shorts. Also, Muslim girls who observe hijab must be allowed to wear appropriate modest attire and head covering in mixed classes. Swim wear that covers more of the body than most swimsuits need to be allowed for Muslim students (p. 20).
Islamic Holidays	Muslim students need to be given excused absences to participate in the two major religious holidays in Islam. School officials and teachers are requested not to schedule standardized testing or exams on these holidays and to allow for makeup time on important assignments so that Muslim students can avoid any adverse effects upon their academic efforts (p. 20).
Modesty in curriculum	Some curriculum issues must be taken with sensitivity by educators in public schools. For example, nudity in art and art history, mixed dancing in dance class, certain physical contact in drama class, and overnight mixed sex outing in field trips or camping (pp. 20-21).

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*Note.* Adapted from Haynes (1998, pp. 19-21).

Similar to Haynes' (1998) strategies specific to the learning needs of Muslim students at public schools, many school districts in Ontario have created policies that outline the steps to help accommodate the particular needs and concerns of Muslim students. Such accommodations include those for Muslim daily and Friday prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan, and addressing sexual orientation in the Ontario health curriculum (Collet, 2007; Durham District School Board, 2010; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Thames Valley District School Board, 2011; Toronto District School Board, 2011; York Region District School Board, 2014). Yet, there are educators who remain to either

intentionally or un-intentionally not respond to written policies; either by not becoming fully aware of these policies or by choosing to resist inclusive policies (Collet, 2007; Niyozov & Plum, 2009). Therefore, being strategic in regards to hiring strong teachers and supporting the professional growth of staff becomes necessary in order for principals to build an inclusive school culture and enhance inclusion in schools.

### **Challenges Principals Perceived in the inclusion of Muslim Students**

The four strategies principals can engage with to include Muslim students in public schooling are also a response to the challenges they could face as they attempt to include Muslim students. The opposite is also true, as inclusive principals decide on the best strategies to employ to combat the challenges faced while working with Muslim students. Also, how principals understand the needs of Muslim students in schools affects a principal's view on what is the most challenging for them as they work to include this group. As principals attempt to promote inclusion by communicating with others, viewing their environment from a critical perspective, working to include the community in the education of young individuals, and being political and strategic in advocating for inclusion, principals face many challenges. It is worth specifying the main challenges principals face as they work to include Muslim students in public schooling, particularly: resistance and pushback, limited resources, high task volume, and intensified workload.

**Resistance and pushback.** Barriers principals face as they work to promote inclusion in schools include resistance from staff and parents and pushback against inclusive decisions in schools. Resistance includes the push towards maintaining the status quo, which can take the form of staff resistance to changes, such as with teachers in their classroom practice (Griffiths, 2011; Theoharis, 2007). As well, there may be

obstructive attitudes and beliefs of staff, and privileged parents, towards decisions and initiatives that aim to address and combat racism and meet the needs of underprivileged groups (Griffiths, 2011; Theoharis, 2007). Pushback towards inclusive decisions and initiatives can include decisions, such as holding holiday events that are inclusive and welcoming to everyone in the school (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Therefore, resistance may involve attitudes against inclusive decisions, and pushback may involve actions against inclusive decisions. Resistance can be understood as obstacles to inclusive leadership that include attitudes of many exclusive-minded individuals in schools and in the education system. Inclusive principals may identify individuals they work with at schools as a source of obstacles to inclusion. Principals face challenges as they work on fostering inclusive school–community relationships by including the wider community in school initiatives and activities; this is rather more challenging in diverse communities (Duggal, 2014; Ryan, 2013). These challenges are because advocates of inclusive practice encounter a lot of resistance from the community against inclusive decisions, hence why leaders are strategic in the ways they promote inclusion. Pushback can be understood by principals who suggest that they receive a great deal of *pushback* against decisions that support inclusive learning and that create a welcoming environment for all stakeholders (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Teaching teachers about the many layers involved with inclusive education can be a challenge, as educators are the products of their pasts, and they bring their story to their present teaching (Duggal, 2014). While some legislation is helpful to provide direction to schools and administrators across Ontario, many teachers are not using the documents in their teaching, and inclusive

education is sometimes not a priority for some teachers. Teachers are also not getting pressure coming from the parent community to implement these policies (Duggal, 2014).

**Limited resources.** Limited resources, such as limited time, limited parental involvement, and limited support for policy resources contributes to principals' high workload pressure. This, in return, can limit principals' capacity to work towards inclusion of Muslim students. Many principals are experiencing limited resources, which contributes to the high task volume and intensified workload as a result of the increased demands on principals and the expectation from them to have a role as instructional leaders in schools (Cash, 2013, Griffiths, 2011; Grubb & Flessa 2006; Leithwood, 2012; Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Zhang, 2013). The daily demands of a principal's job can be overwhelming for principals and stand in the way of promoting inclusion, as the many demands of a regular school day take time from focusing on inclusion (Griffiths, 2011).

Limited resources also contribute to the role overload and stand in the way of principals' work to promote inclusion. This includes staff's limited understandings of students' needs, which acts as barrier to inclusion (Griffiths, 2011). As well, limited parental engagement in schools as a result of parents not feeling welcomed or comfortable being involved in the school, parents of different cultures feeling that schools did not understand their needs, being busy, and not finding time to participate (Griffiths, 2011). Lastly, a lack of Ministry and district school board resources is a limitation, in terms of initiatives that aim to promote inclusion and make inclusion a priority, rather than focusing solely on student achievement (Griffiths, 2011).



The call for improved leadership in schools is placing increased demands on principals. Many scholars assert that the job of school principals has become increasingly complex (Archer, 2004; Griffiths, 2011; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Krüger, van Eck, & Vermeulen, 2005). Beside the everyday work principals have to do, for example, “coordinating bus schedules, mollifying angry parents, disciplining children, overseeing the cafeteria” (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 519), many principals are expected to have a role as an instructional leader in schools (Leithwood, 2012; Hallinger, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). While principals were mainly considered educational managers before the early 1980s, the reforms of the early 1980s led to a new understanding of principals’ roles, which assumed that principals ought to influence instruction, and accordingly, support student achievement (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014). Principals are experiencing intensified workloads, which demand they report early to work, stay late, and in many cases, work on weekends to fulfill job duties (Zhang, 2013). On average, “principals spend approximately 59 hours per week on their work” (Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014, p. 14). A similar study that examined the working conditions of school leaders in Canada (Alberta) revealed that many principals share the same *frantic pace*, which makes it hard for them to focus on “the most meaningful and important aspects of their work” (Servage, 2014, p. 27).

Student affairs, facility management, and reporting were three categories that were shown to take up most of principals’ time, and these daily managerial tasks were said to leave little time for “the kind of leadership focus” that emphasize: fostering effective relationships, embodying visionary leadership, leading a learning community, providing instructional leadership, developing and facilitating leadership, managing

school operations and resources, and finally understanding and responding to the larger societal context (Servage, 2014, p. 28). These dimensions need sufficient time and focus to be developed and achieved. Yet, studies show that principals may not have the time and resources needed to concentrate on some of these dimensions, which consequently leaves little time for principals to focus on promoting inclusion in schools (Griffiths, 2011; Servage, 2014).

Resistance and pushback, as well as limited resources, high task volume and intensified workload are struggles for many principals in Ontario and worldwide. Yet, principals can include Muslim students by adopting policies that support the Muslim student population in Ontario schools and allow for greater equity of outcome in schools, and by taking advantage of support from various associations and institutions.

### **Resources Available for Principals to Include Muslims Students**

Resources based on policies and practices that allow for greater equity of outcomes in schools, and support from the Ministry, can help facilitate principals' work in addressing student diversity and inclusion of Muslim students. As well, taking advantage of the services provided by many Islamic associations and institutions, and ensuring positive relationships with these associations and institutions, can also help principals in their work with Muslims students at elementary public schools.

**Policy support for inclusive education of Muslim students.** The Ontario Human Rights Commission argued that, "the right to live a dignified life can never be attained unless all basic necessities of life...are adequately and equitably available to everyone" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2001). This 2004 framework explained education as the social, physical, and academic development of the student wherein

accommodation is defined in terms of dignity, individualization, and inclusion, and both the process of determining the accommodation and the accommodation itself must respect the dignity of the individual.

Accordingly, the Ontario Ministry of Education works to create public schools that “honour and reflect the multicultural, multifaith character of Ontario” (Joshee, 2007, p. 188), and consequently asks for an enhanced understanding of “commonly held values—such as honesty, justice, responsibility, and respect for diversity-in,” in order to motivate students and prepare them to live in a democratic society that recognizes and actively promotes justice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1993). Program Policy Memorandum (PPM) No. 119 was created in 2013 to support diversity and inclusive education in schools, while attempting to change school procedures regarding how to deal with concepts of race (Duggal, 2014). PPM No. 119 values diversity and rejects discriminatory attitudes and ideas (Duggal, 2014). Focus areas of PPM No. 119 included a goal on inclusive education as well as policies and practices that support positive learning, which is respectful and welcoming to all students (Ministry of Education, 2013). This Memorandum focused on inclusive curriculum and assessment practices, as well as ensuring religious accommodation in schools, where school boards, “are expected to take appropriate steps to provide religious accommodation for students and staff” (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6).

Resources provided by the Ministry to support school boards in developing, implementing, and monitoring the policy on inclusive education included, “providing practical strategies, advice, and templates in the guidelines,” as well as working to “review and conduct research on promising practices in inclusive education” and

distributing this information to boards (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 7). Additionally, the Ontario Ministry of Education utilized the option of course selections to facilitate inclusive and antiracist education to students, and offered inclusive course topics and materials for students to ensure that students' willingness to show respect to others (Duggal, 2014).

Specific to Muslim students, in 2016 the Canadian Human Rights Commission launched a guide that aimed to assist educators to understand and support students influenced by the effects of geopolitical violence and Islamophobia (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2016). Moreover, Bill 23, which was proposed by Teresa Armstrong and carried (at the first reading stage) on Sep 26, 2016, attempted to bring the provincial government in line with the Canadian Federal government and local school boards, who already recognized October as Islamic Heritage Month (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2016). In 2007, the Parliament of Canada declared the month of October of each year as Canadian Islamic History Month, which was created to foster dialogue and acceptance and to teach Canadians about the Islamic faith in order to lead to social cohesion (Armstrong, 2016; Senate of Canada, 2011).

By celebrating the month of October of each year as Islamic Heritage Month, the province of Ontario recognizes the contributions of Muslims in Ontario and provides Canadians with an opportunity to learn about Muslims and about Islam (Armstrong, 2016; Senate of Canada, 2011). Armstrong (2016) suggested that, "Muslims have been contributing to all aspect of Ontario's prosperity and diverse heritage for generations" (n.p.). Senator Salma Ataullahjan, Senator of Ontario (Toronto) explained:

Islam is not new to Canada. Many believe that the first Muslims came to the country with the large wave of immigration in the 1960s and 70s, when in fact, 13

Muslims were reported in the national census of 1871—four years after Confederation. Muslims have contributed to the social fabric of the country almost since the founding of the nation itself. (Senate of Canada, 2011)

In September 2016, the Act, entitled *Islamic Heritage Month Act, 2016*, was at its earliest stages, and was only to come into force if it received Royal Assent and reached its final stages (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2016). On Thursday October 6, 2016, October was announced to be officially recognized as Islamic Heritage Month in Ontario after the legislature unanimously passed the Act (The Canadian Press, 2016). This Act aimed to help eliminate Islamophobia and promote education about Muslims, especially after the recent incidences against Muslims, such as a fire that was recently set at a mosque in Hamilton (The Canadian Press, 2016). While this policy may have a huge impact on a better understanding of Muslim students in schools, the benefits of this policy are dependent on effective implementation in schools, which is the work of school principals. Nevertheless, the adoption of policies and practices that enhance an understanding of Muslim students in Ontario schools, and leads to a better inclusion of this group, can help facilitate principals' work in addressing student diversity and inclusion of Muslim students.

By taking advantage of policies that allow for greater equity of outcomes in Ontario schools, principals' work to include Muslim students in public schooling may be facilitated. The *Leading Education: New Supports for Principals and Vice-principals in Ontario Publicly Funded Schools*, released in December 2005, outlined some of the commitments made to a number of initiatives intended to develop, support, and sustain a high-quality leadership in Ontario schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). The framework provided an agenda for growth, which is sufficiently detailed to describe good

leadership, but broad enough to be applicable in the various contexts in which schools and system leaders function throughout their career (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). To support principals and vice-principals in meeting all the challenges of school leadership today, the Ministry worked on allowing for conditions that can permit principals to perform their key function as *instructional leaders* in their schools. The Ministry worked with school boards to create an overall positive working environment and to normalize relations with staff to relieve principals of certain pressures. Steps taken included:

1. increased staffing;
2. a review of the Safe Schools Act to clarify principal responsibilities and discretion under the Act;
3. a \$1.7-million study of mentoring programs across the province;
4. a \$15 million New Teacher Induction Program;
5. improved school-based budgets;
6. expanding of the number of professional development days;
7. a new program to provide principals with similar challenges and priorities with opportunities to regularly collaborate across boards, as well as exchange programs to collaborate with colleagues in other jurisdictions;
8. providing principals and vice-principals with highest quality training and support throughout their careers;
9. ensuring an enhanced say for principals as principals need to have a strong voice in education affairs;
10. improved respect and security for the roles of principals and vice-principals;

11. better-defined roles, powers, responsibilities and obligations for principals.

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005)

In 2017, allowing Muslim Friday prayers in schools got a provincial endorsement by two provincial Ministers who spoke out in support of school space for Muslim Friday prayers (Rushowy, 2017). This happened after the Islamophobic incident, which occurred during a meeting at the Peel District School board, where a protester tore up a Quran and some protesters used Islamophobic comments (Rushowy, 2017).

Nevertheless, support for policies that allow for greater equity of outcome in schools and Ministry support can help facilitate principals' work in addressing inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario public schools.

**Community support.** Services provided by various associations and institutions can help support principals in including Muslims students in public schools. The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the rights of Canadian Muslims in challenging Islamophobia (NCCM, 2015). In 2014, the NCCM published a document called the *Muslim Community Safety Kit: Step by Step Guide to Community Safety*, which outlined the steps taken to *better equip* leaders with the knowledge necessary to secure Muslims basic legal rights (Muslim Community Safety Kit, 2014). One of the NCCM initiatives is to meet with local school principals to discuss students' safety and other issues related to Muslim student needs. A representative can be contacted or invited to meet with local school administrators to discuss safety plans for students and to alert administrators of any harassments experienced by any Muslim student (Muslim Community Safety Kit, 2014). Other association initiatives that principals can take advantage of to support them in their work

with Muslim students include initiatives by the Muslim Education Council, which is available in cities around Ontario. The Muslim Educators Council (MEC) was established ten years ago to serve the needs of the Muslim community and the local education community on a wide range of issues (Muslim Educators Council, 2005). The Council offers many initiatives, services, and events. The MEC aims to support parents by: bringing awareness to parents about parent teacher associations (PTAs) in public schools; informing parents of resources, such as social services and counselling available for them; surveying parents on topics of interest to them; helping parents understand the Canadian education system; focusing on issues, such as depression, drugs, and other issues students may face in public schools; and last, but not least, engaging teachers and administration to help bring more awareness (MEC, 2005). The Muslim Educators Council works to hear from parents by inviting them to meetings and surveying their needs (MEC, 2005).

The Muslim Resource Centre for Social Support and Integration (MRCSSI) is another main institution in Ontario, which provides social support networks for diverse communities in Ontario (MRCSSI, 2015). The MRCSSI aims to create a “pathway of understanding between the Muslim and Canadian community,” and it provides those people within the education system with the means for awareness and capacity building (MRCSSI, 2015). Some of the services catered to for those in the education system include *diversity competency training*, which aims to assist service providers through the delivery of training services and the sharing of resources and to integrate and transform knowledge about Muslim individuals into specific policies, practices, and attitudes in order to enhance the quality of services provided (MRCSSI, 2015).



Nevertheless, by connecting to the various institutions and associations available to support principals to better understand Muslim students and their needs in public schools, principals' work may be facilitated or made easier. These various institutions (mentioned earlier) may provide resources and guidance, and they may serve as a way for principals to connect to, and build trust with, the Muslim community across Ontario. A resource, specific to newcomer students, including Muslims coming from the Middle East, are the settlement workers in schools.

**Settlement workers.** Settlement workers can help support the needs of newcomer Muslim students in public schools, and therefore, support principals engaged with that group. The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program is funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This program takes place in 11 Ontario regions with 250 settlement workers from 22 settlement agencies, which are based in schools in 22 school boards in Ontario (TVDSB, 2019). The SWIS program places workers from community agencies in elementary and secondary schools with a high number of newcomer students to help schools work with newcomer students and their families (TVDSB, 2019). The SWIS program works to assist newcomer students and parents with their settlement needs by directly working with them, referring them to more specialized community resources, and providing them with group information sessions in partnership with school staff (TVDSB, 2019). Moreover, the SWIS program provides school staff with an orientation about the settlement needs of newcomer students and families (TVDSB, 2019). Taking advantage of the services provided by various government and community associations and institutions can serve as resources for principals who are

working to understand and include Muslims students at their elementary public schools, thus facilitating principals' work in this area.

There is a dearth of literature on the work of principals in including Muslim students in the Ontario context, and it may be a result of in-attention to this topic. Yet, the push for inclusion of everyone in schools, the recent attacks on Muslims, and the recent event of Muslim refugees coming to Canada from Syria made this topic more necessary to be explored in Ontario. As well, more research was recently being focused on principals' work and the importance of leadership in schools, so there is a lack of previous research that addresses the topic of principals work specific to the inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario schools. To include Muslim students' in public schools, inclusive principals must work to understand their learning needs and act accordingly.

Based on the above literature review, a conceptual framework was constructed for my study and is elaborated on in the next section.

### **The Conceptual Framework**

My research questions helped contextualize the four themes, which were derived from the literature, and then informed my research questions. In the data analysis section, these themes are then used to organize my findings and thus a coding framework was applied against the data in this process. In order to promote inclusion, there is a need for principals to understand the learning needs of Muslims students in public schools. This understanding is to grant Muslim student with equal opportunities and to offer the same recognition as other students (Ahmed, 2016; Guo, 2011; Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008). Inclusive principals, who understand inclusion and the needs of Muslim students, work to include and engage this group in public schooling by (a) employing good

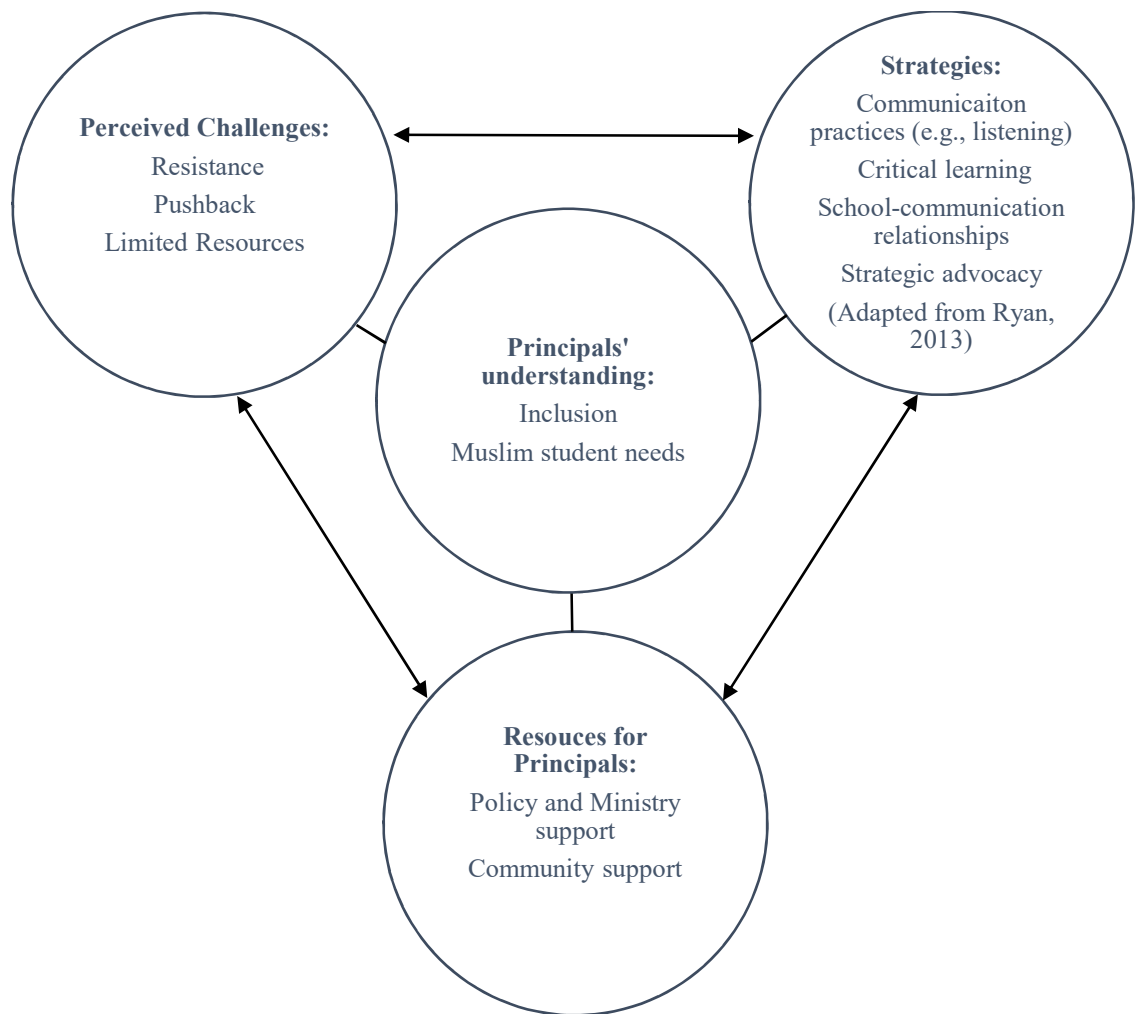
communication practices; (b) using critical learning strategies; (c) fostering school–community relationships; and (d) exercising strategic advocacy (Ryan, 2013). Resistance and pushback (Duggal, 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015) and limited resources (Leithwood, 2012, 2014) are the main challenges principals faced as they work to include Muslim students in public schooling. The adoption of policies and practices that allow for greater equity of outcome in schools, with support from the Ministry, as well as the community, can help facilitate principals’ work in including Muslim students.

My conceptual framework is based on four interconnected themes: (a) principals’ understanding of Muslim students; (b) strategies they employ; (c) their perceptions of challenges; and (d) resources available for principals to implement inclusive education for Muslim students. This conceptual framework was employed to explore how principals include Muslim students in schools. It provides a perspective on how principals understand inclusion and the needs of Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools. It also provides the strategies principals engage in to include Muslim students, the challenges principals perceived as they work to include Muslim students, and the supports available for principals working with this group. Sub-themes emerged from each of the four areas of study examined.

Principals’ understanding of Muslim students and their needs, and the ways to engage this group affects the decisions principals make, in term of what strategies to utilize to engage Muslim students in public schools. As well, principals’ understanding of inclusion and Muslim students’ needs in schools leads to varied perspectives, in terms of what they consider challenging when working with this group. Supports available for principals can help facilitate the work principals do with Muslim students, can help

combat some of the challenges principals face, and can help principals manage the strategies that are a best fit for engaging Muslim students in public schools. Principals work towards inclusion of Muslim students through promoting social justice and acting as transformational leaders in schools (Ryan, 2013; Shields, 2010; Wang, 2018).

The conceptual framework I constructed can be illustrated in Figure 2. The arrows in my conceptual framework signify the relationships and interconnectedness between each of the four concepts I examine.



*Figure 2.* Conceptual Framework of Principals’ Inclusion of Muslim Students. Created by author.

In this chapter, I discussed principals’ inclusion of Muslim students according to the literature examined. I discussed the links between principals’ understanding of the inclusion of Muslim students and the strategies they can employ to include this group. As well, I discussed the links between principal’s understanding of Muslim students and the challenges they face, as well as the resources available for them, while working to include and meet the learning needs of this group. In the next chapter, I will outline my methodology and the methods I used for data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 3

### Methodological Considerations

This chapter explains my research methods, which includes participant recruitment, data collection, and I will discuss the reasons behind my sampling approach and sample size. I will also outline the method of inductive data analysis and describe how my thematic analysis was conducted. Lastly, I will discuss trustworthiness and the ethical implications in my study.

#### A Qualitative Approach: Case study

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine how Ontario principals include Muslim students in public elementary schools. Qualitative research looks into situations “in their uniqueness as part of a particular context” (Merriam, 2009, p. 1). Further, researchers strive to explore the meaning people have constructed and how they make sense of their world and experiences (Merriam, 2009). Consequently, the overall purpose of qualitative research is to achieve “an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 14). Emphasizing the *how* and *what* questions provides the researcher and research participants with an awareness to the alternative ways knowledge is constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 342). Merriam (2009) and Stake (2010) listed central characteristics of qualitative research, including face-to-face research conducted in naturalistic settings and a focus on rich description of participants’ points of view and meanings. Given that I examined the work principals do with the Muslim student population in public

elementary schools, a qualitative case study was the most appropriate methodology for my research.

A qualitative case study methodology allows a researcher to explore a contemporary phenomenon within a natural context, and thus a contemporary and relevant issue within real-world context (Yin, 2014). Case study examines a case as a single entity, while permitting interpretations in context of a situation (Merriam, 2009), and it focuses on the perceptions of individuals or groups in particular situations, while seeking to understand participants' lived experiences (Cohen et al., 2007). Case study helps to understand the linkage between the cause and effect that is also dependent on the context (Cohen et al., 2007).

The case study approach also helps in developing an understanding of similar cases, phenomena, and situations (Cohen et al., 2007), and it seeks to gain insights rather than test hypothesis (Merriam, 1998). Case studies can be exploratory, thus seek to create knowledge; constructive, thus seek to solve a problem; or confirmatory, thus seek to test hypothesis (Yin, 2003). In this study I used an exploratory approach to identify research questions and get insight on the topic, as there is limited research in the specific topic I am exploring (Yin, 2014). A case study approach served as a holistic approach, and it helped me examine *how* and *when* questions within my study (Yin, 2014).

**Sampling strategy, recruitment, and participants.** Sampling is the process to select participants from a population for study. Qualitative research is often based on non-probability or purposive sampling, while sampling decisions are made based on the richest source of information that can answer the research questions (Ploeg, 1999).

Qualitative sampling is the process of “selecting a small number of individuals for a

study in such a way that the individuals chosen will be good key informants...who will contribute to the researcher's understanding of a given phenomenon” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 135). Purposive sampling helps a researcher to strategically select “information-rich cases to study” (Patton, 2015, p. 265) to answer the inquiry question being investigated; and snowball sampling is an approach for “locating information-rich key informants...by asking well-situated people” who the researcher needs to talk to, thus getting a larger sample size (Patton, 2015, p. 298).

Elementary school principals in Ontario were chosen as participants for my study. Participants were initially contacted through purposive sampling, and snowball sampling was used to recruit further participants. Individuals considered for participation had been in the in the role as principal at a particular school for at least one year, and in the practice, as an Ontario school principal for at least five years. This criterion ensured that the principals were able to reflect on their experiences and the roles they played in the inclusion of Muslim students within their schools, respectively. Initial participants were recommended from Ontario public elementary schools to participate in my study by one of my professors, and they were then asked to recommend further participants for my study. In total of ten elementary principals from Ontario public schools were recruited successfully. The statistics of participants are indicated in Table 2.



Table 2

*Statistics of Participants*

Pseudonyms	Years as a principal	Percentage of Muslim students in school
George	Principal for eight years, with three years at the school we focused on for the interview (he was new at current school)	15-20%
Nancy	Principal for 13 years, with three years at school we focused on for the interview (low socioeconomic school: ranked 25 and with high learning needs)	15%
Jacob	Principal for nine years and in his first year at the school we focused on for the interview on (his previous school was not diverse)	15%
James	Principal for 11 years, with seven years at the school we focused on for the interview (he was new at the current school)	1/8 <sup>th</sup> of the school and/or 13-19%
Saundra	Principal for 13-14 years, with two and a half years at the school we focused on for the interview (the school was one of the top underprivileged schools in the area)	Principal was not sure but thinks 70 out of 200 families (35%)
Sarah	Principal for eight years, with two and a half at the school we focused on for the interview (we talked about previous school)	70%
Emily	Principal for six and a half years, with two and half at the school we focused on for the interview	35%
Mike	Principal for 12 years, with five years at the school we focused on for the interview (new at current school)	55% (prosed that this number will be 75% with Syrian refugees coming to Ontario)
Laura	Principal for seven years, with three years at the school we focused on for the interview (new at current school)	30%
John	Principal for 12-13 years, with six years at the school we focused on for the interview (new at current school)	15%

*Note.* Pseudonyms created by author.

Qualitative research usually involves smaller sample sizes (Ploeg, 1999). Relatively, I consider my sample size “large enough” (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009, p. 132), given the purpose of my study and the inclusion criteria I employed. As well, given that the topic I explored might have been a sensitive topic for some principals, some principals chose to decline or withdraw from the study.

Recruitment is a critical element in a research study. Powers, Edwards, Blackman and Wegmann (2013) explained that this stage is critical for a researcher to decide on participants who can best inform the research, while ensuring sufficient data to answer the research questions.

For the purpose of recruitment, a purposive, and later a snowball sampling, approach was used in order to collect further participants to fit my study criteria. I submitted a brief overview of the purpose of my study and how principal’s input would inform the study to the Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC) through my professor. The OPC then sent the information out to its members through a weekly bulletin with timelines and my contact information. If they chose to participate, the principals could contact me through email. The principals then contacted me and I sent an email (see Appendix E) asking for a list of times, dates, and a location convenient for the principal to conduct a 45 to 60-minute face-to-face interview. The email included a letter of information outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality steps to be taken, and the benefits of this study. Each principal signed a letter of consent at the time of the interview. An overview of my research questions was also sent beforehand to allow busy principals to get a sense of what I aimed to ask in the interview.

Principals interviewed were then asked to recommend colleagues that may be appropriate participants for my study. Two principals recruited for my study were recommended by a previous school district director, two principals were recommended by OPC, three recommended by a professor from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and three were recruited through snowball sampling. Moreover, announcements were made by my thesis supervisor to help recruit participants for my study. Data collection occurred between August and November 2015.

**Interviews.** The interviews aimed to understand the experience of people and the meanings they make out of these experiences (Seidman, 2006). Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) defined an interview as a purposeful interaction in which a person obtains information from another.

Qualitative research focuses on rich description of participants' points of view through face-to-face interviews conducted in naturalistic settings (Merriam, 2009; Stake 2010). Not all my interviews were face-to-face, therefore phone interviews were used, and they were structured in a way that allowed for dialogue and conversation to occur. I used semi-structured interviews, which allowed me to probe, follow up, and further explain questions (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Seidman, 2006). Interview questions followed an interview protocol that can be seen in Appendix A. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for 30 to 90-minutes each, with a total of ten principals from Ontario public elementary schools. Some of these interviews were conducted in person and the remainder by Skype or telephone.

## **Inductive and Thematic Data Analysis**

In this study, I use four themes as the main units of analysis: principals' understanding of the inclusion of Muslim students, the strategies principals employ to include Muslim students, the challenges principals experience as they work to include Muslim students, and the resources available for principals to include Muslims students. I provide rich description of the four themes as the case study approach uses rich data that contain greater depth (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 2003).

Data analysis is the process of “bringing order, structure and interpretation” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 207), and thus making sense of the data collected in a study. Qualitative data analysis is a search for relationships, identifying underlying themes among categories of data, and identifying significant patterns and content (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015). Through my analysis, I identified ideas and themes, which were grounded in my conceptual framework, which was presented in chapter two. There were two processes for my data analysis, with four steps that will be introduced later in this chapter.

In an inductive process, researchers collect data that can help them in building concepts, hypotheses, and theories. Researchers work from the particular to the general by combining information from interviews, observations, or documents and ordering them into larger themes (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Findings that are inductively derived from the data collected in a qualitative study are usually in the form of themes, categories, and concepts (Merriam, 2009). On the other hand, the deductive approach aims to verify themes (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic method wherein data are analysed in terms of main concepts, themes, or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a method for “identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) to interpret research data. To do so, transcribed interview data are organised into categories to help interpret the data (Seidman, 2006).

Phases of thematic analysis included organising and familiarizing myself with the data, generating categories or themes, coding the data, understanding and searching for explanations of the data, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). My data were analyzed thematically by following these steps: I started with a folder for all original transcribed interviews (transcribed verbatim). Transcripts were separated from personal data, which were stored separately. Working folders included the following (refer to Table 3):

Table 3

*Themes Analyzed*

Folder	Main folder name	Individuals files name	Content
Folder 1	“Version 1 _can send”	“transcript _Month of interview_ Date of interview_ principal initials_#### (Time of interview, e.g. 1230 for 12:30PM) _To send”	transcripts edited and all identifiers removed, no names

Folder 2	“Version 2 _some thoughts”	“transcript _ Month of interview _ Date of interview _ principal initials _#### (Time of interview) _V2”	<p>I highlighted main points, took notes of each transcript, reflected on how the interview went, and the main points principals shared. I also included my opinion in some areas based on the literature that I have read and my own personal experiences and believes.</p> <p>Conducting the previous step, the reflection of each transcript, allowed me to better comprehend my interviews and reflect on what I am trying to learn. While I tried to be aware of my bias in this step, some biases may have been raised in this step. I attend to this in the section on trustworthiness.</p>
Folder 3	“version 3_codes and themes’	<p>“transcript _ Month of interview _ Date of interview _ principal initials _#### (Time of interview) _V3_Done”</p> <p>*<i>Done</i> was only written when I was done analysing the document</p>	<p>In each folder of Version 2, I labelled main ideas using the four themes: understanding, challenges, support, and strategies. In this version, I also include some detail for subthemes. For example, understanding: <i>how principal identify student as Muslim</i></p> <p>A table was constructed with the fields in one column: context; resources, challenges, strategies, understanding, recommendations and resources, and other interesting thoughts (final thoughts) for each principal interviewed. The other column was entitled based on the interview details. For example: AB interviewed on Dec 3, 2015 at 12:00 PM.</p> <p>This included what each principal shared in regards to the seven areas, as well as main quotes used for each point made was listed below.</p>
Folder 4	“analysis version 4”	<p>included 5 main documents: “context,” “resources,” “challenges,” “school justice_ understanding,” “strategies”</p>	<p>Each document included a table with the topic (e.g., strategies), the theme, and what principals have said.</p> <p>Vertical analyses were made organizing the data for each of the four themes. The context document</p>

included context information to be used in my thesis. This information was supposed to not include any identifiers, yet I had to make some changes after to honour the privacy of individuals in my study. For example, I had to remove some of the information that related to the city in Ontario, which might be an identifier for some individuals.

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*Notes.* Generated by author.

**Step 1: Transcribing, organizing, and familiarizing myself with the data.** The first step in my data analysis was reading and making sense of the data presented in each transcript (Gay et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). I transcribed each interview after interviewing participants. I used *Record and Transcribe* transcribing software, which allowed me to listen to each interview at a reduced speed. Respective interview transcripts were shared, accordingly, with individual participants, and they were asked to suggest any modifications before I used these transcripts for data analysis; edits suggested included any additions, deletions, or revisions.

Participants had two weeks to send in their suggestions. Five of the participants replied that they felt comfortable with the transcripts, two suggested minor adjustments, and three participants did not respond. The three participants that did not respond indicated at the end of the interview, when I shared next steps with them, that they would not have any problems with the transcript.

During transcription, I became familiar with these data, and later I read each transcript in detail and took notes of major themes. Two documents were generated for each of these interviews in this step. The first document, version one, contained edited transcripts with all personal identifiers removed. Whereas, in version two, I highlighted

main points and reflected on how each interview went and the main points principals shared.

**Step 2: Data coding and theme generation.** The second step of my data analysis was creating key codes for each transcript and sorting codes, which commonly appeared in the transcripts for more themes (Gay et al., 2012; Patton, 2015). To begin, I focused on each transcript by itself (vertical analysis of each transcript). In version three documents, a table was constructed for each of the interviews outlining, in detail, what each principal shared in regards to these categories: context, resources, challenges, strategies, understanding, recommendations, and other thoughts. Major codes were added to each table explaining each point made by the principals. All codes were included in each table, yet not all codes ended up being used. Only key codes that ended up being a theme were used for findings. I later moved my focus to complete and take notes of similar codes that appeared in transcripts (horizontal analysis) and combined similar codes into themes based on what are suggested by Miles et al. (2014) and Patton (2015).

Four major themes included: understanding, strategies, challenges, and resources. I also took notes of the context of each interview with each principal and other interesting or final thoughts shared in each interview. I then looked for subthemes that fell under each of the four major themes and took a note of other themes raised. Examples included, *understanding*—how principal's identified students as Muslim and *challenge*—lack of awareness from the Muslim parents and parents receiving incorrect information about health curriculum (refer to Table 3). I made decisions on which codes were most important, which codes to use, and which codes to collapse. Codes that were not able to form a theme were dropped.



**Step 3: Connecting themes.** The next step was engaging in ongoing analysis to refine the details of each theme and to decide on what the analysis revealed. Further vertical and horizontal analyses were done at this step. I created charts that summarized my findings, as well as charts for key codes and themes with example quotes. Version four, the analysis documents, included five main documents: *context*, *resources*, *challenges*, *school justice\_ understanding*, and *strategies*. Each of these documents included a table outlining each theme and code (horizontal analysis). A context document was also made, which contained contextual information that included information about the principal and the school. This information did not include any identifiers.

**Step 4: Synthesizing findings.** The final step in analysis was synthesizing my findings and reporting in various chapters. In the findings chapter, I describe the connections between the categories I identified and how they are connected without interpreting my results. The categories and the connections were the main results of my study. In the discussion section I will explain my interpretations and discuss my results. My final thoughts on analysis, using selective compelling extract examples, while relating back of the literature and the research questions, will be made.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that trustworthiness of qualitative research deals with how a researcher can persuade their audience that the findings of their study are worth paying attention too. While some question the trustworthiness of qualitative research, since the concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in naturalistic work, many scholars have shown that qualitative researchers can incorporate measures that deal with these issues (Shenton, 2004). Guba proposed four criteria to be considered

by qualitative researchers to work towards trustworthiness in qualitative research, which include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004, p. 64).

Trustworthiness in my work involved establishing *credibility* to ensure that a study measures what is actually intended (Shenton, 2004). To achieve this, I paid attention to strategies that helped ensure honesty of informants, for example participants choose to participate in my study. Consequently, ensuring that only those who were “genuinely willing to take part and prepared to offer data freely,” were part of the data collection process (Shenton, 2004, p. 66). Participants were invited to provide feedback, through member checks, to identify any inaccuracies or misinterpretations in the transcribed interview before I continued with the analysis. This was done to help establish credibility (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Transcribed interviews were sent back to participants to examine and participants choose to add or remove any part of their interview data. Participants were asked to read the transcripts of dialogues in which they have participated to ensure that they are comfortable that “their words match what they actually intended,” (Shenton, 2004, p. 68), which is another credibility measure I followed. Further, I allowed for some debriefing opportunities (through email) with my supervisor throughout my research to widen my vision through her experiences and perceptions.

I paid attention to *confirmability*, which addresses how my findings are shaped by the participants rather than my own bias, motivation, or interest (Shenton, 2004). To address confirmability in my research, I kept reminding myself that I needed to be neutral and not have any pre-assumptions. If a question was not clearly addressed, then I tried to

ask for further clarifications, so that I was not making any assumptions. I framed my questions in a way where they were general, and thus conclusions were drawn from the entire conversation. I asked many questions that pertained to each theme, so that I captured a participants' perspective from many directions. For example, principals' understanding of social justice and Muslim students' needs in schools was captured from the way they answered the challenge question, the strategy question, as well as the questions directly pertaining to understanding of Muslim needs and inclusion in schools. Themes emerged inductively from the data during analysis, and deductive analysis was only employed for the last two interviews in order to ensure that they did not take the form of my assumptions or predictions.

Furthermore, during the semi-structured interviews, I focused my questions on what the principal(s) did in schools in terms of strategies to include Muslims students and initiatives in seeking supports, as opposed to how they think inclusion should look like. As well, when analysing the data, the understanding category was analyzed from different perspectives; based on how principals viewed challenges, their understanding of inclusion based on the strategies they used, and whether inclusion of Muslim students was a priority for these principals that was shown in their efforts in seeking support and reaching to community to better include this group.

Principals who did not want to participate or chose to withdraw at earlier stages of the study may have done so because they were busy to participate. Further, because of social desirability and the topic being a sensitive one, principals may not have wanted to sound politically incorrect, or they may have believed they did not have much to share about this topic.

I also paid attention to other criteria of trustworthiness including *transferability* by incorporating into my research explanations of how my findings can have applicability in other contexts (Creswell, 2014; Gay et al., 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). I used detailed descriptions of findings and rich descriptions of principals' opinions so that the reader may decide whether or not the findings of my study may be applicable to their own context. I addressed *dependability* by explaining how my findings are consistent. Thus, similar results can be established if my work is repeated in the same context, using the same methods and similar participants. I included sections that explained the research design and its implementation, I described what was executed and the operational detail of data gathering, as well as a description of the details of what was done in the field (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). I explained in detail my data collection and analysis process to allow other researchers who chose to engage in a similar study to easily follow my procedure. I included charts to explain the steps of the data analysis and a summary table of main themes and sub-themes.

The trustworthiness of this study has been dealt with through ethics, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Gay, Mills, & Airasian 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). As I addressed trustworthiness through ethics, I began my study only after I received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at Western University. I addressed trustworthiness through *credibility* to ensure that my study measured what it was actually intended to measure, by deriving data themes and categories based on the research questions that framed the study. I also did so by ensuring that participants could choose to not participate in, or withdraw from, my

study, and by inviting feedback from principals to ensure accuracy and identify any misinterpretation. I addressed *transferability*, which is applicability of my study in other contexts, through providing detailed description of my findings, so that it is easy to determine whether my study findings are applicable to other researchers' contexts. I addressed *dependability*, of my study findings by using the same methods and participants, by including details of my research design and data collection, and I addressed *confirmability* through member checks of the data, so that the findings were shaped by participants input rather than my own biases.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues are inherent in any research work involving human respondents (Ferguson, Yonge, & Myrick, 2004). Researchers will experience a tension between the need to collect personal data from participants and the need to maintain an ethical practice that protects the rights of the participants and ensure maintaining their dignity and privacy (Ferguson, Yonge, & Myrick, 2004). Yet, “the self in relation to others...is essential in helping us to understand ethical issues in the research process” (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012, p. 97). To do so, researchers need to pay attention to the ethical issues that may arise in their research (Miller, Birch, Mauthner & Jessop, 2012). Researchers ask themselves: what are the likely consequences of their research? How does the research fit with their own values and priorities? and if the researcher was a participant, then “would [they] want this research to be done?” (Zeni, 2015, p. 17), and what changes might they want to make so that they, as participants, feel more comfortable? In this study I introduced my participants to all potential risks as well as possible benefits of the study. Participants gave informed consent and were fully aware

that they could refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

I made it clear how their confidentiality and anonymity would be protected. I ensured anonymity of participants, which, according to Zeni (2015) and Ferguson, Yonge, and Myrick, (2004), are important steps to be considered by a researcher. I also paid special attention to respect for privacy by meeting the participants expectations in regards to the degree of privacy in the study (Patton, 2015, p. 343). Pseudonyms were given to participants to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality. A master list was kept on a separate computer hard drive. All identifiers were removed from the main data set, and were kept on a hard drive separate from the master list. All details of context contained in the data that would potentially identify the participant were excluded, and participants were informed that identifiable information and any details of context contained in the data that could potentially identify participants would be excluded. Data, without personal information, were stored and protected in my password-protected computer. Notes taken during the fieldwork and data analysis were kept in a secured place, and will be shredded after the period of the study. Data will be kept for a minimum of five years in accordance to Western University policy and then destroyed.

### **Limitations**

Social desirability bias was a potential limitation in my study. Social desirability is the “tendency of individuals to deny socially undesirable actions and behaviors and to admit to socially desirable ones” (Chung & Monroe, 2003, p. 291). In my study, while there was a potential for participants to respond in a socially acceptable manner, I tried to

avoid that by framing my questions in a way where I would ask for what is actually being done in schools as opposed to only sharing what principals see appropriate.

Limited access to principals may be another limitation regarding sampling. Access to principals, who were willing to participate in the full study, was not an easy task and a total of ten principals ended up participating in the full study. As in many studies, initial recruitment of *ideal* principals may have been another limitation, as initial participants were recommended by one of my supervisors before snowball sampling occurred. Afterwards many principals recommended by other principals chose to withdraw from my study with some suggesting that they did not have pertinent input on this topic. The third limitation could include the chance of misinterpretation of participants' answers as a result of my understanding and identity.

The next chapter will present the major findings of this study. These findings were guided by my research questions and conceptual framework, with the key codes and themes analyzed from the data collected.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

This chapter is organized into four sections. These sections are outlined according to the four themes of my analytical framework introduced earlier. The first section captures principals' understanding of inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools. The second section addresses the strategies principals' employ to include Muslim students. The next section speaks to challenges principals' experience, as they work to include Muslim students in schools. The final section illustrates resources and facilitators for principals. Greater details related to the organization of these themes and subthemes can be found in Table 4 in Appendix F.

#### **Principals' Understanding and Recognition of the Inclusion of Muslim Students**

Findings in this first category include principals' understanding and recognition of Muslim students and how principals' understanding of inclusion of Muslim students affected their attitude towards equitable distribution towards this group.

Principals like Laura and John recognized that in order to ensure equal recognition of Muslim students, principals need to be cognisant of their own biases and be cognisant of the fact that some students can be more privileged than others in school. Other principals did not speak to that understanding of inclusion of Muslim students in schools, and some principals defined Muslim students based on a relatively less-inclusion view.

John and Laura agreed that biases and privilege exist in schools. John explained that being a white male, Christian, able-bodied, heterosexual might make an individual



more privileged. John explained that while many privileged groups tend to think they made it where they are because they are “hardworking and smart,” the reality is that they have an advantage because of their gender, skin color, and mainstream beliefs and understandings. Similarly, Laura explained how many principals refuse to accept that some students are more privileged in schools. Yet, many principals and educators might not be aware of the hidden practices and beliefs around them and in the media, which John explained shapes principals’ and educators’ understandings. John explained that all principals have their own “biases and deficits.” Yet when principals accept that they have their own biases, that is when they can start to work against stereotyping and assumptions. John stated:

I have to fight my own prejudices and biases and deficits, ideologies. I think we all have them...we have to continually fight against falling into the habit of stereotyping or assuming that one way of thinking is better than the other...That’s the battle...understanding that the world favors some people over another.

John also suggested that it is necessary for principals to understand that schools might be “tolerate” but not be inclusive. John explained that “the word tolerated is unacceptable...it means something negative.” Rather, Muslim students need to be “truly accepted,” their voices need to be heard, and they need to see themselves as a “part of the school,” as opposed to being “just people in the school” (John). John explained how the school system might not spend enough time making sure the curriculum is inclusive and representative of all students. Thus, principals need to ask themselves:

How do we make our children, in that case, our Muslim children, seem like they are a part, they can share their experiences, and they can share their world views...do they have an opportunity to share that within the class and within the school, and are they accepted? (John)

Consequently, Muslim students need to feel that their voices are being heard in schools, and this understanding needs to be incorporated into students' daily work.

While Laura and John recognized that bias and privilege may exist in schools, many participants did not speak to the importance of understanding inclusion and challenging assumptions. Rather, conversations with some principals showed how they might be defining Muslim students, based on a limited understanding. Emily suggested that one of the ways she identified Muslim students was because they speak another language. Thus, suggesting that background is linked to religion (i.e., Arabic people should be Muslim). Jacob explained that he identified students based on physical features that he sees normally with darker hair and tone, thus focusing on physical features. He also suggested that he looks at it as “a new person to a new culture,” suggesting that he views Muslims as newcomers. Moreover, the findings of my study suggest that principals identify students as Muslim using various signifiers. Indicators included: main celebrations, self-identification as a Muslim, and certain aspects of their dress and religious practices (i.e., wearing the Hijab and eating food that is Halal).

Some principals did not generalize or make assumptions when identifying students as Muslims, and they were observant and made sure to and listen to what others need to share. For example, John explained that principals need to listen to students and parents to figure out their needs as opposed to making assumptions. He explained that it was about trust, since what one Muslim parent or student might need, another Muslim parent or student might not. Thus, John encouraged actively listening to parents and

students to find out what they needed, rather than making presumptions. Similarly, Laura and James agreed that physical signs alone cannot be employed when identifying a student as a Muslim. When asked, James explained that, “nothing in terms of [physical indicators]...that would stand out, saying, Okay, because I look this way I'm Muslim. Not at all” (James). Similarly, Laura stated:

I'm almost embarrassed to say I couldn't tell where anyone was from and I wouldn't want to put myself out that way that you make assumptions, so as I say such a diverse population that I really by visual appearance I couldn't really tell who was Muslim necessarily.

Indicators used by principals to identify students as Muslim included main celebrations, identifying one's self as a Muslim, and certain aspects of dress and religious practices:

- *Celebrations*. Indicators also included main celebrations Muslim participate in. Mike, James, and Jacob agreed that main celebrations were an indicator, such as Eid.
- *Identifying one's self as a Muslim*. Many principals interviewed explained that they knew a student was a Muslim when students self-identified (Emily, Nancy, Saundra, and John). Nancy stated: “It's basically when the parents come in and talk about what their needs are.”
- *Certain dress and religious practices*. Certain dress or religious practices can also be an indicator. Principals give the examples of Hijab, and the culture of shaking hands or not shaking hand (Jacob, Laura, Nancy, and Saundra)

## **Principals' Strategies to Include Muslim Students**

Few principals in my study sought to educate students about diversity, focus on teacher and staff learning, or to work on building strong relationships with Muslim parents and leaders. Some principals advocated for inclusion in strategic ways, and some principals implemented policies that supported inclusion in schools through hiring practices and imposing religious accommodations. Nevertheless, some principals influenced their staff to be more inclusive by challenging teachers' world view of what inclusive teaching and learning looked like and through encouraging staff to connect with parents.

The strategies principals employed to include Muslim students are grouped into four models: (a) communication practices, which included listening to parents and providing parents with needed information; (b) critical learning strategies, which included focusing on staff learning and educating students about diversity; (c) fostering school-community relationships; and (d) strategic advocacy, which included imposing inclusion through hiring practices and through imposing religious accommodations. Strategic advocacy also included persuading staff and teachers to challenge their world view of inclusive teaching and learning and encouraging staff to work with parents.

**Communication practices.** Some principals employed effective communication practices with parents and students. Employing effective communication practices by listening and directly reaching out to Muslim parents was a theme only focused on by some principals. Few principals spoke to listening to Muslim parents' needs and opinions, and reaching out to parents, both Muslim and resistant parents, by giving them

much needed information and ensuring effective communication with them in regards to sensitive curriculum issues.

*Listening to parents.* While listening to parents is a main strategy to build trust with parents, Mike, John, and Emily were the only principals who spoke to the importance of listening to parents. Mike explained how parents have an opinion and a position, and John explained how listening to parents can help build trust. He explained that he gained trust, because he, “devoted a lot of time to be on that playground. Going out and welcoming, and doing listening.” Good listening also helped John deal with parental concerns in conflict situations. Similarly, when asked about resistance from parents in regards to including Muslim students, Laura explained how communication and reaching out to resistant parents, to listen to their concerns and explaining procedures, was her solution. Laura responded to parents who were resistance towards not holding a Christmas party at school by listening to them and their concerns and then by explaining any misunderstandings about how Christmas parties need to include everyone:

We have lots of different religions reflected so it’s important to us that this is not a Christmas concert. We call it a holiday concert and we are trying very hard to start to incorporate things that, you know, people can see themselves reflected in, so we're incorporating some types of dance and we’re incorporating different songs and we're incorporating stories that are been told by students that are based on their own religions and things like that. (Laura)

Therefore, listening was a strategy employed with both Muslim parents and students, in an aim to incorporate stories of students based on their religions. As well as with resistant parents to promote inclusion.

*Providing parents and students with needed information.* When asked about how they dealt with sensitive curriculum issues, specifically the health curriculum, some principals explained that they responded by reaching out to parents to provide them with needed information (Mike, Sandra, John, and Emily). Few principals provided parents with translated sessions to explain the health curriculum or responded by providing much needed information. Other sensitive topics were handled in a similar manner by these principals.

Mike, Sandra, John, and Emily spoke about how reaching out to parents and giving them needed information was a strategy they employed to include Muslim students in schools. When asked about how they dealt with sensitive curriculum issues, Mike responded that it happens by providing needed information: “We gave them [parents] as much information as possible... That’s been very helpful and I know that the imam and I, we talked about this last year, about making sure information is clear.” Sandra explained that parents were provided with translated sessions to explain the health curriculum: “This comes January or so when we have more direction around the health curriculum is have some sessions for parents with translation. Whatever we do we try to get translation if we know this group is coming.” John and Emily explained that other sensitive curriculum issues were handled by providing needed information. John explained how LGBTQ issues in curriculum was also handled in this manner.

In order to reach out to parents, principals in this study engaged in activities that included providing parents with opportunities to get information, such as sessions about report cards and why they are important (Mike). In order to build trust with parents, John explained that principals need to reach out to parents and not wait for them to come to

him. Mike explained: “We also provide opportunities for them to get information... We do sessions on what’s the report card, why is it important? Because parents don’t get it!” Emily stated that, “we can send email blasts to families. And then send it in a form that it’s easy to Google translate or whatever.” As well, Emily suggested translating materials or sending parents material that can be easily translated. Emily asserted:

Translating text, even an announcement at times. We did the bullying pledge last week. So, each day we did it in a different language. Making students aware of what’s going on. Translating the things that we’re sending home is important. Using social media, because some of our families are really savvy when it comes to that stuff. So, using as many avenues as you can to get families involved and knowledgeable of what’s going on. (Emily)

Some principals employed effective communication practices with Muslim parents, such as actively listening and reaching out to Muslim parents and giving them needed information. The next strategy was the use of critical learning strategies as a way to educate staff and promote learning of students.

**Critical learning strategies.** Three themes emerged relating to this category as a way to engage Muslim students in schools. Some principals spoke about promoting a strong understanding and awareness of inclusionary practices by focusing on the training of teachers and staff through professional learning opportunities. Some principals worked on encouraging activities that educated students about diversity, and other principals focused on Muslims being included in the curriculum. All three strategies were suggested to help include Muslim students in public Ontario schools.

***Focus on staff and training.*** Focusing on staff learning was one of the themes emphasised. Some principals suggested that they focused on staff learning. John spent 15

to 20 minutes every staff meeting looking at inclusionary practices and challenging and reflecting on staff's own biases. Emily suggested that staff learning needed to also include the learning of students and their needs. Nevertheless, while principals directly worked to educate staff, principals also needed to motivate staff to be self-directed, to learn to become cognizant of students' needs, as there is always so much to be done and professional development sessions may be limited (Jacob).

Jacob also explained how learning about the *other* is important. Jacob suggested, "the more I can start to understand that or at least recognize that there are differences the more I am able to support people." Yet, in some cases Jacob stated that teachers need to be "self-directing themselves to learn and recognizing and recognizing the needs—because of Limited PDs [professional development]." John also focused on staff learning by spending 15 to 20 minutes every staff meeting looking at inclusionary practices. As well, Emily explained that staff learning must to include the learning of students and their needs. She asserted that principals need to be aware of the context that students are coming from and by knowing what expectations their families have of them can help principals address these expectations.

***Educating students about diversity.*** Few principals explained that they had opportunities in their schools to educate students about diversity. Laura, Mike, and John suggested that principals were expected to lead and coordinate the instruction of religion in schools. To do so, Mike organized groups to come in and talk about diversity, as well as organizing for multicultural food days. Few principals explained that they had opportunities in school to educate students about diversity. Similarly, John asserted that, as a principal in a school with a large Muslim population, he was expected to educate



students about other cultures and religions. As well, Laura explained how students should be aware of certain acts that can be considered offensive to Muslim students and how this should be an “educational piece” for students. She gave an example of a student who approached her saying, “I had a copy of the Quran in my desk and I’ve been studying it during lunch hour, and I try to do that quietly...one of the other students in the class took it and he threw it...I realize it’s my fault, and I did this to myself. I should not have brought it to school. I should not have had it there and now I’ve created a problem.” Laura responded by mentioning that the other student “should not be touching” the Quran and that this should be “an education piece.”

*Muslims being included in the curricula.* Fostering inclusive education in schools allows for a better understanding of differences by staff and students. This understanding, in return, enhances the education of diverse student groups by creating an atmosphere that is anti-racist and anti-prejudice. John explained that Muslims are not included the way they should be in the Ontario curricula. Yet recently, library books have been more inclusive towards Muslim students. John stated:

Having enough resources in there so that the children will see themselves in books in the library and resources...In terms of having resources, like books and that, I don’t know how far we went along in that. [But] we’re certainly better with anti-racism with that.

Emily and Sandra explained how the librarians at their school worked towards including more inclusive and culturally sensitive literature in their school libraries. Their librarians tried to purchase materials that reflected different points of view and thinking. As well, Emily suggested that in her school, some teachers “embraced a day, or a half a day,

dedicated completely to a student investigating what they're interested in." She suggested that recently, many students at her school showed interest in social justice.

Therefore, some principals promoted critical learning strategies that aimed to engage Muslim students through promotion of a strong understanding and awareness of inclusionary practices—encouraging activities that educate students about diversity and focus on Muslim inclusion in curriculum.

**Fostering school–community relationships.** Some principals did not seek to build strong relationships with Muslim parents and leaders. Neither did they take an initiative to reach out to Muslim leaders or employ strategies that aimed to build trust with Muslim parents.

While many principals agreed that it was necessary to build trust with Muslim parents, only a few principals acted based on this and worked on building trust with Muslim parents to get them involved in school. Strategies suggested to be used to build trust with parents included being visible and approachable (Nancy), organizing for teacher parent meetings, overcoming language barriers by offering translation (Emily), and respecting Muslim culture (Saundra). Nancy suggested that she worked on being approachable by being open and visible to parents so they feel comfortable. Emily suggested that she worked on organizing face-to-face meetings between teachers and parents and to overcome language barriers by offering translation. Saundra suggested that building trust is about “walking the talk” and that a principal is “respectful to all. [and]...respect[s] the wishes and what not of the parents.” Saundra also indicated that to

build trust she needed to respect Muslim culture, and she gave the example of respecting the culture by not hand-shaking a Muslim Male.

Moreover, Mike connected with Muslim leaders as a strategy to build strong relationships with the Muslim community. He suggested that building strong relationships with Muslim leaders helps build trust within the school and between the principal and students, as well as parents. Muslim students and parents trusted Mike, as he was knowledgeable about their needs, which in return helped during conflict. He suggested that during conflict, instead of resisting, “all the sudden students backed down.” Mike explained:

Because they [students] realized that we had a good relationship with the imam and they found out that what they were doing and carrying on with would get back to the people at the mosque and then get back to the parents.

Therefore, students were more careful with their actions if they knew that the principal could get that information to the imam and parents. Mike also explained that having a strong relationship with parents and the imam helped in dealing with conflict as a result to sensitive curriculum issues. When asked about his relationship with the imam, Mike explained that it helped Muslim students and parents understand that they are working together as a community. Mike gave an example of how good relationships helped him in conflict situations: “When you talk about building trust, it’s about having those good relationships and leveraging them when you need them.” Mike explained that if you are doing your best to engage all groups including Muslim students, more people will talk about you to others, thus more and more will end up trusting you.

**Strategic advocacy.** My data show a mixed picture that some principals did not advocate for inclusion in strategic ways while others did so. A few principals advocated for inclusion by implementing policies that supported inclusion in schools, through hiring practices, and imposing religious accommodations in schools. As well, some principals challenged educators' worldviews of what inclusive teaching and learning looks like and through encouraging staff to connect with parents.

**Imposing inclusion.** Principals who chose to impose inclusion were blunt about their expectations that those who were hired at their school needed to have an inclusive perspective. As well, some principals focused on ensuring accommodations for the learning needs of minority groups, in this case, Muslim students. When asked about strategic advocacy and ways principals advocate for inclusion in their schools, Sandra explained that sometimes inclusion needs to be imposed first and then acceptance can come after. Mike explained that he demanded inclusion in his school—given that staff and teachers in his school are there by choice. Thus, some principals, like Sandra and Mike, worked to make inclusion non-negotiable and enforced inclusive policies and practices that their staff and teachers needed to adhere to.

Two subtopics emerged when considering how principals imposed strategic advocacy to promote inclusion: hiring practices and imposing religious accommodation. Principals who chose to impose inclusion had an expectation that those who were hired at their school must have an inclusive mindset. Moreover, principals focused on ensuring certain religious accommodations in schools.

*Hiring practices.* Principals who appreciated diversity and inclusion suggested they mainly looked to hire teachers who possessed a perspective of inclusion. While some principals asserted that having Muslim teachers on staff could help in engaging Muslim students in schools, some principals suggested that they did not have a lot of control in terms of hiring unless they were working with a supportive superintendent who was more critical in their hiring practice, as opposed to hiring solely by the seniority list. Yet, other principals seemed to have more control over this process.

John and Jacob believed that hiring Muslim teachers could help engage Muslim students, as children need to see educators from their cultural or religious group. Jacob asserted that his school was “fortunate that [they] have a secretary that is new with [them] that has some of that background and even about Eid and about how we recognize this part,” and parents and students were very comfortable dealing with the new secretary that was a Muslim (and wore the Hijab). Jacob argued that having Muslims on staff could help engage Muslim students, as the staff might be able to better relate to Muslim students. As well, John explained how hiring Muslim teachers could be helpful in engaging Muslim students as, “the children need to see educators from their cultural group...a staff should be representative as much as they can be to the students they are serving” (John). John further suggested that when looking to hire, he looked for someone with an *equity mindset*. Nevertheless, unless principals are working with supportive superintendents with inclusive mindsets, principals may have to hire teachers based on certain policies. Laura and Mike explained that there was not a lot of control in terms of hiring unless the superintendent the principal works with is supportive. In this case, the

principals would be given some freedom in terms of who they may hire. Otherwise, they needed to go by the seniority list. Laura explained:

Now you also get into the realm of, if you have a superintendent who has that mindset that is going to be supportive you'll get the go ahead to interview, if you don't have a superintendent with that mind set then that can be a road block.

Laura explained that there continued to be principals who hired teachers that shared their similar culture and beliefs. She stated, "many principals are not Muslim and they are white and they hire people who look like themselves and act like themselves and talk like themselves, so that's an issue right there."

Some principals did not speak to the importance of hiring strong teachers and staff who could help engage Muslim students in schools and, as Laura suggested, there continues to be principals who "hire people who look like themselves and act like themselves and talk like themselves." As well, when hiring based on seniority, Laura stated, "people are not always representational," and unless a superintendent is supportive, inclusive principals do not have a lot of control in regards to who they hire.

*Imposing religious accommodations.* Ensuring certain religious accommodations in schools was another theme proposed by principals. All principals spoke to accommodations specific to the following needs: accommodation for dietary needs, the month of Ramadan, modesty and wearing the Hijab, prayer, and holidays. Schools do accommodate for the dietary needs of Muslim students and staff are made cognisant of and are given information about what is halal or lawful for Muslims to eat. Moreover, many schools have special accommodations during Ramadan and Muslim holidays. Yet some principals pay more attention to understanding accommodations, as well as to put in

the effort to celebrate Muslim holidays and special occasions, such as Ramadan. Many schools accommodate for the prayer needs of Muslim students. Yet only some schools have a room set up for this purpose, while other schools provide some space only for those who ask for it. Nevertheless, as Laura suggested, some students do not feel comfortable to ask for a prayer room. Laura suggested that in one of her less diverse schools, while she had several conversations with Muslim students on their need for prayer room, she stated that each time it was, “no I’m not ready for this, we don’t want to rock the boat.” Thus, she was aware that some Muslim students may be uncomfortable to ask for their right to a prayer room.

Moreover, all school principals in this study recognized Islamic holidays and allowed for a day off on these days, with some schools taking a step further to celebrate Muslim holidays. Similarly, all schools were willing to accommodate for the modesty needs of Muslim students. Some principals even tried to better understand and respect the Islamic dress. Nevertheless, while the Ministry of Education in Ontario imposes certain religious accommodations in schools, a strong understanding and appreciation for Muslim dress was only the attitude of few principals in my study. Consequently, imposing accommodations beyond what was asked for by the Ministry, such as ensuring a prayer room for students to feel comfortable, accessing this accommodation was only an attitude held by few principals in my study.

Based on my study, the following findings show that schools do accommodate for dietary needs of Muslim students; schools have special accommodations during Ramadan, as well as accommodations for prayer and holidays. Nevertheless, only a few principals paid attention to recognizing Muslim students’ needs and ensured that Muslim

students were practicing their religion freely without any pressure. Some principals held a strong understanding of, and an appreciation to, differences, which is reflected in the strategies they used in schools to include Muslim students.

*Persuading staff and teachers.* Some principals in my study advocated for inclusion through persuading staff and teachers. Principals who worked on supporting the concept of inclusion amongst their staff, did so through challenging educators' world views of what inclusive teaching and learning looks like, and encouraging staff to connect with parents.

John explained that he advocated for inclusion through professional development via sharing stories and discussions of what needs to be done in teaching practices. Jacob explained that he worked with teachers who were moving forward with inclusion and waited for others to join. Sandra explained that sometimes she was able to support inclusion amongst her staff, yet other times inclusion had to be imposed. Sandra explained:

Sometimes you're able to persuade and talk about how this is fundamentally right and how this is going to work and how this is going to help. Sometimes you do have to impose first and then go the other way and get the buy-in afterwards. Of course, you try to get the buy-in right from the beginning.

One of the main steps taken by principals to engage Muslim students was to work with, and support, their staff to challenge their views of the purpose of education and what inclusive teaching and learning needs to look like in order to engage all ethnic and religious groups in schools (John, Sandra, and Laura). When asked about how principals included Muslim students in schools, John suggested that "the principal's main goal is to



build staff capacity...[as they] don't directly work with kids." Principals worked with staff to challenge their views on the *Canadian experience* and the idea that "you have to be of a certain religion or a certain heritage background to be considered Canadian" (Laura). This was done by working with and discussing how some groups might be privileged. These discussions were done via the sharing of stories that would broaden the perspective of staff and allow them to understand the purpose of inclusive education by looking at, and being reflective of, their own world views.

When asked about principals' work with teachers, John explained that he worked on challenging educators' worldviews of what inclusive teaching and learning looks like, and he encouraged staff to connect with parents. He argued that, "the key point I did in that school was, I work with the staff to challenge their world view of what teaching and learning looks like, how do we serve students." John did this by sharing stories. Similarly, other principals supported the idea that the purpose of education needs to be considered. Sandra stated, "teachers have to be aware of who they're teaching...teachers are sensitive to the needs and so they'll think about what they're doing." Moreover, Laura shared her work with staff to become better-informed on inclusive education:

It was work on staff to talk about: what is the Canadian experience? Whose experience are you talking about? Whose voice are you talking about? So, do you have to be of a certain religion or a certain heritage background to be considered Canadian? Is one person more Canadian than another? How are we valuing a variety of different celebrations and a variety of different faiths and cultures and religions?

Moreover, to include Muslim students in schooling, principals in this study also explained how they persuaded and encourage staff to connect with parents. These principals did this by acting as a role model (John, James, and

Mike). Yet, some principals do not put as much effort into challenging educators' worldviews of what teaching and learning looks like or encourage staff to connect with Muslim parents and community leaders. Some principals believed that asking staff to learn about Muslims might make them feel uncomfortable if they are not Muslim themselves. While others work to make such topics safe and comfortable for educators, which is necessary to challenge educators' worldviews of teaching and learning. These principals encouraged staff to connect with the Muslim community (parents and leaders), since they believed that as an educator that works with a particular group, you need to be cognisant of the group and their needs.

Nevertheless, some principals in my study advocated for inclusion in strategic ways, by imposing policies that supported inclusion in schools, through hiring practices and imposing religious accommodations in schools; supporting the concept of inclusion through challenging educators' world views of what inclusive teaching and learning looks like; and to encourage staff to connect with parents.

### **Challenges Principals Perceived**

With regards to challenges principals perceived, I classify them into two main themes: (a) resistance or pushback and (b) limited parental engagement. Sub-themes concerned with resistance or pushback emerged and include: resistance or pushback from staff and teachers or from the community against inclusive decisions and resistant principals. These findings allowed me to reflect on participants' understanding of inclusion, Muslim students, and their learning needs in schools.

**Resistance and pushback.** Resistance is concerned with attitudes towards inclusive measures, and pushback is concerned with actions towards inclusive measures. Resistance in education is opposing an action, policy, or regulation (Ryan, 2013; Theoharis, 2007). Whereas, writers and researchers use the term pushback to imply an action of forcing something, such as a policy, backward (Smith & Crowley, 2015). Ore (2016), who spoke to pushback for justice in education, described pushback as an effort to disturb or actively and aggressively stop an action or the work of to destabilize an attempt.

Some principals were resistant, yet did not pushback. The pushback came as a second step to resistance, and thus when principals spoke to examples of pushback, they combined resistance and pushback. Below, I present the two main sub-themes that emerged: resistance and pushback, which came from staff, teachers, the community, and resistant principals.

***Resistance and pushback from staff, teachers, and the community.*** Resistance or pushback from staff, teachers, and the community against inclusive policies and decisions are some of the challenges principals experienced as they work to engage Muslim students in schooling. My findings suggest that indirect resistance from staff may exist, and thus, sometimes, “people could be nodding their head that they agree with you, but in their heart, they don’t” (John). Therefore, without a principal’s follow-up and ensuring that inclusionary practices are taking place in the classroom, full inclusion might not be achieved. Emily explained that resistance from staff also included resistance to parental involvement. Resistance can also come from the community, as some people may not be “as accepting or understanding or empathetic or recognizing that our world is global”

(Jacob). However, in cases where resistance is not a minor issue, and thus most staff agree to inclusive decisions, decisions get pushed along. Yet in cases where resistance from staff and the community to inclusive decisions is more common in a school, Muslim parents may become hesitant to ask for their rights. For example, Laura gave an example of one of the schools she worked in, which had a large influx of diversity; yet the staff was not as inclusive. Laura explained that indirect resistance from staff caused parents to be hesitant to ask for a prayer room. She stated that, “teaching practices and many of the school practices when I arrived at the school continued to be very Eurocentric-based, and families were hesitant to break that” (Laura).

Moreover, some parents were resistant to Laura’s decision to include all students in Christmas holiday activities. Some parents were resistant to this inclusion and were resistant as they thought the school was no longer holding Christmas activities. In this case, Laura explained to parents how Christmas activities, which the school referred to as holiday activities, needed to include all students in the school, as opposed to holding activities that only engaged one group that celebrated Christmas as a religious Christian holiday. Thus, some school communities pushed back against decisions to host *holiday* events that were inclusive and welcoming to all stakeholders, rather than celebrating specific religious observances.

Nevertheless, some principals indicated that they faced no resistance from staff or the community towards inclusive education decisions. When asked about pushback and resistance, some principals, mainly those who held a relatively less-inclusion understanding of inclusion and the needs of Muslim students, directly spoke about what they saw as resistance and pushback from Muslim parents. These principals believed that

they faced no pushback from staff; yet they received resistance from Muslim parents, who lacked an understanding of *Canadian culture* and were resistant towards the health curriculum and other sensitive issues in education.

Moreover, some principals explained that they did experience resistance from the community as some people may be, “not as accepting or understanding or empathetic or recognizing that our world is global now as opposed to 20 years ago it wasn’t a global world” (Jacob). Yet Emily explained that when there is resistance from certain staff, given that everyone else wanted a specific decision, it gets pushed along: “Usually the group sort of pushes it [a decision] along anyway and that one lone voice kind of falls off because everyone else says, Well, no. This is what we're going and why we’re doing it” (Emily).

Resistance from staff is explained to include resistance to parental involvement: “Teachers are resistant to have any parents in that classroom and involved and what not. So, some staff has really been resistant to that” (Emily). Nevertheless, resistance from staff and the community can cause Muslim parents to be hesitant to ask for their rights. Laura explained that indirect resistance from staff caused parents to be hesitant to ask for a prayer room:

The context at my last school...had a huge influx of diversity but the staff at the school was still very much a staff that had been with [school name] so for the most part, European backgrounds, white, Christian faith, it was a very strong Christian faith in that community so many of the teaching practices and many of the school practices when I arrived at the school continued to be very Euro centric based, and families were hesitant to break that. (Laura)

Nevertheless, given that many principals do face resistance from staff and the community towards decisions that aim to include Muslim students, principals need to be able to stand up against those who resist. Sarah explained how she dealt with issues of resistance from staff:

When you're dealing with parents that are not of Canadian background, and they may not be able to express themselves as well as. At times people [staff and teachers] think that they know better, and they [staff and teachers] don't have to treat them with respect, and I'm like, No, I don't care. Even if they're poor, whatever. They're human beings and they have just as much right to speak up about their kids, and you need to be respectful of that. So, sometimes I really had to deal with the staff, but overtime, I would say that that attitude changed. I don't know what it is like now.

On the other hand, Mike, who is a principal at a very multicultural school, just like many schools in Ontario, explained that he did not expect resistance from staff as "there is ninety other schools you [staff] can work at and they are here by choice." Mike set high standards at his school and did not tolerate otherwise.

***Resistant principals.*** At least half of the principals interviewed indicated that they faced pushback and resistance from Muslim parents (Nancy, Emily, James, and Sandra). Many principals viewed concerns from Muslim parents as resistance and pushback, and they believed that some Muslim parents lacked an understanding of Canadian culture. These parents also showed a resistance towards the health curriculum and other sensitive issues in education. The health curriculum might be a concern that is not specific to Muslims. Yet principals, such as Nancy, Emily and James, viewed this matter as resistance from Muslim parents, as opposed to a concern from Muslim parents that needed to be attended to.

Nevertheless, there might be a lack of awareness or understanding on the part of Muslim parents in regards to the health curriculum. This lack of understanding could be as a result of parents receiving incorrect information about health curriculum. Yet school communication practices, and being able to provide parents with much needed information, needs to be provided to better inform Muslim parents about what they view as a concern. This need was commonly pointed out by George, John, Mike and Laura. It is also necessary for communication to be strategic and strong, so that parents are provided with the information they need and feel comfortable with the material taught to their children. For example, in Sandra's case, she indicated that while she "had those conversations," she still lost many students "to Islamic schools," as a result of the new health curriculum, which might indicate that the conversation with parents did not go well. Principals, such as John, explained that the health curriculum might be a concern, but it is not specific to Muslims: "Again, I can't speak to what is going to happen with the health curriculum, because I am not going through that right now. I know it's not just Muslim groups who are concerned about the content...There's a number of different religions that are, I think, concerned about the content of the curriculum" (John). Nancy viewed the health curriculum as an issue as opposed to a concern, like others have suggested: "In terms of curriculum sometimes there are some issues with Muslim families saying their kids can't participate in music or can't participate in dance. That becomes an issue" (Nancy). Emily explained that many parents refuse to accept that schools should touch on certain aspects of the health curriculum, while other parents ask for more focus on these topics:

Lots of our parents actually want their kids to know a lot more about the health curriculum than they used to. So, we have that pushback from

parents really wanting kids to have all the information and they don't want to teach it at home. They want us to do it all. And then lots of families who don't want us even talking about certain things to do with healthy development and sexual health. (Emily)

George explained how there was a lack of awareness from Muslim parents in regards to the health curriculum, as a result of parents receiving incorrect information.

George stated:

Some of the other concerns [from parents] are not factual; they are not really connected to what is actually being taught. It's misinformation...it is hard to know where that misinformation comes from...people were kind of running with assumptions of what was being taught and it wasn't really accurate.

James also received pushback in regards to the newly introduced health curriculum:

“Pushback was during the new sex ed. curriculum” (James). Sandra explained that she lost many students to Muslim schools as a result of the new health curriculum: “We have had those conversations. We lost ten students in September to Islamic schools as a result of that specific thing” (Sandra). This shows that the principals' conversations with Muslim parents may be lacking an appreciation and understanding of their specific needs and concerns.

Moreover, some principals indicated that one of the challenges they faced was that some Muslim parents were not respectful of the Canadian educational system. James explained how there was a lack of understanding of the Canadian system, specifically from families that are coming from overseas, while Nancy explained how Muslim parents expect to “run the school the way a Muslim school would,” and they lacked an understanding of the Canadian system. James explained: “The other challenge that I would face quite a bit was lack of understanding of the Canadian system of education



when some of our families were coming from overseas. Finished grade four so they should be going into grade five.” Similarly, Nancy stated:

Muslim parents come in and they expect that you’re going to run the school the way a Muslim school would run and I think that sometimes they have to understand that this is a Canadian system and it’s a multicultural system and we have to serve the needs of all the students. Sometimes their demands are a little excessive.

The second challenge principals faced was limited resources, which came in the form of limited parental involvement.

**Limited parental involvement.** Limited Muslim parental involvement was another challenge that some principals faced. In this section, I outline principals’ views on limited engagement of Muslim parents and the challenge of building trust with Muslim parents and children.

Principals explained that engaging Muslim parents might be a challenge and that Muslim parents are sometimes not involved in school (Emily, George, and James). Involving Muslim parents, especially newcomer families, might be a challenging process if newcomer families had an experience where they are not used to being involved in their kids’ education (Emily and George). George and James further suggested that a lack of newcomer parental engagement might be a result of parents not being as confident with their language skills, which make these families uncomfortable sitting in a parent–teacher meeting. George suggested that sometimes principals and staff speak “so quickly” that parents might not be able to understand. He explained the situation, “where everyone speaks so quickly and [they] don’t feel like [they] can keep up and I don’t speak as well

as everyone else.” Yet, as James suggested, this language barrier should be used to encourage parents to participate, he stated:

If you don't understand the language, it's even a better reason for you to participate in school...as you immerse yourself in the culture, you're going to pick up some of our oral language and it'll probably improve your ability to speak English.

James suggested that another reason why Muslim parents are not as involved in school is that it is difficult to make the commitment when the meetings are later in the day; even with child care provided, there was still low turnout of Muslim parents coming to meetings and getting involved (James). Nevertheless, while parental engagement is viewed as a challenge for principals, when principals work towards including Muslim parents in school, principals are able to see a positive change with time (Emily). Thus, while change might take time, principals need to continue to work on including parents, using the strategies discussed earlier, while being patient and persistent.

Sometimes Muslim parents resisted involvement. James explained how parents refused to be engaged. He explained that, sometimes, parents are “just too proud sometimes to ask for help.” Other principals, such as Emily and George agreed that engaging parents might be a challenge, and believed that Muslim parents are not involved as much in their schools. Emily suggested, “I think in some ways it's a challenge for us to get our Muslim families involved and tell them it's a good place to be.” Similarly, when asked about challenges working with Muslim students, George described the limited engagement of Muslim parents; for example, in parent–teacher associations (PTAs).

Nevertheless, building trust with parents is not an easy process (John and James). Building trust takes a lot of work, especially when students have experienced exclusion

and poor treatment in Canada because of their religion. John explained that if parents and students have experienced this exclusion, students might be bringing these experiences to school and thinking, “is this school going to be another place where I’m going to be treated poorly, because I’m Muslim? Or if I’m going to be treated rudely or with lack of respect because of my faith?” (John). Principals might not know what students have gone through, especially that some parents do not feel comfortable asking for help, yet principals are aware that exclusion and poor treatment, as result of religion, does exist, and they are aware of the need for staff training. John explained that building trust with parents is important, yet it is not an easy process:

Without that [trust], you really have nothing... The biggest challenge was the trust had to be earned...you have to earn the parents trust and the children’s trust...it’s your job to earn their trust, and to do so it takes a lot of work. Especially if they’ve been excluded and treated poorly because of their religion in this country... We don’t know what they’ve gone through, but we know that it exist...That’s where our staff learning comes into play. (John)

Therefore, coming to school with negative experiences makes the process of gaining parents’ and students’ trust a harder process, which needs to be a focus in staff training.

### **Resources Available for Principals**

My findings suggest that principals are supported in their work with Muslim students through institutional and community support. Institutional support came in the form of related policies and information from the Ministry, and their respective school board, about understanding and including Muslims students in Ontario public schools; as well as support for newcomer students (SWIS workers support), opportunities to collaborate and work in groups, and support for policy implementation. Moreover,

support from the community has been shown to help principals in including Muslim students in schools. This happens through engagement with Muslim leaders and reaching out to the Muslim community, and through support from higher education institutions, which support principals and teachers through providing them with training for the role.

**Institutional support.** My study's findings show that by taking advantage of policies that allow for greater equity of outcomes in Ontario schools, principals' work to include Muslim students in public schooling can be facilitated through support from superintendents, school boards, and the Ministry of Education. These stakeholders also need to be responsive and communicative. Principals are further supported through having access to many resources. Principals in this study agreed that there is a need to receive more definitive answers from their respective school boards in terms of how to include a diversity of student within schools. This happens through school boards providing principals with professional development opportunities.

The Ontario Ministry of Education and school boards can also help engage parents. This can be facilitated through materials that are translated by school boards (Emily and Sandra). As well, the Ministry and school boards need to allow for opportunities for principals to work with Muslim students and parents; as principals' experiences and involvement with different cultures influences their understanding of diversity and Muslim students (Nancy and Mike). Principals need to be given the opportunity to experience working in schools with different populations, and they need to have opportunities to work with Muslim students. Moreover, almost all principals agreed that settlement workers, which is a government initiative, and other support workers in schools helped them meet the needs of newcomer Muslim students (Emily, John, Jacob,

and Sandra). Moreover, principals spoke about the importance of collaboration and working in groups, and how mentorship between principals can help principals in their work.

On the other hand, when asked about support rooted in policies, it was suggested that the implementation of a policy is what dictates how helpful a policy is. And although the current liberal government, “has done a lot of great things in terms of being with policies that are far more equity minded” (John), how helpful a policy can be is influenced by how a principal chooses to treat the policy (Mike, John, and Laura). When a policy comes down from the Ministry, school boards then choose how they want to interpret the policy and implement it in a way that is meaningful to schools and valuable for school populations. Thus, as Mike explained, “it’s not so much the policy. It is how all the work in between to make sure it’s successfully put into place when it hits the ground.” While the interpretation and application of a policy is what affects how helpful a policy is, there are no clear accountable measures in place to ensure that principals are working to establish an inclusive school environment for all different cultures and religions. As Laura summarized, in school improvement meetings, the superintendent will not ask, “how the climate itself is supporting Muslim students?” but rather the respective school board’s area of focus is what will be discussed, and topics such as reading, writing, and math come up instead. The religious accommodations policy that school boards have brought out is viewed as, “a step in the right direction that needs to be enforced within schools (Laura).

Support from superintendents, school boards, and the Ministry comes in the form of information from Ministry and school boards about Muslim student’s needs and ways

to include them in schools. As well, allowing for opportunities for principals to work with Muslim students, and learn from working in groups. Finally, support for newcomers was proposed to help principals in supporting this group.

***Policy information from the Ministry or school board.*** Most of the participants believed that information from the Ministry or school boards, on ways to include Muslim students in schools, could help facilitate their work in including Muslim students. Nancy explained that there should be “more definitive answers from the board...in terms of how to accommodate different subjects and some different options.” She explained that more information should be provided on “what the religious values are” (Nancy). Whereas, Sandra explained that “within the board there’s documents and guides to help us understand certain customs in different cultures.” James, Mike, and Emily also believed that school boards needed to provide principals with information on how to include Muslim students, how to engage Muslim parents, and provide translated material that parents can understand. Mike explained that the Ministry and school boards could help in providing information on ways to engage parents:

Finding those ways where those parents can really be engaged and be a part of their child's education would also be very valuable...For example, we did a lot with technology and had parents come in with their kid and being able to learn together, so parents can figure out what's going on. It was very helpful. Making sure parents are firmly entrenched in the equation is important.

Support for newcomers may also help principals in supporting Muslim students and their parents in schools.

***Support for newcomers (SWIS workers).*** Most principals spoke about how settlement workers and other support workers helped them meet the needs of newly

arrived Muslim students. Jacob, Sandra, Emily, and John explained that settlement workers helped them with families that were new to the area to ensure equity and inclusion of newcomer Muslims and especially that SWIS workers may speak the same language of the newcomer families.

*Having the opportunity to work in a group.* Some principals explained how being given the opportunity to work in groups may help them in supporting Muslim students. This happened through Ministry and board initiatives. James, Mike, and Laura spoke about how mentorship between principals can help them in their work. Mike recommended that the Ministry focus should be on principals learning teams, which provided principals with a unique experience of working with other principals with similar experiences:

My school board has been very proactive in doing is doing PLTs (principal learning teams)...Have a time of learning, sharing and co-planning, co-problem solving, so that's our principle learning team. That model started a few years ago and it's been invaluable...When you get to sit down away from the hustle and bustle with people who have populations that are similar to yours, problems that are similar to yours, it is great learning. That's been something I've encouraged the ministry to think about. (Mike)

While the Ministry sends policy instruction to principals, having the opportunity to discuss these policy instructions with other colleagues was helpful for the principals. Emily spoke about having more time for principals to meet with colleagues:

Something gets sent to me and I'm left to read it through on my own, and sort of figure out how it applies to my school. Some opportunities to even share online, or share through whatever method, my struggles [and] other principals in a similar situation's struggles. How we're all making equity and inclusive education a priority. What strategies they're using. That sort of sharing time I think would be really beneficial. (Emily)

Nevertheless, principals are supported through having supportive and responsive superintendents and school boards, especially through information on ways to include Muslim students; as well as having the opportunity to work in groups through a principal's learning teams and other professional development opportunities, which seek to engage principals in collaborative learning.

***Support for policy implementation.*** My data suggests that implementation of specific Ministry and school board policies is what supports Muslim students in schools. John explained that, "the liberal government has done a lot of great things in terms of being with policies that are far more equity minded." Yet, not all policies are helpful, because it is about how principals treat the policy. When asked about policies and practices, Mike explained how policies can either be helpful or not:

When [policy] comes down from the Ministry, it's up to the school board to be able to take that and interpret it. Apply it in a way that's meaningful for schools to be able to again put those lenses on and make it valuable for their school populations. The Ministry can adapt or put whatever it is in place, but it's the process from when it leaves them to it actually hits the teachers that matters the most. That's when the clarity of focus happens. That's when the application happens. That's when the interpretation happens.

Therefore, support for policy implementation, which happens by providing principals with opportunities to collaborate and learn about policies and implementation, can help principals utilize these policies in the best ways. Laura asserted that there had to be a follow-up to policy to ensure that implementation was done the way it should be. She suggested that she did not see the accountability measures that were in place for inclusion policies, as no one asked her how she was establishing an environment that was inclusive for all different



cultures and religions in her school. All the focus was on topics of reading, writing, and math, rather than how the climate itself was supporting groups, like Muslim students. Therefore, she asserted that certain policies have to be enforced after they are introduced.

**Community support.** My data show that taking advantage of the services provided by Muslim resource centres, as well as various associations and institutions, can help support principals in including Muslims students at public schools. Some principals explained that community support had helped them work better with Muslim students at their schools. Principals explained how engaging Muslim leaders from the community can support principals in their work with Muslim students (Laura, John, and Mike). Some principals called for partnership between schools and spiritual leaders. While there is no expectation for principals to engage Muslim leaders in schools, principals such as Laura, believed that doing so was important, as it give principals a better understanding of the Muslim students and families in schools (Laura). Some principals established very strong relationships with Muslim leaders and involved them directly in their schools, which helped principals, such as Mike, in conflict situations (e.g., health curriculum concerns). Laura asserted that there needed to be a more deliberate partnership between schools and spiritual leaders in order to gain a better understanding of the families in schools. Mike, who already worked on engaging leaders (e.g., in Friday prayers). He explained that, “it’s about having those good relationships and leveraging them when you need them” (Mike). Therefore, those principals who encouraged engagement with the Muslim community in schools found an advantage and a support in doing so. Nevertheless, as suggested earlier,

some principals, on the other hand, believed that they needed to avoid engaging Muslim leaders in schools.

Principals also suggested that support can come from teacher education institutions. While preservice education programs include foundations courses on topics related to inclusion for everyone, the principals in my study believed that teacher education and principal training needed to include more components. This addition of education in both teacher education and in principal training would better help principals and teachers for engaging in inclusive education. Nancy, Laura, and John asserted that diversity, equity, and anti-racist education needs to be emphasised in teacher education programs. Nancy suggested that Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs need to prepare teachers to work with diverse religious groups. Nancy suggested that there needs to be education in B.Ed. programs on “how to teach to a diverse population...and how to accommodate when there’s different religious needs” (Nancy). Similarly, Laura explained that equity should be focused on in teacher and principal training, and should be embedded in curriculum and everyday work in schools:

There needs to be...a lot more around equity in particular in teacher training and also in principal training...we need to start to shift some mindsets, we need to have a better understanding of marginalization and power dynamics and the impact it can have on students and on their families. (Laura)

John addressed teacher and principal training and asserted that society’s diverse populations need to be included, yet not necessarily specific to Muslim students. He suggested that principals need to have an understanding of how our society marginalizes certain groups, which is key to becoming more equity-minded.

Nevertheless, resources and facilitators for principals working to include Muslim students in schools need to include: institutional support, which comes in the form of support from superintendents, school boards, and the Ministry. This support is needed to better understand and implement policy information from the Ministry and school boards; support for principals through providing them with opportunities to work in groups; and support for newcomers. Other themes, which support principals in their work of including Muslim students in schools include: community support—support from Muslim leaders and the Muslim community to better understand the needs of the Muslim community, as well as support from higher educational institutions through more education on inclusion.

My findings show that some principals are cognisant of their own biases and privilege in schools; yet other principals do not have that understanding. Only a few principals focused on staff learning and building relationships with Muslim parents and leaders. As well, only a few principals advocated for inclusion in strategic ways by imposing policies that supporting inclusion, supporting teachers in the concept of inclusion through challenging educators' view of inclusive teaching and learning, and encouraging staff to connect with parents. Resistance and pushback and limited parental engagement were the main challenges principals faced, while they worked to include Muslim students. Resistance and pushback came from staff and teachers, or from the community against inclusive decisions and also came in the form of resistant principals. Nevertheless, principals are supported in their inclusion of Muslim students through policy and implementation information, opportunities to collaborate, support for newcomer students, and support from the community. This support comes from

engagement of Muslim leaders, reaching out to the Muslim community, and from support of higher educational institutions.

### **Examples: Lack of Recognition**

For activities such as Halloween, school dances, and Christmas parties, some principals were not fully aware of why some Muslims did not want to engage in these events, which demonstrates a lack of understanding of Muslim needs. When asked how she worked around sensitive curriculum issues, like the health curriculum, one principal was unsure of the reason behind parental concern, and explained that one of the issues she faced was that, “some [parents] are flexible and others say, no, absolutely not” (Nancy). When asked about the challenges, she as a principal experienced while trying to include Muslim students, she suggested that her “problem” was “what to do with them [Muslim students]” when they do not get involved in specific activities; the engagement of Muslim students was seen as a challenge in this case. The principal explained how the engagement of Muslim students may be an “issue” when Muslim students cannot participate in certain activities. Nancy stated: “In terms of curriculum sometimes there are some issues with Muslim families saying their kids can't participate in music or can't participate in dance. That becomes an issue.” This principal suggested that she did not know what to do with Muslim students who refused to participate in certain activities. She stated: “I think, if they're not participating in a subject like drama or music, it's like what to do with them during that time and in terms of supervision” (Nancy). Similarly, Sandra viewed isolating Muslim students in a room to read or engage in other activities as an

accommodation. Therefore, for activities such as Halloween or school dances, some principals are not fully aware of why some Muslims do not want to engage and do not seek to ask or learn. Sandra stated:

Of course, when we talk about Halloween and that sort of thing, [like] dances, I have students who aren't allowed to go into the dances. They just come to the office and read or there's a room for children who don't want to be there, where they can be. We make that accommodation, but the majority of our children do go in. Even if they just stand there and stare because that's all they do. They stand there and stare. They don't really move.

Therefore, Muslim students were not included in dances in Sandra's case.

Moreover, Sarah viewed Canada as a "Christian country" and suggested there is a need for Muslim families to understand and act based on the belief that "it's not a Muslim country." She, like some other principals in my study, viewed inclusion of this group as a challenge. Sarah stated:

Sometimes I find that they're [parents]... You really have to work with them to understand it's not a Muslim country, and there are other people here and they have other beliefs... it is like, we don't want a Christmas thing in this school. Excuse me, but this is a Christian country, and yes, we will have our Christmas program.

Similarly, Sandra argued that Muslims need to understand the system and "how it works," as we may be "coming from a different space." Sandra stated:

At the same time, you need to understand we're coming from a different space. We are coming from an inclusive space where, yeah, the girls are included on this trip. Yes, it's both sexes are involved in this trip, but that's how it works.

The previous section on examples of lack of recognition by some principals will be discussed in the chapter to follow. Chapter five includes a discussion of the findings, implications, significance, and suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

In this chapter I will discuss the analysis of my main findings presented in chapter four, which answers my research questions: How do principals include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools? Specifically, this study examined the following four sub-research questions:

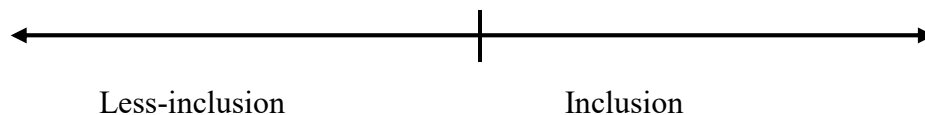
1. How do principals understand the inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools?
2. What strategies do they employ to include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools?
3. What challenges do they experience as they work to include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools?
4. What resources are available for them to include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools?

Principals' understanding and demonstration of inclusion can be placed on a continuum with two directions: *less-inclusion* and *inclusion*. Further, I consider how the strategies principals employ may be related to their position on the two directions. I address how principals' understanding of the challenges they face, as they work to include Muslim students in schools, may depend on how they understand inclusion in these two categories. I will discuss principals seeking of resources and supports, and how this, again, maybe related to their position on the continuum. I will then discuss the implications and significance of my research and address future directions.

## The Continuum of Inclusion

Based on my findings, I describe principals *understanding* partly as their knowledge of both inclusion in schools, as well attitudes and beliefs, which underpins and affects principals' actions. The first component of knowledge is described as being equitable in schools, and having knowledge of the needs specific to Muslim students. I describe actions as the work and steps principals take to include Muslim students in schools. This includes strategies they use, challenges they perceive, and initiatives taken to seeking supports.

From my observations and data from semi-structured interviews, I identified there are two broad categories of principals' understanding of inclusion of Muslim students in schools that sits on a continuum. The categories on the continuum include: less-inclusion and inclusion (shown in Figure 3):



*Figure 3.* Principals' Continuum of Inclusion. Created by author.

Many principals, on the left of the less-inclusion part of the continuum, find themselves comfortable where they are in terms of understanding and supporting Muslim students; they give the argument that they are beyond this category. Therefore, principals who do not work to challenge their own personal assumption and seek to learn may accept Muslim students in school feel comfortable where they are, being located at less-inclusion, given that they perceive that they are beyond it.



**Less-inclusion.** In this category principals only have some understanding and positive attitudes towards Muslim students and their needs in schools. The data from my study suggest that some principals exhibit an understanding of and attitudes towards Muslim students that may be non-inclusive; yet these principals may not recognize that they are being non-inclusive, or they may believe they are, in fact, being inclusive in schools.

*Some principals did not fully recognize Muslim students and their needs in schools.* Some principals did not fully recognize Muslim students and their needs in schools. The lack of recognition of Muslims students leads to tolerating and *othering* (talking about Muslims as alien or not as part of the society), rather than including Muslim students in schools. In my study, the insufficient recognition by some principals lead to a lack of equitable *distribution*, as principals did not have an understanding of where the needs of Muslim students lie, and why Muslim students needed to be supported in schools. Promoting inclusion when working with Muslim students in schools is not only concerned with providing them with an equitable distribution of material things. Rather, it is also concerned with aspects of social justice and forms of relationships and aspects including cultural justice and autonomy, respect, and recognition of Muslims as part of the school and the society (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Gewirtz, 1998; Ryan, 2013).

Muslim students need more than mere accommodation in schools; they need to be free of any pressure in being who they are as Muslim Canadians (Ahmad, 2016). Thus, Muslim students' needs in schools are not limited to their needs for equitable distribution that will provide them with tangible accommodations in order to practice their religion.

Muslim students' needs also include their need for an environment that is understanding, respectful, and one that recognizes the value of Canadian Muslims within society.

In my study, the notions of *recognition* and *distribution* focused on ensuring that Muslim students are given the same value as everyone else—Muslim students receiving the same recognition as others (Farrell, 2013; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Ryan, 2013).

Further, ensuring how Muslim students can be a part of a just distribution of goods, rights, and responsibilities, have a distribution of social and economic goods and rights and responsibilities, such as educational services and resources, rights to practice religion, having a voice in education, and having a responsibility to get involved and contribute positively to the school. From a social justice point of view, a focus on groups who might be disadvantage in schools entails a focus on respect and recognition (Gewirtz, 1988; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Ryan, 2013 Wang, 2012; Wang, 2018).

Further, education, which is a basic human right, should ensure equity of educational opportunity and outcome of all disadvantaged groups in schools (Farrell, 2013; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Gewirtz, 1998). As well as ethical dimensions, social justice is not only about equity and participation, yet it should have an ethical and moral dimension (Wang, 2018)

Some principals do not recognize Muslim students and their needs in schools. My findings suggest that some principals did not properly understand that certain ethnic or religious groups may be more privileged at school, and in these cases, schools might tolerate, but not include, Muslim students. Moreover, some principals spoke about Muslims using othering words, such as *us* and *them*, which shows a limited understanding of Muslim students and their needs. This limited understanding, in return,

makes the engagement process of this group frustrating for these principals, and they may hold a relatively less-inclusive view on the nature of Canadian culture. The lack of understanding by principals was apparent in the data through my analysis of how some principals defined students as Muslim students, how they understood Muslim students' needs in schools, the challenges they faced, and ultimately the strategies they utilized when working with Muslim.

A less-inclusion view was characterized by: (a) principals lacking a *proper understanding of inclusion*, which recognizes that some groups may be disadvantaged in schools (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007) and (b) principals displaying a limited understanding of the *concept of diversity*, which recognises individualization of students and celebration of differences and that differences exist in religious beliefs as well and other areas (Gérin-Lajoie & Diane, 2012; Ryan, 2003). Different students may have different learning needs, which includes students who are, “classified as...members of visible minorities...[and]...young people whose cultures and religions are not main stream” (Webber & Lupart, 2011, p. 4), and some principals' understanding of diversity was based on *visible differences* (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015, p. 70). Finally, principals did not have a strong *understanding of Muslim students* and the learning needs specific to this group, nor did they recognize that this group may be disadvantaged in schools (Ahmed, 2016; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008).

As mentioned earlier in chapter four, only Laura and John spoke about recognizing bias and privilege that may exist in schools. Most principals did not speak about understanding inclusion and challenging their assumptions.

Conversations with some principals showed that they defined Muslim students based on a limited understanding, such as: speaking another language (suggesting that background is linked to religion and Middle Easterners should be Muslim); identifying students based on physical features (darker hair and skin tone); or as a new person to a new culture (Muslims as newcomers).

Not understanding Muslim students is further explained as principals' lack of understanding that Muslims are one of Canada's major minority religious communities (Bramadat & Seljak, 2009), nor having an understanding of the facts about Islam, such as how most Muslims are not Arabs (only about 80%), and that while some Muslims are born in Canada, a lot of Muslims come to Canada from various areas around the world, which also affects the cultures and experiences they come with (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Principals also had a lack of understanding regarding how the rate of Muslim Western citizens is growing (Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008). Principals held misunderstandings and assumptions about Islam and Muslims, such as the covering of women's hair, the Hijab, which can be seen as "oppressive, degrading, limiting, forced, and antiquated," yet most girls or women who choose to wear Hijab feel the opposite and that it is "liberating, dignifying, freeing, equalizing, and very much a choice" (Ahmed, 2016, p.13).

However, there were some principals who worked actively to recognize the cultural identities of Muslim students and support Muslim students' identities, and there were principals who challenged their own assumptions in schools and worked to provide a means for recognition and representation of Muslim students through modifications of school curricula, dress codes, and provisions for prayer rooms for Muslim students.

Finally, some principals had an understanding of the learning strategies specific to the religious learning needs of Muslim students at public schools to include this group.

Still, some principals in my study did not understand inclusion from a social justice point-of-view, nor did they understand equality (sameness) as related to equity (fairness) in education; that is equity based on equality of educational opportunity and outcome among marginalized group members (Farrell, 2013). Moreover, some principals did not show practices of educational leadership that placed issues of exclusion as central to their leadership and advocacy in their schools. While, social justice becomes meaningful only through engaging in such educational leadership practices (Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2012; Wang, 2018). And, it is only through leadership that translate inclusive ideas into practices that aim to include all groups, that groups like Muslim students would be understood and included in schools (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2018)

In my study, many principals lacked an understanding when it came to include everyone in holiday parties as opposed to introducing holiday parties as Christmas parties, or organizing field trips and graduation parties in a way that Muslim students feel their needs are understood and met and feel included (i.e., understanding Muslim parents' perspectives of overnight and mixed field trips, and holding graduation parties at times of no fasting for Muslims). Nevertheless, prompting inclusion of the marginalized demands equity and equality in educational outcomes for these groups (Farrell, 2013; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Joshee, 2007; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007; Ryan, 2013). Fairness and a valuing of diversity comes with equitability for everyone, since equal treatment will only extend already existing inequalities (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). Still, some principals in

my study were defining Muslim students based on a relatively less-inclusive view without recognizing that they were being non-inclusive.

My analysis of the data suggests that some principals recognized Muslim students in their schools based on physical indicators and a relatively less-inclusion view. In my study, some principals were generalizing and making assumptions based on physical features, such as being brown, wearing the hijab, or coming from certain areas around the world, or speaking a different language. Yet, language and background are not necessarily linked to religion. Thus, these principals, like many principals in Ontario, still understood diversity based on visible differences (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). These principals lacked a strong understanding of inclusion, which recognizes that some communities may be disadvantaged in schools without a clearly identifiable pattern (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007).

***Implications of lack of recognition and strategies.*** It appears that not all principals recognized that Muslim students may be disadvantaged in schools, or as Ryan (2013) and Ryan and Rottmann, (2007) described it, how differences in religion and culture may influence students' success, enrichment, and hope in schools. Thus, not all principals realized that Muslim students may be excluded as a consequence of their religion in schools (Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011).

Principals' limited understanding of inclusion displayed by some principals in this study, which demands for students, in this case Muslim students, to be given the same value and recognition as everyone else in school, caused principals to tolerate this group as opposed to include them. These principals intentionally or un-intentionally *othered*

Muslim students and did not fully include or engage them and their parents in schools. As I was studying how principals included Muslim students in schools, I focused on how they paid attention to both the distribution of rights and responsibilities and a recognition of Muslim students. I was looking to examine whether Muslim students receive the same recognition as others and are, therefore, given the same value as other students in school. I found that limited principals' understanding of inclusion, equity, and Muslim students' needs in schools makes the engagement process of Muslim students frustrating for principals, and may lead them to tolerate and *other* Muslim students, rather than include Muslim students in schools. This was demonstrated in the data from Nancy, Saundra, and Sarah on the lack of understanding of Muslims' needs with regards to activities, such as Halloween, Christmas, and school dances. These examples also showed how the engagement of Muslim students was viewed as a challenge by these principals

Some principals I interviewed did not understand that Muslim students may be unprivileged, and that schools might tolerate, yet not include, Muslim students in schools. These principals used non-inclusive language and utilized strategies and attitudes that were tolerating, not inclusive. For example, asking students who wish not to participate in certain activities, because of their religion, as Muslims, to sit in another room and work on something, rather than making the activity inclusive for all.

Compared to principals in the next category: inclusion, which I will detail later, principals in the first category showed a limited focus on building trust with Muslim parents and the Muslim community. They also showed a lack in promoting the learning of parents, staff, and themselves. Principals in this category did not speak about listening to Muslim parents' needs and opinions, reaching out to parents by giving them needed

information, or ensuring effective communication with these parents in regards to sensitive curriculum issues (e.g., responding to concerns in the health curriculum by providing needed information). These principals thought they were doing what should be done to include Muslim students, while they were doing the minimum to accept and tolerate these students in schools. These principals did not realize that their attitude was not inclusive and that they lacked strategies to support the learning of Muslim students and include them in schools.

Principals at the first category, less-inclusion, suggested that resistance comes from Muslim parents. These principals believed that they faced resistance and pushback from Muslim parents towards the health curriculum and towards the Canadian system. Nevertheless, inclusive-minded principals faced resistance and pushback *towards inclusive decision-making* (Duggal, 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Ryan, 2013; Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2012), not the opposite. Resistance and pushback towards inclusive decisions and practices are an inevitable challenge for principals working towards inclusive decisions (Wang, 2018; Ryan, 2013). Principals who work towards initiatives and decisions to address social justice and the needs of underprivileged groups and to combat racism face resistance to change from staff or privileged parents, through pushing towards maintaining the status quo and through obstructive attitudes and beliefs (Griffiths, 2011; Theoharis, 2007). Pollock and Hauseman (2015) suggested that a form of pushback can be towards initiatives such as holding inclusive holiday events. Resistance in education involves attitudes against inclusive measures through opposing an action, policy, or regulation (Ryan, 2013; Theoharis, 2007), and pushback involves actions towards inclusive measures though efforts to stop an action (Ore, 2016).



The lack of understanding for inclusion and Muslim students' needs in schools made it challenging for principals to work with this group. Conversations with Nancy, Saundra, and Sarah showed how principals may other Muslim students while having a limited understanding of this group. Principals' lack of understanding of inclusion and the needs specific to Muslim students in schools make it challenging for principals to support Muslim students in schools.

**Inclusion.** This category is characterized by having a more open or stronger understanding and appreciation towards Muslim students and their needs, and having a stronger understanding for the need for the inclusion of Muslim students in schools. Principals who aligned with this category believed that Islam, just like any other religion, is a valuable religion that has a lot to offer our communities. These were principals who sought to learn and increase their knowledge of Islam and Muslim students and suggested there was more to learn. These principals understood and fought against resistance and pushback towards inclusive policies and decisions. Many principals acted as transformational leaders as they worked towards better inclusion in schools and influencing teachers and parents towards that change (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003); these principals did so through fostering collaboration and focusing on teacher's and parents understandings and skills necessary in the process of including Muslim students, thus acting as transformational leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003). As well, as working as instructional leaders by focuses on learning of staff, students' and parents, and working towards quality teaching in schools; as well as enhancement of curriculum and instruction in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003; Wang, 2012).

*Strategies used by principals in inclusion category.* Principals employed various strategies to help include Muslim students and meet the challenges of this process. Principals who aligned with the category of inclusion believed that continuous learning helps principals better understand Muslim students' inclusion in schools, that it helps them better recognize this group, and can challenge their views and assumptions. Challenges and resistance can be alleviated through building trust in schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Cranston, 2011) and with Muslim students and parents. My study's findings illustrate the importance of promoting continued critical learning in schools, and it is obvious that principals who seek to learn and understand inclusion face fewer challenges when dealing with Muslim parental concerns.

Inclusive principals saw inclusion of Muslim students as a priority and were able to manage connecting with imams and parents to better understand Muslim students. They found the resources and time to learn and educate others about inclusion. Obviously, a principal does not need to be Muslim to understand the needs of Muslim students at his or her school, and continued learning can promote this understanding. If a group exists as a minority within a school, it makes it more necessary for the principal to work to understand this group, as there is a higher chance for students who belong to this group to feel excluded in the school when many cannot relate to them. Therefore, regardless of minority size, all groups, including Muslim students, need to be understood and their needs recognized. If assistance is needed to include all groups then the principal can seek to get the help rather than ignoring the needs of some groups (for example, Mike, John, and Laura connected with Muslim leaders as a strategy to better understand Muslim students and their needs in schooling). Challenges and resistance can be settled

through seeking to learn about Muslim student's needs and through building trust in schools and with Muslim parents (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Cranston, 2011). Wang (2018) asserted that facilitators to inclusion and social justice include support from parents and external support.

*Building trust with parents and the community.* To include Muslim students in schools, principals took the strategy of building trust with Muslim parents and employed effective communication skills when working with them. They suggested that attention needs to be paid to building trust with Muslim parents, as a lack of recognition of Muslim parents may lead to lack of distribution in schools. By building trust with parents, principals allowed Muslim parents to feel comfortable sharing their needs instead of principals making assumptions based on affiliation with a certain group. Inclusive administrators work towards inclusion of all by building trust with and including the wider community in school initiatives and activities (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cranston, 2011; Henderson & Mapp; 2002; Rialsback & Bewster, 2003; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2013). While including parents in schools might be challenging, this can be done by either an enablement of parents through giving them a voice or the empowerment of parents through reaching out to parents and encourage their involvement (Ryan, 2013). Building trust in schools and with parents helps to overcome challenges and resistance (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cotton, 2003; Cranston, 2011).

Principals suggested that engaging parents in schools may be enhanced through various steps. Steps included reaching out to parents and discussing ways they would like to be involved; providing parents with opportunities learn their rights, responsibilities, and roles in schools; and providing staff training on ways to work and engage with

Muslim parents (Railsback & Brewster, 2003). Similar findings were noted in my study, and less than half of the principals interviewed understood the advantage of building trust with parents. These principals asserted the importance of reaching out to parents, rather than waiting for them to approach the principal or the school. They also asserted the importance of providing parents with opportunities get information, translating material and or sending parents' material that could be easily translated, and listening to parents as a means to promote trust. These principals understood how effective communication with parents and reaching out to parents can help in overcoming resistance and challenges. Research shows that dialogue with parents and staff, and listening to what they have to say, is important to encourage inclusion (Ryan, 2013). Inclusive principals ensure that less-advantaged speakers feel comfortable to share what they have to say (Ryan, 2013).

Nevertheless, more attention has to be paid to building trust with parents in order to overcome challenges and resistance and to promote recognition of Muslim students, and, consequently, promote their inclusion in schools. Exercising strategic advocacy is the next strategy to be discussed in this section.

*Strategic advocacy.* Principals promote inclusion by advocating for it in strategic ways. They also are strategic in deciding on which strategies to employ and when to employ them (Duggal, 2014; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2013; St. Pierre, 2009). Inclusion can be advocated for by imposing it, persuading people, or establishing links with marginalized groups (Ryan, 2013). Some inclusion category principals advocated for inclusion of Muslim students in schools by imposing inclusion. This imposing was done through hiring inclusive teachers and staff and imposing certain religious accommodations within the school. Whereas, other principals persuaded staff to be more inclusive through

helping teachers and staff to be more reflective and to challenge their view of inclusive teaching and learning, as well as through encouraging them to reach to parents.

Principals who imposed inclusion made it non-negotiable and enforced inclusive policies and practices (Ryan, 2013). Principals like Mike and Sandra took this approach. Mike made sure only those who were inclusive were hired at his school, and Sandra believed that principals had to impose inclusion as a first step before they could persuade teachers and staff and encourage it. Inclusive principals spoke to hiring staff and teachers with an equity mentality, and hiring teachers who reflected the identity of students in schools (Mike, Sandra, John, Jacob, and Laura).

Yet, in some cases, hiring strong teachers depended on certain policies and whether the principal was working with a supportive superintendent that held similar inclusive understandings. Research in the area of inclusion supports the idea that hiring *strong teachers*, who are inclusive and challenge their own personal assumption and seek to learn, can help support students and enhance their achievement in schools (St. Pierre, 2009). As well, imposing certain religious accommodations in schools was emphasized in my study as a second approach to imposing inclusion of Muslim students in schools. Researchers assert that principals should be cognizant to supporting the specific learning needs of Muslim students in schools and educating teachers and staff about those needs (Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008, Sirin & Fine, 2008).

Persuading teachers and staff to be inclusive was a theme suggested by some principals. John explained that he advocated for inclusion through professional development sessions and through sharing stories and guided discussions on *what should*

*be done.* Similarly, Jacob persuaded his teachers and staff to be inclusive by working with them to understand and appreciate inclusion. Nevertheless, many principals sought to build trust and establish links with the Muslim community and imams in the community in order to better understand Muslim students and their needs in schooling (Mike, John, Laura, and James). Consequently, principals who were working to promote inclusion of Muslim students in their schools did so through imposing inclusion, persuading for inclusion, and establishing links with marginalized groups and thus focusing on underprivileged students to include them in schools. On the other hand, other principals worked on persuading their teachers and staff towards inclusion, so that members would accept it voluntarily. To convince members to value equity, principals employed techniques, such as information-circulating, guided discussions, questioning, and provoking (Ryan, 2013).

***Principals' view on challenges.*** Principals agreed that there were many obstacles that stood in front of them; yet, working towards change and towards a just education system, which recognizes the groups that make up schools, is necessary. Inclusive leaders faced pushback and resistance as they worked to include Muslim students in schools. Principals faced resistance from staff and teachers and from the community against inclusive decisions. Limited engagement of Muslim parents was another challenge principals in this category faced in schools.

Only principals who were inclusive, and who understood the importance of inclusion of all students in schools, spoke about resistance towards inclusive decisions. In my study pushback came as a second step to resistance. Principals who experienced pushback against actions towards inclusive decisions and practices, experienced it along

with resistance, and negative attitudes towards inclusive decisions and practices. Yet, many principals experienced resistance without pushback.

Limited parental engagement was a main challenge for inclusive principals. Involvement of Muslim parents was suggested to help principals understand and support this group by listening to parental concerns and using their help as a resource. Nevertheless, limited parental engagement in schools is suggested in the research to be a result of parents not feeling welcomed in schools (Griffiths, 2011). Challenges principals faced and strategies principals utilized, while working with Muslim students, were interrelated in my study. Strategies can alleviate the challenges and challenges can lead to principals considering new strategies.

Nevertheless, inclusive principals face resistance and pushback towards inclusive decisions, as they worked towards inclusive education and the elimination of exclusionary attitudes and practices in schools (Duggal, 2014; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Ryan, 2013; Theoharis, 2007). Wang (2012, 2018) also asserted that staff and teachers' attitude and values may act as obstacles to social justice. A principal should realize that he or she will face resistance as they work towards inclusion of all, and that change takes time. Thus, persistence is important in the journey of change. The idea that change is a process that takes time was obvious in conversations with inclusive principals. Yet, when talking about change and development, principals asserted that change is doable when persistence is there, and when principals work towards building relationships and trust in schools and with the community.

***Facilitators for principals: policies and community support.*** Principals who held a stronger understanding of inclusion took initiative to include Muslim students in

schools. These principals suggested that they needed to explore what was available for them to better understand and educate staff, students, and non-Muslim parents, about Muslim students. Further, they needed to work together with the community and various resource centres to get the job done (to include Muslim students by granting them with equal recognition based on a just education system, and equitable distribution). This provided the main support for principals in their work to include Muslim students. Wang (2012, 2018), who also examined facilitators for principals, while focusing on the concept of social justice, suggested that facilitators include parents and school boards support, as well as, principals' focus on professional and intellectual growth.

Principals spoke about policy support and community support as facilitators to their work with Muslim students in schools. Superintendents, school boards, and the Ministry can facilitate principals' work by allowing for opportunities for principals to collaborate and work in groups, so that principals can share their knowledge and learn from others about Muslim students and their needs in schools. As well, they can help principals by providing information on ways to include all groups in schools, including Muslim students and by directly supporting newcomer students through initiatives such as settlement workers in schools (SWIS). Yet, support from policies was based on whether or not and how the policies were implemented in schools. There is a push for understanding and implementing policies that support inclusion of all students and Muslim students in schools. Implementing and following up on policies and practices that support equity of outcomes in schools becomes an imperative for the inclusion of Muslim students in schools.



Community support acted as the second facilitator for principals working with Muslim students. Support for principals was suggested to come from supportive Muslim leaders that are engaged in schools and from reaching out to Muslim resource centres, which provided resources to be used when working with Muslim students and parents. Yet, initiatives from principals should be taken to obtain these resources.

As well, principals suggested that support can also come from higher education institutions that train principals and teachers for the role. By focusing on diversity and equity, teacher education programs can better prepare principals and teachers for the roles they are expected to play in inclusive education. This need for a focus on teacher education calls for these institutions to not only focus on educating for inclusion, but to also go deeper into learning about the specific groups that make up Ontario public schools.

Consequently, implementing policies that call for equity in schools, and taking initiatives to reach out to the community, and to take advantage of resources available, as well as demanding advancements in institutions that prepare principals and teachers, can assist in facilitating principals' work in supporting Muslim students in schools. Principals should work to collaborate and to explore what is available for them to better understand and educate staff, students, and non-Muslim parents about Muslim students and their needs. As well, they work together with the community and various resource centres to learn about inclusion of Muslim students in schools.

Based on my study findings, I suggest that principals' understanding can be placed on a continuum with two categories: less-inclusion and inclusion. As well, I suggest that principals' understanding of the inclusion of Muslim students and their needs

in schools are related to their attitudes and actions towards inclusion. Less-inclusion, is characterized by principals who have a limited understanding and limited positive attitudes towards Muslim students and their needs in schools, whereas, the inclusion category is characterized by principals who have a stronger understanding and appreciation towards Muslim students and their needs in schools. Principals who aligned with this category were seeking to grow their knowledge and fight against resistance towards inclusive policies and decisions.

### **Implications, Significance, and Future Research**

This section focuses on implications, significance, and further research, which emerged from my study. I discuss recommendations for understanding the inclusion of Muslim students, and recommendations to take action to include Muslim students. I then discuss contributions to practice and to theory and why I see my work necessary. Finally, I will address further research and next steps to my work.

**Implications.** It is important that principals challenge their own assumptions about Muslims (Guo, 2011). The interviews carried out show that some principals lacked an adequate understanding of Muslim students and their needs in Ontario schools. The main problems associated with principals' lack of understanding of Muslim students include: (1) limited understanding of Muslim students and their needs, which makes the engagement process of Muslim students frustrating for principals, and engagement is viewed as a problem for principals; (2) holding a certain view on what defines Canadian culture; and (3) identifying Muslim students based on a relatively less-inclusion view, which can be based on physical features and generalizations (i.e., assuming that all Muslim females wear a hijab); wrong assumptions, (i.e., believing that language and

background are necessarily linked to religion); physical features, (i.e., assuming that all Muslims are Arabs or brown); assuming that most Muslims are newcomers; principals being inclusive in some aspects, like gender, and not in other aspects, like religion or culture; and not working to challenge their own personal assumption or seeking to learn.

Policy recommendations to address this lack of understanding may include two approaches. The first is to enhance principals' understanding of equity and inclusion. This happens when principals work to understanding that the world favors some people over another and being aware of the systemic practices and beliefs that are present in our media, which many people believe as true, and consequently shapes their understandings. As well, principals must understand that schools might tolerate, but not include, Muslim students. This issue means students need to be engaged with thoughtfully as members of the school community, and their voices need to be heard in order for them to see themselves as a part of the school community. Making Muslim students a part of the school community happens by making sure the curriculum is inclusive and representative of all, and being cognisant that the definition of what constitutes Canadian culture needs to be challenged. The second recommendation is to enhance principals' understanding of the needs specific to Muslim students and for principals to be able to identify students as Muslims by building trust with students, parents, and staff rather than employing physical indicators.

In Ontario, policies call for inclusive education. Working towards a better understanding of inclusion of Muslim students, as in enhanced knowledge and attitudes, is a matter of education and implementation of policies by principals. Nevertheless, policies that can help in a principal's implementation and better education of policies can

be established by the Ministry and school boards, as well as in higher institutions that aim to prepare educators who then become principals. A focus on policy implementation is my main recommendation based on my findings.

To include Muslim students in schools, I suggest that principals focus on certain actions. Policies that can help principals work towards these actions can facilitate the process of inclusion of Muslim students in schools. These actions include:

1. *Fostering school–community relationships.* Fostering inclusive school–community relationships and building strong relationship with Muslim leaders in the community, which happens by establishing trusting conditions and reaching out to parents and the community to gain their trust.
2. *Communication practices.* By employing communication practices that includes self-reflection on privilege, can work against exclusive practices of racism. This includes reaching out to parents through translating material and good listening; challenging educators’ world views of what inclusive teaching and learning looks like, encouraging staff to connect with parents, and hearing from parents and giving parents needed information.
3. *Exercise strategic advocacy.* This action works by promoting inclusion through advocating in strategic ways and by carefully assessing situations before making a decision. A theme related to the topic of strategic advocacy includes hiring strong teachers. In my study it was suggested by some principals that hiring Muslim teachers can be helpful in engaging Muslim students as students benefit from working with educators from their own cultural group. Another theme was being

aware of the learning needs specific to the Muslim student population in Ontario public schools.

4. *Use of critical learning strategies.* This action works by promoting inclusion through critical learning. My findings show that principals' use of critical learning strategies can help them include Muslim students in school. The use of critical learning includes principals being willing to learn and by recognizing and accepting that there is more to be learned. This will, in return, help them to continue to work on understanding the barriers and structures that interfere with inclusion. Moreover, educating students about diversity is necessary to enhance the school climate and students' learning. As well, there is a need for a focus on teacher and staff learning as it is challenging for teachers to focus on learning when they do not have enough background knowledge of diverse education. Moreover, Muslim students need to be included in the curriculum in order to foster understanding and acceptance of cultural differences, which leads to decreased levels of racism and prejudice and increased categories of inclusion (Ryan, 2003). Finally, collaboration, group leadership, and collective decision-making have a positive effect on student outcome (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Ryan, 2013).

Policies addressing some concerns towards inclusion may include: empowering principals about the ways to foster school–community relationships and about communication strategies, as well as other strategies that can help them include Muslim students in schools. As well, school boards can re-consider hiring practices—making it easier for principals who have an understanding of inclusion to have more control over

hiring, as well as having inclusive superintendents. Furthermore, educating principals about the specific needs of Muslim students by engaging in activities that can allow them to better understand critical learning, and give them opportunities to learn from others. This learning needs to, in return, allow principals to maintain a willingness to learn and to continue growing, and accept that they may have deficits and they may be yet aware of. When principals are educated about inclusion, inclusionary and exclusionary practices, and the needs of Muslim students, principals can work on promoting the learning of staff and students, which will in return enhance the school climate and students' learning. Finally, allowing for opportunities for principals to collaborate with others and to learn about the importance of collaboration is important, so that principals may work at promoting collaboration at their own schools.

Principals experiencing high-task volume, intensified workloads, increased demands, and limited resources can be managed by policies that help in the process of implementing inclusion to build strong relationships with staff, parents, and the community. For example, limited engagement of Muslim parents can be supported through educating parents about the importance of being involved and through building trust with them, as well as including them in school.

The work principals do to address student diversity and the inclusion of Muslim students can be supported through the adoption of new policies and practices that allows for greater equity of learning needs of Muslim students in public schools. Principal's work can be supported from superintendents, school boards, and the Ministry. For example, some policies or new ones, can provide principals with more systematic information about Muslim students and how to include them in public schools, provide

principals with opportunities to work with Muslims, and provide principals with support for newcomer students and families (e.g., SWIS workers).

Moreover, ensuring positive relationships with institutions can support principals who engage with Muslims students at public schools. Support from the community, including taking advantage of Muslims resource centres, and engaging Muslim leaders is a suggestion to help principals understand and engage Muslim students in schools.

**Significance.** The significance of my study is threefold: practical, theoretical, and personal, as illustrated below.

**Practical.** The findings from this study help enhance principals' practices in regards to working with Muslim students at public schools in Ontario. This identifies where gaps exist in terms of supporting principals in engaging Muslim students at elementary schools. Policy options are recommended for how schools may empower principals in the engagement process of all Muslim students. Recommendations also include those for the Ministry of Education in Ontario to initiate new policies to support principals in inclusion of Muslim students; for the Ontario Principals Council (OPC) to support principals in including Muslim students and for higher educational institutions to highlight on in educating principals.

While principals get their training from their two-part principal qualifications (Ontario College of Teachers, 2017), I recommend a specific focus on social justice and equity in education with a focus on minority students in schools, such as the particular needs of Muslim students in Ontario schools. As well, I recommend the same for preservice teachers. In order for teachers to be able to demonstrate that they have been taught an understanding of the importance of equity, a focus on equity education is

needed when teachers get their certification from the Ontario College of teachers. This should, in return, help principals enact inclusion in their schools.

*Theoretical.* Theorizing the findings of this study, especially the voices of Ontario elementary school principals, is the main theoretical contribution in this study. While there exists literature that focuses on including diverse student populations in schools, there is a lack of research on the specific inclusion of Muslim students in public schools. As well, while some inroads have been made in how teachers engage, and understand inclusion of Muslim students in public school, there is a lack of literature that focus' on principals' inclusion and understanding of Muslim students in public school.

Researchers like Gewirtz (1988), Fraser and Honneth (2003), Ryan (2013), and Farrell, (2013) examined marginalization and exclusionary while focusing on aspects of respect and recognition. A focus on educational leadership practices is explained to be necessary in this process (Bogotch, 2008; Theoharis, 2007). Nevertheless, Wang (2012, 2018) spoke to leadership that employs democratic and inclusive ideas into practices in order to include diverse groups in schools. Wang (2012), employed research in the form of interviews with principals from the Greater Toronto Area to examine how they perceive social justice and actions they take to work against social injustices in schools. Wang (2012, 2018) addressed facilitators and challenges of social justice, and asserted that principals may focus on the purpose and goals of public education while taking into account the dimensions that underlie social justice, including redistribution, recognition, inclusion, and representation. In my work, I describe inclusive leadership of principals based on ideas that translate democratic and inclusive ideas into practices in order to eliminate practices of exclusion to meet the needs of Muslim students in schools.



While researchers like Wang (2012, 2018) examine how principals promote social justice to address inequity in Ontario's public education, my work aims to examine principals' voices on the specific inclusion of Muslims students, the challenges they face as they attempt to include Muslim students, the supports available for them as they work to include Muslim students, and their understandings of Muslim students and their needs in this process. In particular, I have elaborated on the spectrum of their inclusion with two main categories (i.e., less-inclusion and inclusion). Principals in the *inclusion* category have stronger understandings of the concepts of marginalization and exclusionary practices, and showed better respect and recognition for Muslim students in schools (Gewirtz , 1988; Farrell, 2013; Fraser & Honneth 2003; Ryan 2013). Principals in this category employed inclusive ideas into their daily practices in an aim to better include students in school. Examining the challenges these principals face as well as the facilitators they speak to, these principals show a perspective of inclusion that is focused on the purpose and goals of education, which gives Muslim students better recognition and representation in schools. Nevertheless, principals in this category acted as instructional leaders by focusing on students' learning and quality teaching in schools (Marks & Printy, 2003; Wang, 2012) and promoted the learning and growth of teachers and parents (Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, 2012; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). As well, these principals acted as transformational leaders by working with teachers towards change and through encouraging, motivating, and influencing teachers and staff towards a more inclusive schools for Muslim students (Leithwood & Jantzi,

1990; Marks & Printy, 2003). These principals showed stronger leadership practices that employed stronger democratic and inclusive ideas into practices, which is necessary in the process of inclusion of diverse student groups (Bogotch, 2008; Theoharis, 2007; Wang, 2018). The same, however, is not seen for principals in the *less-inclusion* category, which was categorized by principals having less understanding of the concepts of marginalization and disadvantage in schools. This understanding is then reflected in these principals daily practices, and their perspective on challenges and facilitators in this process.

***Personal.*** Given the current situations Muslims face with the dramatic increase in Islamophobic incidences in Canada and worldwide, it is necessary that principals work towards a pluralistic vision that holds in it a strong understanding of and appreciation for Muslim students' needs and their inclusion in schools. Despite high-profile incidents against Muslims, some Canadians still ignore or deny anti-Muslim hate in Canada (Williams, 2017). In order to understand this reality, principals need to understand the importance of learning about Muslim students and why this group has to be understood and focused on. Since I started this graduate program, four years ago, hate crimes against Muslims has tripled (Minsky, 2017). The Canadian Council of Muslim Women asserted that there has to be a focus on education to reduce the *disturbing* trend and stated that "all levels of government need to step up with more resources and act quickly to allocate urgently needed funds to school programs and agencies involved in education, public awareness and prevention of conflict and violence in our communities" (Nassar, 2017).

In my study I argued that principals' understanding of inclusion encouraged them to learn about the various ethnic and religious groups that make up the demographic of

their schools. Principals' who hold an understanding of inclusion and the needs of Muslim students in public schools engaged in practices that aimed to include this group in public schooling. Yet, engagement of Muslim students is not a smooth process, as there may exist resistance from the community towards inclusive decisions in schools. If supported, principals work to include Muslim students and to overcome resistance against inclusive decisions would be facilitated. Nevertheless, support mainly comes from the Ministry of Education, the various school boards in Ontario, as well as higher education institutions that prepare teachers and principals for working in Ontario schools. In order to support principals in understanding the inclusion of Muslim students, principals must be aware that some students may be more privileged in schools as a result of race and religion. This requires principals to be aware of and ready to stand against hidden or overt systemic practices and beliefs that favour certain individuals over others.

According to my study results, I believe that action should be taken in schools in terms of promoting a stronger understanding of the needs of Muslim students at schools. For example, celebrating October as Muslim awareness week as, "Muslims have been contributing to all aspect of Ontario's prosperity and diverse heritage for generations" (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2016).

On a personal level, I find that I have grown as a researcher and a practitioner to a great extent. I have become more aware of the dimensions of inclusion and how a practitioner can work towards inclusion of all groups. My research helped me reflect on my own biases as a researcher and a practitioner, and thus pushed me to want to learn more about various topics, including education in a diverse community, as well as learning more deeply about minority groups, learning about principals' legal and moral

responsibilities and duties in schools, and understanding the educational policy system in Ontario, Canada and worldwide.

Throughout my journey exploring the inclusion of Muslim students in schools, I became particularly interested in better understanding and learning about people with histories of disadvantage; mainly learning about the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) communities and their experiences in our society. As well, women's rights and the history of misogyny, and most importantly, the representation of women in media, books, and outlets available and accessible for school-aged children, learning about First Nations, Metis, and Indigenous histories and aboriginal rights in Canada, and last but not least, learning about the history of racism towards Black men and women, and the challenges Black Muslims face.

Finally, my research pushed me to consider how I want to mobilize my knowledge through workshops, article writing, conversations and discussion, and through considering other creative ways to disseminate my work, such as through online venues.

**Future research.** Further research is desirable on the topic of principals' engagement of Muslim students in public schooling, including the four areas I explored in my study. As a next step, I aim to carry out further research that involves collaborating with one or two colleagues to form research new questions and interpret data. As well, working on interviewing more principals, and interviewing principals in five years given the shift to the inclusion of Muslim students. Additionally, I plan to add a further level to my research by considering differences that exist between Muslims based on their country of origin and their experiences. For example, while some Muslims are Arabs, many Muslims are not. Around 80% of Muslims are non-Arab (Sirin & Fine, 2008). As

well, while some Muslims are born in Canada, a lot of Muslims come to Canada from various areas around the world, which also affects the cultures and experiences they come with. Muslims live all over the world with 30% living in South Asia, 20% living in Sub-Saharan Africa, many living in Central Asia, and a growing population living in Europe, North America, and Australia (Sirin & Fine, 2008). As well, in this study Sandra suggested how there are “spectrums of faith leaders...from those who take the hard line in any religion to those who are trying to mediate and to accommodate and to understand that we're in a new place that's a different culture and system,” which also affects the needs of different Muslims. This, in my view, needs to be the next stage of exploring inclusion of different Muslim students and the work principals do to engage different Muslim students in public schools. A different framework or the use of quantitative research could also serve as a next step to better understand the topic of understanding and including Muslim students in schools.

Nevertheless, my future research may enable me to make further recommendations to such institutions as the Ontario Ministry of Education, the OPC, and higher educational institutions across Canada that aim to prepare teachers and principals for their job.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

This study was carried out to respond to the central research question as to how principals include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools. It intended to answer the four sub-research questions: how do principals understand the inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools? What strategies do principals engage in to include Muslim students in Ontario public schools? What challenges do principals experience as they work to include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools? And what resources are available for principals working to include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools?

To find out how principals include Muslim students in elementary schools, a qualitative case study was carried out to collect data in the form of semi-structured interviews from ten elementary school principals in Ontario. Elementary principals from Ontario, who have been in the role in a particular elementary school for at least one year and in the practice for at least five years were considered for the study to ensure that the principal has been in the role for enough time to be able to reflect on the role.

The main findings include that principals held different understandings of inclusion of Muslim students and their needs in schools and that this understanding affects the actions principals take to include Muslim students in schools. *Understanding* was the knowledge component, as well as attitudes and beliefs, which underpin and affects the actions that principals take to include Muslim students. The knowledge component included knowledge about inclusion and being equitable in schools, and

knowledge of the needs of Muslim students in schools. Principals' *actions* are described as the work they do and steps they take towards including Muslim students, including the strategies they use, the challenges they perceive, and the initiative they take in seeking supports to include this group.

On a personal level, this research helped me reflect on my own practices and understandings of various groups, and has helped me better understand inclusion and exclusive practices that may not be as obvious in public schools in Ontario. In sum, key reflections are highlighted through three core aspects as outlined below.

### **Including Muslim Students in School Activities**

Allowing some Muslim students, who do not want to engage in some school activities to not join, or to join and not engage, is seen as an accommodation for some principals. Yet, in order for students to not feel excluded, principals can try understanding why some students do not wish to participate or engage in certain school activities. Principals can try to explain Halloween activities to parents and to come up with dance and Halloween activities that are convenient and appropriate for Muslim students and parents; engaging Muslim students in these activities. Principals who want to include Muslim students in all school activities need to work on ensuring effective communication with parents, so that there are no misunderstandings or assumptions made, and so parents understand that school activities can be appropriate and convenient.

Inclusion of Muslim students is facilitated by understanding inclusion and social justice in schools. This happens by recognizing unjust practices and ideologies (Bogotch, 2008; Bogotch & Reyes-Guerra, 2014; Ryan, 2013; Shields, 2014; Wang, 2012), and understanding the needs of, and ensuring a positive condition for learning for, all groups

in schools (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007), which demands a focus on critical learning and challenging personal assumptions (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Joshee, 2007; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007). Moreover, effective communication practices that can help promote mutual respect, understanding, and trust in schools. Effective communication practices involve dialogue with staff (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Duggal, 2014; Riehl, 2000; St. Pierre, 2009) and communication practices that aim to engage families on ways they can be involved to help them understand their rights, responsibilities, and roles in the education system, and provide staff training on working with these families (Railsback & Brewster, 2003). Furthermore, effective communication helps foster inclusive school–community relationships through building trust and including the wider community in school initiatives and activities (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Cranston, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Railsback & Brewster, 2003; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2013).

### **Muslim Students are Different**

Some principals do not view Muslim students as different. Yet, it is necessary for difference to be recognized in order to better understand and consequently include Muslim students at schools. Researchers speak to how Muslim students are different and have different needs (Ahmed, 2016; Collet, 2007; Guo, 2011; Haynes, 1998; Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008). When Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau explained how schools need to engage Muslim students in Canada, he made it clear that there are differences. He explained that, “yes, there are behaviors and attitudes that are different...But these are things that do not weaken the fabric of who you are [as a Muslim student] and the society you belong to” (Quarts, 2016).



## **Muslim Students are Part of Canadian Society**

Some principals view Canada as a Christian country and find it challenging to include Muslim students who refuse to participate in certain activities or who ask to engage in different activities. As well, some principals hold a limited understanding of Muslim parents' needs, which causes them to not tolerate some concerns from Muslim parents. This attitude, however, may exclude and other Muslim students. Principals' lack of understanding, resistance to change, and lack of a willingness to learn and challenge their own personal assumptions, may cause them to become ignorant when it comes to Muslim students and parents' needs in schools, and may distract them from making inclusive choices in schools. An example of inclusive choices may include principals holding Christmas activities while calling them *holiday activities* to engage everyone in the school, and thus treating Christmas time activities as holiday activities to engage all students not solely groups that celebrate Christmas as a religious Christian holiday.

It is important that principals recognize that Muslim students are part of Canadian society. An understanding of the context of Muslim students in Western societies and in Canada specifically, is necessary. Literature shows that Muslims are the second largest religious denominational group in almost all Western countries, including Canada (Niyozov & Plum, 2009; Siddiqui, 2008; Sirin & Fine, 2008). Islam constitutes one-fifth of the world's population and is the second-largest religion after Christianity (Siddiqui, 2008), while the Muslim population is growing in North America (Sirin & Fine, 2008).

I conclude that principals' understanding of the inclusion of Muslim students can be placed on a continuum with two categories, less-inclusion and inclusion. Some principals recognized Muslim students and their needs in schools more than

others. Some principals identified Muslim students based on a relatively less-inclusive view, and this lack of recognition led to tolerating and othering, rather than inclusion in schools. Some principals understood diversity based on visible differences, which is evidenced in the study by Pollock and Hauseman (2015). Consequently, there is a need for critical learning in schools: there is a need for principals to learn and educate others in schools about inclusion, which recognizes that some communities may be disadvantaged in schools in a clearly identifiable pattern (Bogotch, 2008; Bogotch & Reyes-Guerra, 2014; Ryan, 2013; Shields, 2014; Wang, 2012). Many principals viewed inclusion as a matter of equality as opposed to equity. Yet, promoting inclusion, which is concerned with the trouble of the marginalized, demands equity as opposed to equality, as demonstrated in the literature (Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Joshee, 2007; Ryan & Rottmann, 2007; Ryan, 2013; Wang, 2012). Fairness and valuing diversity come with equitability for everyone, since equal treatment will only extend already existing inequalities (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007).

The exciting findings from this study are that some principals appeared strong in the inclusion category, which gives the school community an anticipation that an equitable Canadian society is possible in the future for all children, including Muslim students. These principals acted as transformational leaders by focusing on change and influencing teachers and staff to work towards change (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003)—as well as fostering collaboration, encouraging staff and parents to contribute to change and leadership, and focusing

on staff and parents' understandings and skills in this process Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Marks & Printy, 2003).

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions



### *Inclusion of Muslim Students in Ontario Public Education: A Qualitative Inquiry of Elementary School Principals*

*Faculty of Education, Western University*

#### Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me about yourself and how you got to this position.

Probe for:

- how you became a school leader and a principal at your school
- professional learning you engaged in, steps taken to become a principal
- how many years as a principal, how many years as a principal at the school you're currently in.

2. Can you tell me about your school context?

Probe for:

- do you consider your school to be multicultural?
- the percentage of Muslim students
- if there are Muslim teachers on staff
- whether there are Muslim parents on the parent teacher association
- how do you go about identifying a student as a Muslim?
- **If the principal mentions that Muslim students have needs then ask:** how do you describe the needs of Muslim student population, what are the needs of Muslims students at your school?

\*\*look for principals' understanding of Islam (but don't ask directly)

3. **If not already probed for:** Can you tell me a little bit about the Muslim student population at your school?

Or, how do you understand the learning needs of Muslim students in public schools?

4. Can you tell me a little bit about how the presence of Muslim students at your school influences how you do your work?

- **If I need to be more specific then probe for:** how do your school approach educating Muslims students?

Probe for:

- a) Communicating with Others
  - Working with adults in the building: teachers, VPs.  
\*As principals do not work with students directly
- b) Promoting Critical Learning
  - Professional learning opportunities / training
- c) Fostering Inclusive School-Community Relationships
  - Building trust
  - Communicating with families on ways they would like to be involved
  - Providing family members with opportunities to understand their rights, responsibilities, and roles in the education system, and to develop their leadership and communication practices
  - Communicating with families in person; and
  - Providing staff training on working with Muslim families.
- d) Exercising Strategic Advocacy
  - advocating in strategic ways/ being political
  - Ways to advocate for inclusion include imposing it, persuading people, and establishing links with marginalized groups
  - Principals working to build an inclusive school culture
  - Principals hiring 'strong teachers'
  - Principals supporting professional growth of staff
- e) Accommodating the religious needs of Muslim students.

Accommodation for:

- Daily prayers (Salah)
- Friday prayer (Jumah)
- Dietary needs
- Fasting (Sawm)
- Islamic Holidays

Sensitive issues:

- Modesty
- Mixing of the sexes

Sensitive curriculum issues such as:

- Nudity in art/art History,
- Mixed dancing in dance classes,
- Certain physical contact in drama,
- And overnight mixed sex outing in school field Trips and/or camping.

5. What challenges do you as a principal experience while trying to meet the needs of Muslim student population?

Probe for:



- a) the ‘push back’ against decisions towards inclusive and welcoming learning community
    - ➔ Resistance and pushback
  - b) working with teachers and VPs (working with adults at your school)
  - c) Limited resources, high task volume and intensified workload,
    - ➔ Resistance and pushback (or challenge) from parents
6. How do you go about addressing these challenges?
7. What needs to be in place for you to carry out some of the activities and strategies you engage to meet the needs of Muslim student population?
- **If the principal spoke about policies, then probe for:** how do you think adoption of policies and practices that allows for greater equity of outcome in schools can facilitate your work in dealing with Muslim student population? (Adoption of policies and practices that allows for greater equity of outcome in schools)
  - support from the Ministry
  - taking advantage of the services provided by many Islamic associations and institutions and ensuing positive relationships with these associations and institutions

➔ I also ask a question about recommendations: to Ministry, School boards, Higher Educational Institutions (teacher education + principal education), Islamic resource centers...

### **Final Questions**

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Note: to ask principals to let any potential participants who may be interested in participating in my study know about my study!

## Appendix B: Letter of Information



### *Inclusion of Muslim Students in Ontario Public Education: A Qualitative Inquiry of Elementary School Principals*

*Faculty of Education, Western University*

#### LETTER OF INFORMATION

Farah Ghonaim: xxx-xxx-xxxx or [xxxxxx@uwo.ca](mailto:xxxxxx@uwo.ca)

Dr. Katina Pollock: xxx-xxx-xxx ext. xxxxxx or [xxxxxx@uwo.ca](mailto:xxxxxx@uwo.ca).

#### **Introduction**

My name is Farah Ghonaim and I am a graduate student at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I will be conducting research on the work that principals do in dealing with increasingly diverse student populations; specifically focusing on principals' work with Muslim student population. I like to invite you to participate in this study.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to conduct 45 minute to a one-hour, semi-structured interviews with elementary principals from Ontario to receive input on principals': (a) understanding of diversity and inclusion of Muslim students, (b) the strategies principals engage in when working with Muslim student population, (c) resources and facilitators for principals' work in addressing Muslim student population, and (d) challenges principals experience while working to meet include Muslim students.

#### **If you agree to participate**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute audio recorded face-to-face interview at a time, date, and location that is convenient for

you. Interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device. Audio recording is mandatory, and you need to not participate if you do not wish to be audio recorded as per the study protocol.

### **Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. Names of participants will not be used in document analysis and any quotations or findings reported will not be linked directly to an individual's name.

At the end of the study, data will be stored on a secured office desktop, and a password protected memory stick for backup, which will be kept in a secure location, for the required period of time of five years. After five years, electronic data will be overwritten using an appropriate secure deletion program (file will be shredded), memory stick will be destroyed, and paper records will be shredded.

### **Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study. This study will help gather information about principals' work with diverse student populations. Participants will be provided with an executive summary of findings at the end of my study.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, terminate the audio recording at any time, or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

You need to not participate if you do not wish to be audio recorded as per the study protocol.

If you choose to withdraw from the study or to terminate an audio recording, data collected from you will be kept safely for a period of five month in case you decide to

change your mind and, after five months, the data will then be destroyed.

If you choose not to participate in the study, your data will be destroyed and will not be used in data analysis or reporting results.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University at xxx-xxx-xxxx or [xxxxxx@uwo.ca](mailto:xxxxxx@uwo.ca). If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or [xxxxxx@uwo.ca](mailto:xxxxxx@uwo.ca), or my supervisor, Dr. Katina Pollock, at xxx-xxx-xxxx ext. xxxxx or [xxxxxx@uwo.ca](mailto:xxxxxx@uwo.ca).

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

Farah Ghonaim

xxx-xxx-xxxx

xxxx.xxxx@gmail.com

**Appendix C: Consent Form**



***Inclusion of Muslim Students in Ontario Public Education: A Qualitative Inquiry of Elementary School Principals***

*Faculty of Education, Western University*

*Farah Ghonaim*

**CONSENT FORM**

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give consent to be audio recorded during this study:

Please initial:        \_\_\_ Yes        \_\_\_ No

Participant's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.

## Appendix D: Information for Newsletter



### *Inclusion of Muslim Students in Ontario Public Education: A Qualitative Inquiry of Elementary School Principals*

*Faculty of Education, Western University*

#### **Information to be Provided for Dr. Joanne Robinson's Newsletter**

##### **What is the study about?**

My study examines the work that elementary school principals do to include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools. The aim of this study is to conduct 45 minute to a one-hour, semi-structured interviews with elementary principals from Ontario to receive input on: (a) how principals understand inclusion of Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools, (b) what resources are available for principals working to include Muslims students in Ontario public elementary schools, (c) what strategies do principals engage in to include Muslim students in Ontario public schools, and (d) what challenges do principals experience as they work to include Muslim students in Ontario public elementary schools.

##### **Why need to I participate?**

Principals' work is influenced by the increasingly diverse student populations (Gérin-lajoie, 2012; Nelson, 2013; Pollock, & Hauseman, 2015; Pollock, Wang, & Hauseman, 2014; Webber, & Lupart, 2011), consequently, when examining principals work in Canadian schools, it is essential that we pay attention on the work principals do when working with diverse student populations.

In places where inclusive and antiracist education is the key player, like Canada, elementary schools commit to positive and equitable outcomes, and actively recognize and support the diverse cultures of all students (Collet, 2007, St. Pierre, 2009). While Muslims are one of Canada's major minority religious communities (Bramadat & Seljak, 2009), there is a need for principals at public elementary schools to understand inclusion of Muslim students, and accommodate for the needs of this group including their culture, practices, and values, as schools are the primary social institutions charged with engaging children (Collet, 2007).

When examining the work of principals in Canadian schools, it is essential that we pay attention to principals' understanding of diversity and inclusion of Muslim students at public schools, the strategies principals engage in when working with Muslim student population, the facilitators that can help principals address inclusion of Muslim students,

and the challenges principals experience while working to include Muslim student at public schools. This study will explore the work that principals do in dealing with Muslim student population in an aim to collect input on these areas, thus further exploring the four areas of study and any new themes that have not been explored in previous studies.

Participation in this study is appreciated. Participants will be provided with an executive summary of findings at the end of my study.

**How can I participate?** Please email Farah Ghonaim within the next one-three weeks, at [xxxx.xxxx@gmail.com](mailto:xxxx.xxxx@gmail.com) to arrange for a 45-60 minute face to face interview at a time, date, and location that is convenient for you. Note that interviews will be audio recorded.

## Appendix E: Email



### *Inclusion of Muslim Students in Ontario Public Education: A Qualitative Inquiry of Elementary School Principals*

*Faculty of Education, Western University*

#### **Email to be Send to Potential Participants Who Have Contacted Me Through Joanne's Newsletter**

Dear [*insert name*],

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. A letter of information outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality steps to be taken, and the benefits of this study are attached. On the third page, please find a letter of consent to be filled at the time of the interview.

As a first step, please provide me with a list of times, dates, and a location convenient for you so that we can arrange for the 45-60 minute face to face interview.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxx.xxxx@gmail.com

Your participation is greatly appreciated,

Thanks,

Farah Ghonaim

Edd Candidate



## Appendix F: Summary of Main Themes and Subthemes

Table 4

*Summary of Main Themes and Subthemes of This Study*

Topic/category	Main themes(s)	Sub-theme(s)	
Principals' understanding of inclusion of Muslim students in schools	<i>Principals' understanding of recognition of Muslim students in schools</i>		
	<i>Principals understanding affect their attitude towards equitable distribution</i>		
Strategies principals' employ to include Muslim students	Communication practices (e.g. listening)	<i>Listening to parents</i>	
		<i>Providing parents with needed information.</i>	
	Use of critical learning strategies		<i>Focus on teacher/staff learning</i>
			<i>Educating students about diversity.</i>
			<i>Muslims being included in the curriculum.</i>
	Fostering school–community relationships.		<i>n/a (lack in this)</i>
Exercising strategic advocacy.		Imposing inclusion.	
		<i>Hiring practices.</i>	
		<i>Imposing religious accommodations.</i>	
		Persuading staff and teachers.	
		<i>Challenge educators' world view of what teaching and learning looks like.</i>	
		<i>Encouraging staff to connect with parents</i>	

Challenges Principals’ Experience	Resistance or pushback	<i>Resistance and/or pushback from staff and teachers, and/or from the community against inclusive decisions.</i>
		<i>Resistant principals—principals who view Muslim parental concerns as resistance and pushback from Muslim parents.</i>
	Limited resources	<i>Limited engagement of Muslim parents-</i>
Resources and Facilitators for principals	Policy and Ministry support	Support from superintendents, School Boards, and Ministry.
(principals view/perspective on facilitators and supports)		<i>Information from Ministry/ Board</i>
		<i>Support for newcomers (SWIS workers).</i>
		<i>Having the opportunity to work in a group.</i>
		Support from policies: It’s not about the policy as it is about implementation of the policy.
	Community support	Support from the community: Engaged Muslim leaders.
		Support from the community: Muslims Resources and Muslim resource centres.
		Support from higher education institutions.

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## Appendix G: Outline of Where Principals in My Study Fell in the Inclusion Continuum

Table 5

*Outline of where principals in my study fell in the inclusion continuum*

Categories in continuum	Less-inclusion	Inclusion
Where principals lay on the continuum and why	<p><b>James:</b> accepted policies and ensured religious accommodation in schools, argued that principals should not employ physical indicators to identify Muslim students, and suggested that principals should connected with Muslim parents to understand their needs.</p> <p><i>Why less-inclusion:</i> he still viewed resistance as resistance coming from Muslim parents and believed that the main pushback is in regards to the newly introduced health curriculum. This suggested lack of knowledge and empathy towards some Muslim student’s needs.</p> <p><b>George:</b> accepted policies and ensured religious accommodation in schools, and focused on parental engagement.</p> <p><i>Why less-inclusion:</i> he didn’t recognize the difference in Muslim students (equity and equality problem), health curriculum was a concern (seen as a challenge from Muslim parents)</p> <p><b>Jacob:</b> accepted policies and ensured religious accommodation in schools.</p> <p><i>Why less-inclusion:</i> defined a student as Muslim based on a relatively less-inclusion view (employed physical indicators)</p>	<p><b>John:</b> cognisant to tolerating vs. including, listened to Muslim parents, argued that principals need to be cognisant to their own biases.</p> <p><b>Mike:</b> connected with Muslim parents to learn about their needs, has an understanding of different cultures, viewed no pushback from parents (argued that principals need to understand Muslim and their concerns in schools)</p> <p><b>Laura:</b> argued that principals need to be cognisant of their own biases, employed no physical indicators to identify Muslims</p>

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**Emily:** accepted policies and ensured religious accommodation in schools.

*Why less-inclusion:* defined a student as Muslim based on a relatively less-inclusion view. (speak diff language), argued that resistance and pushback comes from Muslim parents,

**Sarah:** accepted policies and ensured religious accommodation in schools.

*Why less-inclusion:* unknowingly othering Muslim students, had limited understanding of this group, showed frustration attitude from dealing with Muslim families concerns, used othering words in describing Muslims.

**Nancy:** accepted policies and ensured religious accommodation in schools.

*Why less-inclusion:* argued that resistance and pushback comes from Muslim parents, unknowingly othering Muslim students, had limited understanding of this group, showed frustration attitude from dealing with Muslim families concerns, used othering words in describing Muslims,

**Sandra:** accepted policies and ensured religious accommodation in schools.

*Why less-inclusion:* defined student as Muslim based on a relatively less-inclusion view (Muslim come from certain areas), argued that resistance and pushback comes from Muslim parents, unknowingly othering Muslim students, had limited understanding of this group, showed frustration attitude from dealing with Muslim families concerns, used othering words in describing Muslims.

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## Curriculum Vitae

**Name:** Farah Ghonaim

**Post-secondary Education and Degrees:**

Western University  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2005-2009 B.Sc.

Western University  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2009-2010 B.Ed.

Western University  
London, Ontario, Canada  
2012-2013 M.Ed.

**Honours and Awards:**

Canada's Millennium Scholarship  
2005-2006

Western Entrance Scholarship of Distinction  
2005-2006

Ontario Scholars Award  
2005

**Related Work Experience**

Educator  
Thames Valley District School Board  
2010-2019 (9 years)