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Youth-adult community partnerships: Student voice and choice in addressing racism

Sarah Ranco

Wilfrid Laurier University

THESIS

Submitted to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Master of Arts

Wilfrid Laurier University

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### **Abstract**

Researchers have documented many benefits of youth engagement, however there is a need for more systematic research on participation in different contexts. This study has investigated how a youth-adult partnership addressed racism within a high school, as well as the experiences of participants during this process. This project was a case study of a school-based, youth-adult partnership consisting of eight (N = 8) participants. Five participants were students in Grades 11 and 12, two were school/school board staff, and one was the author; I directly participated in the partnership as a facilitator. Qualitative data were collected through field notes, interviews and focus groups, and were analyzed using NVivo 11. Findings highlight the benefits of meaningful engagement for the participants, ideal partnership structures and participant roles, as well as the importance of having a dedicated facilitator with specific qualities identified by participants. Based on these findings, best practices are proposed for conducting youth-adult partnerships in school settings.

### **Acknowledgements**

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I would also like to thank my cohort in the master's program. My work and personal life would have suffered greatly without your late-night mind-mapping sessions, de-stressing café meet-ups, and wellbeing lunches. As well, most of this paper was written long after the libraries had closed for the day and I would like to acknowledge the late-night bubble tea shops that offered free wifi, chill music, and tapioca, thus making the task of writing a more pleasant experience. Thank you to my family and friends for their compassion and patience when I was overwhelmed, as well as for their encouragement in everything I do. Even if you didn't always understand what my research was about, you all made me feel like a rockstar. Finally, I cannot begin to thank my participants enough for their engagement in this work. Everyday I am inspired by the dedication each of you bring into positively building your communities and I will always be your biggest fan. I am in awe of everyone in "Team Timbits" and can't wait to see what other amazing things you will accomplish in this world.

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### **Research Preface**

This study is about utilizing youth-adult partnerships to address racism in school settings. The focus for the research came from many different sectors of my life. The desire to work with youth was a result of having spent numerous years living abroad in South Korea as a teacher, where I was fortunate enough to develop enduring friendships with many of my older students. Watching them navigate their educational systems and successfully transition to adulthood strengthened my respect for the intelligence, compassion and resourcefulness of youth. Understanding the meaningful contributions youth make to their communities is what led me to work on fostering youth voice in schools. Additionally, my position as an outsider in a largely homogenous society helped sensitize me to intercultural and inter-ethnic relationships. During my master's studies in the Community Psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University, I completed a practicum placement at the Equity and Inclusion Office at a school board in Ontario, Canada, which is how I came to know the adult participants from my research project. After over a year of working together, my practicum supervisor, who knew of my wish to do youth-adult partnership work in the school board, connected me with some students and staff looking for school board support in addressing racism at their school. After engaging in discussions about community expectations, project structure, and my suitability to conduct the work as a White researcher, we decided to move forward with the project. All these processes and experiences have led to the following body of work and will hopefully continue to inform my reflections on my position in this research as well as future work.

**Youth-adult community partnerships: Student voice and choice in addressing racism**

Research on youth engagement has grown substantially in recent years, where youth engagement (also referred to as youth participation) is broadly understood as involving young people in the decisions and institutions that affect their daily lives. Meaningful youth engagement is the desired outcome and youth-adult partnerships are a catalyst for fostering that engagement. There are currently several typologies that classify different forms of youth-adult partnerships based on the degree of engagement and empowerment potential. Additionally, critical components have been identified that practitioners can implement to create their desired type of partnership. The following review of the literature starts by exploring how public perceptions kept asset-based approaches for youth engagement from research and practice until only recently. Youth engagement is defined, and its benefits are explored. Two typologies for classifying youth-adult partnerships are presented, as well as best practices and challenges. To provide context for the content of this project's partnership, the literature on school-based approaches to addressing racism in Canada, as well as current school board-specific programs, are reviewed. Finally, empowerment theory and critical race theory literature provide a theoretical basis for this project, and the section concludes with a discussion on the contribution this research makes to the larger body of literature.

To begin, the term youth requires some qualification, as different authors operate under different understandings of what age range constitutes youth. For statistical purposes, the United Nations defines youth as persons between the ages of 15-24 (UN Programme on Youth, n.d.). However, the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, a pivotal piece in youth-engagement work, extends the meaning of child to any person up to eighteen years (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). While not all typologies explicitly define youth, Hart's Ladder of Participation

collectively refers to the pre-teenage years up to eighteen as young people (Hart, 1992). For those that clearly state so, a number of studies on civic involvement and youth-adult partnerships have considered youth to include middle and high school, ranging from 12-21 years (Akiva, Cortina, & Smith, 2014; Ballard, Cohen, & Littenberg-Tobias, 2016; Eisman et al., 2016; Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005). To maintain relevance to this project's age range of secondary students, no research was included that focused exclusively on pre- or post-teenage years. To capture the most amount of information, literature was included that contained age ranges from pre-teenage years up to twenty-four years and, for the purposes of this study, are collectively referred to as youth or young people.

### **Changing perspectives on youth engagement**

**Public perceptions before contemporary youth engagement research.** Research on youth-engagement (and its subset, youth-adult partnerships) is still in its infancy, lacking a fully comprehensive literature base. This dearth in research is partly because the intentional inclusion of youth in decision-making processes has traditionally been at the peripheral of awareness for organizations and the public in Westernized societies (Bulling, Carson, DeKraai, Garcia, & Raisio, 2013). Youth are commonly labeled as students, consumers or trend-setters, but rarely as competent, motivated partners on collective issues (Evans & Lund, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). Young people have been up against negative public perception of apathy and turmoil, reinforced through media, professional practice, and research in the social sciences (Checkoway, Allison, & Montoya, 2005; Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006). These areas have contributed to the perception that the transitional state of adolescence is inevitably chaotic and can only be mitigated by the protection and guidance of adults (Blanchet-Cohen, Linds, Mann-Feder, & Yuen, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). Additionally, the media has played a critical role in portraying youth, especially

racialized youth, as dangerous and a source of concern for society (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006). As early as the 1960's, mass media has been focused on youth deficiencies, such as delinquency or teen pregnancy, and has framed young people as being in direct conflict with adult authority (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). Academic literature can often reinforce this view by disproportionately focusing on deficit-based measures, such as rates of violence or substance-use, rather than emphasizing the resources and strengths of young people (Checkoway et al., 2005; Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel, 2001).

Regarding participation in the community, common public perception is that youth are unmotivated towards civic engagement and fail to contribute to formal political activities (Ballard et al., 2016; Youniss, Bales, Diversi, & Silbereisen, 2002). Similar issues are found in the program development field where young people are often characterized as disengaged or passive in decision-making processes, typically not being consulted with by the adults who advocate for their interests (Checkoway et al., 2005; Cooper, Nazzari, King, & Pettigrew, 2013). Barring youth from contributing to major decisions has often been justified by characterising them as lacking expertise or an understanding of the negative impacts of ill-informed decisions (Blanchet-Cohen, Linds, et al., 2013; Bulling et al., 2013).

Collectively, these perceptions contribute to a deficit-based understanding of youth where they are problems instead of resources with valuable lived experience. Negative portrayals call into question youths' capacity to successfully navigate the perceived apathy and turbulence of adolescence. Supported by social structures placing them in positions of power, adults are often afforded more influence over decisions affecting young people, while those same youth receive little to no consultation (Cooper et al., 2013). When negative messages are disseminated from authority-level adults, these beliefs can become internalized by young people, reducing their

capacity to see themselves as agents of change in their own lives (Checkoway, 2011; Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Finn, 2001). Citing their lack of competency and initiative as a way of excluding youth only further contributes to their isolation, preventing the chance to develop competencies and discouraging young people from seeking out involvement opportunities (Bulling et al., 2013). For these reasons and more, youth engagement research and practice have often been conducted and developed from the perspective of adults, disregarding the experiences and input of the young people who are affected by these decisions (Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010).

**Towards asset-based approaches.** A major turning point for shifting the youth engagement discourse came when the United Nations developed the Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989. In Canada, the UNCRC acts as a ratified, legally binding commitment to the rights of children to participate in decision-making processes relevant to their lives (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). It was a catalyst for organizations and governments to incorporate youth perspectives and fundamentally shifted how organizations viewed young people, swinging the conversation on youth engagement from deficit-based programming towards asset-based practices (Checkoway, 2011; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). While these shifts in perceptions have allowed for major advances to be made in the last two decades, it also means that the field of youth engagement is only just starting to fully develop. As such, there are still many avenues of research to explore and numerous chances to impact our understanding of facilitating meaningful youth engagement in different contexts.

### **What is Youth Engagement?**

While the term “youth engagement” is commonly used in Canada, there is a wide range of perspectives and beliefs embedded in the term (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). Youth

engagement can be broadly conceptualized as involving young people in their institutions, communities and decisions (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006), but in the context of programming and organizational-level decisions, there are varying degrees of involvement (Akiva et al., 2014; Checkoway, 2011; Dunne, Bishop, Avery, & Darcy, 2017). At the lowest end of the engagement spectrum, there is “light touch” participation, which is typically comprised of short-term, low-involvement decisions made by youth (Dunne et al., 2017, p. 2). Such actions can include something as simple as responding to evaluation surveys when prompted. On the opposite end of this spectrum are high-impact decisions by youth at all stages of program design, application, and assessment (Dunne et al., 2017). Youth have reported being offered many of these low-power sharing opportunities, such as providing input in the selection of program activities, but fewer opportunities were available for high-impact decisions (Akiva et al., 2014; Deutsch & Jones, 2008). Across Canada, needs assessment of educational settings supports these findings by reporting that many students rarely, if ever, have the chance for active participation in their communities and schools (Cooper et al., 2013).

Building upon this understanding of youth engagement, research has sought to document the major elements needed for effective and meaningful participation. The most important component identified was the inclusion of supportive adults acting as resources and allies, thus making youth-adult partnerships critical for meaningful youth engagement. Other elements included: positive experiences for youth and adults; tangible results; action-oriented goals; including youth from diverse communities; providing connections beyond immediate family and peers; including youth in major decisions; and providing tangible resources such as money or expertise (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). Many of these components flow into the research on youth-adult partnerships by doubling as key features for empowered collaborations.

**Benefits of youth engagement.** Current public perceptions are shifting to include youth as effective agents of change in their communities. For example, to contrast the perspective that youth are disengaged in civic involvement, researchers have proposed that what constitutes engagement in the political realm is no longer relevant. While there may be apathy towards traditional politics, there is a growing interest among younger generations in unconventional forms of civic participation, such as public debates or participation in community groups (Ballard et al., 2016; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Youniss et al., 2002). Youth may also be more likely to mobilize for issues directly relevant to their generation, such as environmental justice, educational reform, and internet laws, rather than interests appealing to adults (Checkoway et al., 2005; Youniss et al., 2002).

Additionally, there is a significant body of research demonstrating the benefits programs and communities gain from including young people. Youth culture is constantly evolving, and adults may have difficulty keeping up with its rapid changes. Young people are in the best position to understand their culture and their input can increase a program's relevance and chances for successful implementation (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Wong et al., 2010). For instance, peer-led participation in high school-based, anti-bullying programming has been shown to increase long-term impacts and overall program sustainability (Menesini, Nocentini, & Palladino, 2012; Paluck, Shepherd, & Aronow, 2016), while engagement in decision-making processes has been linked to increased knowledge and appreciation of programs being implemented (Akiva et al., 2014; Ramey, Rose-Krasnor, & Lawford, 2016). Engaging in processes typically dominated by adults can also increase youths' sense of community and allow young people to act as agents positively impacting both youth and community development



(Perkins et al., 2001; Zeldin et al., 2005; Zimmerman, Stewart, Morrel-Samuels, Franzen, & Reischl, 2011).

Including youth in decision-making processes not only benefits organizations and programming, but the young people involved as well. The meaningful collaboration with adults was shown to be conducive to improving practical and social skills for youth, as well as foster a stronger sense of identity and self-efficacy (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006; Ramey et al., 2016; Vaclavik, Gray, Sánchez, Buehler, & Rodriguez, 2017; Wong et al., 2010; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2013). Participation has also been shown to increase civic knowledge and encourage future democratic action (Zeldin et al., 2013). Research has also shown that transformative youth-adult relationships can be a resource for well-being, acting as a protective factor against psychological and social problems, especially among marginalized youth (Sterrett, Jones, Mckee, & Kincaid, 2011; Ungar, 2013). Furthermore, in schools, students who engaged in school-wide policies were better able to connect with faculty, thus strengthening their relationships to influential adults, and reported an increased sense of belonging in school (Mitra, 2004; Wong et al., 2010). Positive outcomes such as these only serve to strengthen the case for incorporating meaningful youth engagement in practice, necessitating the need for more research on facilitating youth engagement in different contexts.

### **Youth-Adult Partnerships**

Youth-adult partnerships can be conceptualized as a vehicle for facilitating meaningful youth engagement. Zeldin, Christens and Powers (2013) sought to distinguish it from other types of youth-adult interactions by providing a working definition. They have conceptualized youth-adult partnerships as the practice of “(a) multiple youth and multiple adults deliberating and acting together, (b) in a collective [democratic] fashion (c) over a sustained period of time,

(d) through shared work, (e) intended to promote social justice, strengthen an organization and/or affirmatively address a community issue” (Zeldin et al., 2013, p. 388). This definition provides the conceptual groundwork for youth-adult partnerships in diverse settings, while the following typologies expand upon this definition to classify different types of partnerships based on levels of engagement and empowerment potential.

**Formative typologies.** Hart (1992) proposed a conceptual model for categorizing youth-adult interactions as they progressed towards full engagement in the Ladder of Children’s Participation (see Appendix A). Adapted from the Citizen Participation Ladder (Arnstein, 1969), Hart’s model arose from aftermath of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child where Hart was cognizant of the role power played, so much so that youth participation is distinguished by the level of power sharing (Akiva et al., 2014). In Hart’s adaptation, the Ladder of Children’s Participation identifies different levels of engagement for youth, ranging from non-participation, tokenistic gestures such as youth being manipulated or used as decoration, all the way to full participation where young people and adults share power and decision-making responsibilities (Hart, 1992).

Hart’s ladder metaphor was a major contribution to the fields of youth engagement and youth-adult partnerships; it pushed for a formal recognition of the need for youth in decision-making processes while also exposing many programs, at the time, as operating at non-participation levels (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Shier, 2001; Wong et al., 2010). However, the linear progression of this model holds the implicit assumption that the top tier of participation, one which is youth-initiated and involves shared decision-making with adults, is the ideal state (Wong et al., 2010). This youth-driven ideal ignores the social structures which limit young people’s power beyond the immediate partnership and disregards whether youth may

lack necessary resources or expertise, forcing young people to take on a disproportionate amount of responsibility and potentially obstructing goal completion (Camino, 2005; Wong et al., 2010).

A more contemporary typology, the Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment (TYPE) Pyramid, developed by Wong, Zimmerman, and Parker (2010) documents five different types of youth-adult partnerships (see Appendix B). Like Hart's model, it articulates varying levels of youth participation existing on a continuum. However, the TYPE Pyramid differs by explicitly adopting a strength-based, empowerment framework and by placing an emphasis on meaningful involvement from both youth and adults. Each branch of the inverted V diagram starts with either total-adult or total-youth control. These levels lack empowerment potential and any meaningful involvement of the other side. Completely adult-driven processes may result in manipulation or tokenism (Guinier & Torres, 2002; Wong et al., 2010), whereas total youth-driven processes lose the chance to develop meaningful connections with adults, along with their resources, intergenerational linkages, and expertise (Wong et al., 2010). The two branches progress upwards through increasing degrees of youth/adult involvement and capacity for empowerment, ultimately converging under a partnership type Wong et al. refers to as pluralistic. The authors argue that this type of partnership provides optimal conditions for youth empowerment by recognizing the unique strengths of both young people and adults. The pluralistic partnership's defining characteristic is its reciprocal relationship and shared control in decision-making and planning, where youth and adults take on responsibilities that utilize their respective strengths. Young people can often contribute innovative perspectives, openness to new ideas and a comprehensive understanding of youth culture, while adults frequently bring experience, knowledge of community history and models for best practices (Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005; Wong et al., 2010).

The TYPE Pyramid is currently one of the most comprehensive understandings of youth-adult partnerships as it relates to meaningful youth engagement. Furthermore, the incorporation of empowerment into its framework connects to contemporary, asset-based approaches by focusing on the strengths of young people and identifying where youth contributions have the most significant impact (Wong et al., 2010).

**Best practices.** While useful for gauging levels of engagement, Hart's Ladder and the TYPE Pyramid are classification systems rather than instruction manuals, abstaining from providing concrete steps to achieve a desired partnership style. Fortunately, others are addressing this gap by identifying critical components for meaningful partnerships. These best practices broadly concentrate on partnership structure, promoting sustainability through institutional and community buy-in, power sharing and member roles.

One of the first things needed for any authentic youth-adult partnership to occur is a safe, supportive environment where youth are challenged to succeed and have a sense of ownership in the process (Pearrow, 2008; Yuen & Context, 2013). This must be established from the outset and can be facilitated through the development of meaningful relationships between youth and adults. Forming positive relationships at the start and engaging in community building helps people feel comfortable in the space and is also key for ensuring future sustainability (Pearrow, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2005, 2013). Some characteristics of adults that help facilitate positive relationships with youth include: fostering mutual respect; demonstrating genuine interest; encouraging ongoing friendships; and going above and beyond (Vaclavik et al., 2017). Another important consideration when structuring the partnership is a focus on well-defined goals where there is a consensus on the partnership's purpose. Youth-adult partnerships work best when the intention is not to mentor or promote the development of individual youth, but rather to jointly

address issues that are important to everyone involved (Camino, 2005; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2013). To achieve this, it has been recommended that partnerships concentrate on issues of power and social justice, establish shared values and clear roles for members, as well as be able to articulate why a youth-adult partnership is critical (Camino, 2005; Ungar, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005, 2013). Furthermore, the partnership should be structured with the intention to engage in concrete actions; this increases the potential for empowerment among members by having tangible results from the work (Cooper et al., 2013; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013).

To maximize member contributions, a successful youth-adult partnership should bring together a diverse group of stakeholders (Cooper et al., 2013; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Ungar, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). Involving young people with different experiences has been identified as a key component for promoting youth empowerment (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013), while having a wide range of adults involved, especially those with institutional authority, ensures that youth have multiple advocates and support networks backing their decisions as well as connecting them with influential adults outside of the partnership (Ungar, 2013; Vaclavik et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2010; Zeldin et al., 2005). It is also important to engage and communicate with the broader community since their support can affect the uptake of any resulting programs or initiatives (Cooper et al., 2013; Pearrow, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2013). Oftentimes organizational buy-in is necessary for sustainability, either by institutionalizing roles for youth or by providing resources based on the recognition of the value of youth participation (Cooper et al., 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). To foster institutional support, partnerships should have agreed-upon, favourable narratives for including youth in decision-making processes, as

well as be able to highlight positive community attitudes and provide anecdotal evidence for a partnership's effectiveness (Ungar, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005).

A current trend in Canadian youth-adult partnership practices is to create binaries between adult and youth roles, where young people are delegated to the role of learner and adults to that of expert or mentor. This creates a power dynamic that inhibits true engagement where youth will consistently be marginalized in the decision-making process (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). That is why it has been recommended that adults need to engage in power sharing as well as respect decisions made by youth, even if they do not necessarily agree with the choices (Messias, Fore, McLoughlin, & Parra-Medina, 2005; Roach, Wureta, & Ross, 2013; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Ungar, 2013). Oftentimes adults' decisions are beholden to institutions or funders. Trusting youth in their choices and working with them to develop their visions can lead to innovative solutions or, at the very least, create a space for dialogue about working within pre-existing boundaries (Isenberg, Loomis, Humphreys, & Maton, 2004; Roach et al., 2013). Power sharing works best when adults are open about power imbalances and seek to positively address them while still supporting young people to make good decisions (Ungar, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). Common tactics for sharing power and creating opportunities for youth to make authentic contributions include: having high (but attainable) expectations for youth performance; engaging in reciprocal contributions; negotiating with youth on decisions rather than imposing pre-selected choices; providing established roles for youth in organizations beyond a one-time project; moving forward with the understanding that young people have a stake in the issue being discussed and being prepared to justify this stance (Pearrow, 2008; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Ungar, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2013).

Finally, specific roles have been proposed for adults which may help implement some of these best practices. One such role is for a facilitator, someone who is skilled in collaboration and is knowledgeable about youth participation. Another key role is a dedicated supporter who upholds decision-making processes and is committed to acting on the resulting recommendations (Bulling et al., 2013; Carson & Hart, 2005). Having these clearly defined roles assigned to some of the adults in the partnership holds them accountable for ensuring the facilitation of meaningful youth engagement as well as implementing concrete actions afterwards.

**Challenges.** When done properly, youth-adult partnerships provide the opportunity to foster innovation and empowerment. However, they face several unique challenges with many organizations and programs having difficulty maintaining long-term, sustainable youth-adult partnerships (Checkoway et al., 2005; Cooper et al., 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). One such barrier is the misunderstanding of power sharing and believing that to share power means adults must relinquish theirs. This thinking limits adults' ability to collaborate by shifting their contributions away from engaging in co-learning through shared knowledge, and places the burden of responsibility on youth (Camino, 2005; Evans & Lund, 2013; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). While relinquishing some institutional power, such as by giving youth the final say in a major decision, can help young people feel a sense of ownership, this is often confused with personal power, which is based on experience. If adults abandon personal power, or give up institutional power entirely, they may fall into the trap of believing that to be equitable, youth must do everything of importance (Camino, 2005). That is why it is necessary to view youth-adult partnerships as collective constructs that rely on expertise and different forms of power from each side, and to have clear roles for each member that go beyond traditional assumptions for

age; for instance, ones where youth can contribute as teachers or advisors, and adults can be seen as creative or as engaged learners (Camino, 2005; Pearrow, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2005, 2013).

Other major barriers relate to time. Most of the research on youth engagement has occurred within the last two decades, resulting in many communities and institutions viewing youth engagement and partnerships as modern concepts. Lacking a long-established research- and practice-base makes organizations reluctant to implement youth-adult partnerships (Zeldin et al., 2005). Furthermore, the development of meaningful partnerships where all the best practices can be put in place and power differentials among members are sufficiently addressed requires adequate time. Unfortunately, projects are often time-sensitive and require specific deliverables (e.g., a program, conference, community initiative etc.) which can stifle the development process (Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). While acknowledged to be a difficult task, it has been recommended that partnerships try to plan ahead and incorporate an adequate amount of time for these processes to occur while also focusing on normalizing youths' roles in their organizations and communities (Cooper et al., 2013; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). By acknowledging these challenges from past work, present-day partnerships can attempt to address them before they become a problem or mitigate any of their negative effects.

The literature reviewed thus far on youth-adult partnerships are largely presented by scholars as applicable for many different settings in which these partnerships develop. However, it is also valuable to consider the specific contexts in which the current research resides. Given that this project's partnership was situated in a public school with the goal of addressing racism, it is important to review how schools in Canada are currently engaging with anti-racist efforts and whether educational institutions are conducive to the development and maintenance of youth-adult partnerships.



### **Addressing Racism in Secondary Schools**

During the development of this project, community partners requested that the partnership's focus be on racism in one of the local secondary schools, which necessitates a review of the literature on approaches for addressing racism in educational settings. The Canadian public education system continues to be limited by its inability to work for all students, largely being influenced by a White, Eurocentric curriculum at the cost of marginalized students (Dei, James, Karumanchery, James-Wilson, & Zine, 2000; Kishimoto, 2018; Parhar & Sensoy, 2011; Zinga & Gordon, 2016). Education has a direct impact on the lives of many people and it continues to be a factor helping to produce and maintain racism in our society (Bryan, 2012). For instance, being in a school space can expose racialized students to acts of racism or negative stereotyping by peers or staff, where experience of discrimination are linked to negative academic and psychosocial outcomes for youth (Codjoe, 2001; Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017). Additionally, the existence of institutional racism in Canadian schools has been well-documented, where racialized youth are often subjected to exclusionary educational practices, misrepresentation, and having their experiences challenged while those from dominant groups are recognized (Codjoe, 2001; Parhar & Sensoy, 2011; Zinga & Gordon, 2016). These issues can be compounded by narrow, individualised understandings of racism, which allow for systemic or subtle racism to be downplayed or denied (Bryan, 2012; Raby, 2004; Zinga & Gordon, 2016). Given the pervasiveness of racism in our educational systems and its negative effects on students, what have Canadian schools been doing in recent history to address racism and how can youth-adult partnerships play a part in this moving forward?

**School-based approaches.** Since the introduction of the Canadian policy of multiculturalism in the 1970's, the provincial curriculum has focused its efforts on embracing

cultural diversity (Raby, 2004). Multiculturalism seeks to positively highlight differences among groups, but often takes an apolitical, ahistorical stance, opting instead for a focus on celebration and an assumption of an egalitarian society where all groups are treated equally (Kishimoto, 2018). While this approach may have been developed with the intention of promoting empathy and acceptance, it has been shown to suffer from many shortcomings. Educational approaches that exclusively focus on culture run the risk of de-politicizing racism discourse, homogenizing cultures to create “us” versus “them” binaries, as well as reinforcing harmful power structures and the continual centering of White experience (Bedard, 2000; Kishimoto, 2018; Raby, 2004).

The appeal of multicultural education may be in part due to widespread understandings of racism that focus on overt, individual behaviours which abstain from incorporating systemic factors. When racism is exclusively linked to individual beliefs and actions, a common educational tactic is to teach students to be tolerant of difference (Bryan, 2012). However, the negative effects of this approach are apparent when youth engage in discussions about racism. In two separate studies documenting Ontario secondary students’ perceptions of racism in their schools, Zinga & Gordon (2016) and Raby (2004) found that students denied or downplayed racist incidents in their school environment, even while providing examples of racism. This was the case for the majority of all the students, although racialized students were overall more aware and open to discussing racism than non-racialized peers. Furthermore, students in both studies often attributed racist events to individual factors without acknowledging or perceiving connections to systemic racism.

Given the limitations of the multiculturalism approach, some scholars have argued for the incorporation of anti-racist pedagogy into educational systems. Informed by Critical Race Theory, an anti-racist approach requires a political stance, aligning itself with social justice by

critically reflecting on the power dynamics and institutional contributions that sustain racism (Kishimoto, 2018; Raby, 2004). The integration of an anti-racist approach provides the opportunity for a deeper engagement with the concept of racism, one that increases awareness of different forms of racism as well as their interactions with each other and us through our multiple identity positions. Anti-racist pedagogy also seeks to diversify our understandings of race, nationhood and what it means to be Canadian, using history and critical analysis to illustrate how these concepts have been shaped to benefit dominant groups (Bryan, 2012; Dei, 2000; Kishimoto, 2018; Raby, 2004; Skerrett, 2011). Research has shown that there is support among Ontario teachers for a stronger focus on anti-racism approaches. In a series of interviews at a secondary school in Southern-Ontario, teachers reported needing more structural support from schools for addressing racism and promoting anti-racist education in schools. Recommendations included official curriculum changes that include anti-racist materials, incorporating consistent, systematic procedures for intervening in racist incidents, increasing staff training on racial literacy, and developing a school environment with an explicit anti-racist emphasis (Skerrett, 2011). It is important to start working towards implementing recommendations like these given that the dominant themes in school texts and student perceptions in Western countries currently emphasize individualistic or simplistic perspectives on racism (Bryan, 2012; Montgomery, 2005). An official curriculum that singularly focused on multiculturalism without incorporating additional approaches like anti-racist pedagogy makes it difficult for teachers and administrators to promote a school environment where students and staff can engage in meaningful, alternative discourses about race and racism (Skerrett, 2009, 2011).

**Youth-adult partnerships addressing racism in schools.** Previous research has acknowledged that youth care about their school environment because many of them spend a

large part of their lives in educational settings. Young people believe teachers and schools may not be properly equipped to manage racial issues and seek to be included when addressing racism (Checkoway, 2011). For example, Speaking Rights, a program that engages youth in actions supporting human rights across Canada, has had several successful community events conducted by youth that center around addressing racism. One such British Columbia-based project, called Write4Rights, used graffiti walls and awareness campaigns to engage teachers and peers in discussions on racism and human rights. However, the authors acknowledged that, as a whole, Speaking Rights needs to expand their partnerships to include more decision-makers and teachers (Cooper et al., 2013). Furthermore, egalitarian youth-adult partnerships are generally more difficult to sustain in schools because they are structured as environments of authority (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Linds, Sammel, & Goulet, 2013). Most high schools are more impersonal and controlling than their primary school counterparts, which clashes with a time in adolescence where youth are looking to individuate themselves but still retain supportive relationships with adults (Deutsch & Jones, 2008). To successfully implement youth-adult partnerships in school setting, a model would be needed that can address this dissonance. If done well, fostering youth engagement to address racism through school-supported youth-adult partnerships has the potential to address these recommendations as well as limitations from previous works. As mentioned previously, scholars have suggested that best practices for youth-adult partnerships involve focusing work on issues of social justice and power, as well as legitimizing youth participation through institutionalizing roles for youth (Camino, 2000; Cooper et al., 2013; Ungar, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005, 2013).

**Establishing the local context.** The current study has been conducted in a school board in Southern Ontario, which has a few prior examples of student-involved approaches for

addressing racism and promoting equity, where equity is understood by the school board as the equity of opportunity and the equity of access to a full range of programs, the delivery of services, and resources. The Wellness Acceptance Youth Voices Empowerment (WAYVE) program, formally known as Working Against Youth Violence Everywhere was developed in the region by local community organizations in response to a racially motivated murder. WAYVE is a peer-led, anti-bullying program that seeks to promote positive mental health for adolescents. In an unpublished dissertation, Pister (2010) found that high school students partaking in the program showed increased levels of empathy, enhanced norms against bullying, and an increased likelihood of utilizing positive bullying intervention techniques (Pister, 2010). However, WAYVE has not been consistently implemented across all schools in the region. Additionally, Pister noted that the program impact was lessened by its large-scale application. Typically, WAYVE functions through assemblies and workshops addressing multiple grades within a school, but it was found that this broad style of application influenced its efficacy. While impact may have been reduced by the large-scale presentations, students involved with the WAYVE team as peer-educators experienced positive outcomes through an increased sense of community, greater awareness of community resources and issues, as well as skill enhancement and personal growth, which largely mimics the literature exploring the benefits of youth engagement.

Another resource has been the school board's Equity and Inclusion Office which addresses human rights issues and provides equity and inclusion-based programming for staff and students. In the past, the Equity and Inclusion Office's capstone workshop was an annual multi-day youth equity leadership summit for high school representatives. Students were educated by school board experts and other trained adult facilitators on issues of power and privilege and participated in workshops to identify the strengths of their schools for promoting equity, as well

as areas for improvement. Students developed action plans to address these gaps, and follow-up meetings were held several months later to assess progress and help students encountering implementation difficulties. The summit included some components of youth-adult partnerships by having a teacher for each school who was encouraged to participate in the workshops and acted as a school-based support after the summit ended. As of the 2017-18 school year, these summits were discontinued based on concerns of sustainability and efficacy. Since then, there has been a shift in resources at the Equity and Inclusion Office towards larger-scale events, such as organizing a Black Student Conference and providing teacher training for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy which focuses on respecting and understanding the complexities of student difference as well as integrating a student's prior knowledge and experience into the classroom (Gay, 2000; Ladson-billings, 1995; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). While the initiatives highlighted here seek to broadly address issues of equity and student well-being, with a few exceptions most have not sought to fully engage in youth-adult partnership work or explicitly focus on anti-racist efforts. Many of the evidence-based programs currently taking place in the region primarily focus on social-emotional development or anti-bullying programs (Pister, 2010; Schonert-Reichl, Smith, Zaidman-Zait, & Hertzman, 2011). Furthermore, many school-based initiatives taking place in the region have yet to be evaluated for program outcomes or efficacy. There is still more research that can be done within the region to implement and evaluate school initiatives that focus on empowering youth-adult partnerships and anti-racism.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

**Empowerment theory.** Much of the contemporary youth engagement research reviewed here centers on youth empowerment and facilitating empowering partnerships. The current research project sought to reflect this by using empowerment theory as its main theoretical

framework, wherein empowerment is understood as the process of increasing power for individuals, families and communities to gain mastery over their affairs, and where youth empowerment, specifically, involves power sharing so that youth can become agents of change in their own lives (Dupuis & Mann-Feder, 2013; Pearrow, 2008; Rappaport, 1987).

Empowerment theory emphasizes the concept of self-determination and active engagement along a spectrum of individual and community matters (Pearrow, 2008; Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman et al., 2011). Other necessary features for empowered settings, especially when working with marginalized youth, include: the ability to produce and act on one's knowledge; supporting and encouraging people's hopes and dreams for the future; fostering social commitment and liking your collaborators; as well as operating in an environment of openness (Yuen & Context, 2013).

While scholars agree that youth have historically been disempowered from participating in society (Camino, 2005; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013), contemporary models for youth-adult partnerships, in conjunction with research on best practices, are seeking to shift that reality by finding ways to promote empowered youth participation in decision-making processes. When done well, youth-adult partnerships can foster relationships that support empowerment as well as work towards reforming disempowering settings (Maton, 2008; Zeldin et al., 2013). These partnerships can strengthen empowerment potential by providing opportunities for youth to influence fundamental decisions, build their capacity to become independent decision makers, and work with positive adult role models to make tangible community contributions (Zimmerman et al., 2011). Integrating practices that foster youth-adult relationships and engage youth meaningfully in decision-making may promote an empowering process for youth by providing opportunities for self-determination and active involvement, and in hetero-racial

contexts the existence of discrimination against racial and other minorities must also be considered.

**Critical race theory.** Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a framework for my own reflections regarding my position as a White researcher engaging with racialized communities, as well as the institutional structures that have placed me in a position to take on this research.

Initially developed by legal scholars, CRT centers on the systematic marginalization of racialized minorities and altering the interconnections between race, power and oppression (Breen, 2018; Crenshaw, 1995; Kishimoto, 2018; Park, Yoon, & Crosby, 2016). Its core tenants posit that racism is ever-present, supported through the social construction of concepts like race, and persists because dominant racial groups use it to maintain power. This framework also focuses on the impact of intersecting identities and recognizes the value of the lives and experiences of racialized people (Kishimoto, 2018; Park et al., 2016). In research, these values are reflected in qualitative methods that center voice when discussing racism in modern contexts (Breen, 2018). Critical Race Theory endeavours to address the negation of marginalized narratives in a society that continues to center White experience, while also illustrating how racism is becoming more nuanced and subtle to avoid detection (Breen, 2018; Curtis, 2017; Park et al., 2016). Critical Race Theory and empowerment theory share a similar purpose in that they both strive to be emancipatory frameworks working to expose institutionalized inequities (Breen, 2018; Camino, 2005).

As a framework, CRT can often be found in studies addressing racism in educational systems or in partnerships focusing on issues of social justice. Scholars using a CRT lens for youth engagement work have highlighted the importance schools play in preparing youth for engaging in discourses on race and racism in adulthood (Curtis, 2017). Additionally, CRT has



been used to expose the mistreatment of racialized groups in schools, as well as how downplaying the role of race in schools can lead to institutionalized racism being ignored (Curtis, 2017; Leonardo, 2013; Stovall, 2016). Work like this highlights the importance of engaging with students in a meaningful way to address racism in school environments. Moreover, public schools continue to be limited by a Eurocentric curriculum with simplistic portrayals of racism that rarely address systemic factors (Bryan, 2012; Kishimoto, 2018; Zinga & Gordon, 2016). Critical Race Theory's centering of narratives, along with its more robust understanding of racism, can act as the groundwork for addressing some of these concerns, promoting partnerships which emphasize the voices of racialized students, and serving as a reminder for including institutional levels when addressing racism in schools.

**Implications from research and theory for the current research.** In the context of school-based, youth-adult partnerships, having students engaged in addressing racism through decision-making processes connects with the individual level of empowerment, as described by Zimmerman (2000), which is influenced by a person's involvement in the activities around them as well as their sense of control. At the community level, youth-adult partnerships that focus on social justice goals promote empowerment by increasing youth capacity to collaborate towards implementing social change (Pearrow, 2008). Another component in empowerment is the humanization of all parties involved, which connects to best practices for youth-adult partnerships regarding respecting youth contributions and recognizing them as stakeholders (Freire, 2006; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Yuen & Context, 2013). Through the partnership's structure, focus on social justice, centering of youth voice, and dedication to fostering positive relationships among members, the study sought to incorporate major components of empowerment theory.

Critical Race Theory also contains practices for incorporating an anti-racist lens for researchers engaging in work with racialized communities (Kishimoto, 2018). Thus, using the tenants and practices of CRT provided a framework for conceptualizing racism in the project's local school, for developing a methodology that centered racialized youth narratives, and for critically reflecting on my engagement in the research.

### **Rationale for the Current Study**

Based on the review of the research, the youth engagement field has had to come up against a history of negative public perceptions portraying youth as incapable of meaningful participation, but, a shift towards strength-based approaches is trending. However, this field is still in its beginning stages and there are still many areas for research to have an impact. In the literature a dearth of models and overall experience in implementing and sustaining youth-adult partnerships has been identified (Camino, 2005), as well as revealed few studies on how organizations can plan for and ensure that youth are incorporated into decision-making processes (Bulling et al., 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). Other areas of youth engagement that have been identified as needing further research include: the quality of the youth-adult relationships (Vaclavik et al., 2017); the benefits of participation for youth (Checkoway & Gutiérrez, 2006); core elements of effective partnerships (Akiva et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2010; Zeldin et al., 2013); and the empowerment potential of partnerships in different contexts, including public schools (Checkoway, 2011; Ramey et al., 2016; Zeldin et al., 2013).

Research on addressing racism in schools has demonstrated the need for more alternative discourses on racism, as well as the incorporation of anti-racist approaches (Skerrett, 2009, 2011). Given that schools can act as a source of racism and discrimination for racialized students, scholars have also asked for more work determining how these environments can be

more accommodating (Curtis, 2017). Additionally, youth-adult partnerships that focus on issues of racism have documented needing to include more adults from organizations such as public schools (Cooper et al., 2013). Finally, research still needs to be done on promoting the sustainability and efficacy of egalitarian partnerships in authority-driven educational institutions (Deutsch & Jones, 2008; Linds et al., 2013), as well as on implementing the youth-adult partnership best practice of focusing on issues of social justice and power (Zeldin et al., 2013).

### **Research Objectives and Questions**

This study examined if meaningful youth engagement can be achieved through school-based youth-adult partnerships that focus on responding to racism and incorporate best practices for creating empowering spaces. As demonstrated in literature, there are instances of youth-adult partnerships in schools addressing issues of human rights, however few of these have a singular focus on racism and fewer still within the Canadian context. The objectives of this study were informed by these gaps in the research as well as recommendations for more foundational work on youth-adult partnerships. The study sought to build off recommendations for future research by providing opportunities for young people to actively collaborate with adults and participate in high-impact decision-making processes to combat racism in a school context. An additional goal was to provide a rich account of a youth-adult partnership and use member's experiences of the process to assess its effects on fostering youth voice and empowerment. Based on the summarized findings from the research presented in the literature review above, the proposed project built upon existing literature by exploring the following questions: How can youth-adult partnerships be utilized to address racism within secondary schools? What are participants' experiences of this process?

## **Methodology**

### **Community Entry**

I have been involved with the community partner for this study, the local school board, (this research setting is described in more detail below), since the fall of 2016. I was placed in their Equity and Inclusion Office as part of a required 200-hour practicum component for my master's of community psychology program at Wilfrid Laurier University. I proceeded to spend the next year and a half working with my practicum supervisor, an Equity and Inclusion Officer, on a variety of school-based programs and initiatives to foster a less oppressive school environment for marginalized students. The experience also afforded me the chance to receive training about working with marginalized communities, developing awareness of power differentials and personal privileges, as well as overarching issues of inequity and exclusion. During my placement, my supervisor and I discussed how I could connect my research interests in youth-adult partnerships to the school board in a way that would benefit them.

In spring 2017, there was a series of conversations going on at a local high school involving a group of students wanting school board support for addressing racism at their school. At this time, I had yet to become involved. The students were connected by school staff and a member of a local community organization to my practicum supervisor who listened to their experiences and concerns during a focus group. Given that the resources of the Equity and Inclusion Office for the following school year were already dedicated to several major projects, my supervisor thought this work would be an excellent fit with my research interests and would provide support to the school board by detailing student experiences and potentially providing programming recommendations for the school. It was at this point, which occurred in the summer of 2017, that I was brought into the discussions and told about what had happened thus

far. From then on, up until the start of the study, there were discussions between myself, my practicum supervisor, and my thesis advisor to discuss my suitability for leading the researcher and school board expectations, as well as in-person discussions and online correspondences to connect myself with all the adults involved in the discussions, i.e., one of the school's vice principals, the community member, and the Equity and Inclusion Officer. These three people provided letters of support for the project that were used as part of the ethics applications for both Laurier and the school board and, in addition to the students, were a catalyst for starting this work.

### **Positionality**

I came into this project as a middle-class, educated, queer, White woman who was born in Canada with English as a first language. My wealth of privileges has resulted in limited experience with discrimination, and I have not personally experienced racism nor its effects. I continually benefit from a system that is maintained through the oppression of racialized communities. While the project focus on addressing racism was not researcher-imposed, my involvement as a White researcher working with racialized youth required constant self-reflection to try to ensure that my behaviours and contributions did not perpetuate racism or uphold power imbalances in the partnership. My conduct as a researcher was guided by the work of Kishimoto (2018) on anti-racist approaches for teachers. While the article's focus was on post-secondary faculty as instructors, the recommendations were also relevant for White researchers working with racialized communities. Kishimoto recommends that those in positions of power reflect on their own racial identity and instead of withdrawing your voice during discussions of racism, which may only serve to mute the effects of Whiteness, acknowledge that you are also on a journey of learning where the lived experiences of students and community

members are immensely valuable and can be a source of knowledge. Other recommendations that I utilized for my work in this research included: not conducting research for your own gain at the expense of the community; including participants in the research process; sharing information in an accessible way for the community; involving students to develop the structure of the project; operating in an open and transparent manner; being ethical and fair to one another; and committing to continual self-reflection and a willingness to listen to others about White privilege (Kishimoto, 2018).

I approached this research as someone who operates under a personal principle of fairness and as having had several years of experience working with students in educational settings, from elementary to post-secondary. As a public-school teacher in South Korea teaching Grades K-9, I believed in giving my students a voice in their education and consciously worked towards giving them opportunities to decide how they wanted class structured (within the boundaries of the required curriculum). Overall, this was a successful strategy; I was able to maintain positive relationships with many of my students and these connections helped me learn about the culture I was immersed in as well as highlighted the maturity and expertise my students brought to their education. Given these positive experiences, I approached this partnership in a similar manner, with additional attention to how my current position as a university researcher influences both actual and perceived power. As such, I tried to actively engage in discussions without imposing specific structures or directions. Partnership members, especially youth, directed the flow of conversations and the decisions made each meeting, with my role focused on merging together themes, creating a safe space for discussion, and acting as a resource and connector for other adults. Throughout the process, I continually reflected on how I was

integrating the anti-racist approaches outlined by Kishimoto (2018) and was mindful of my contributions to the project.

### **Research Paradigm and Approach**

I chose to ground the study in a transformative research paradigm, informed by the research objectives of providing empowerment opportunities for youth, and working to address racism through meaningful youth engagement. The transformative paradigm was built off the works of Guba & Lincoln (2005) and Banks & Banks (1995) and is rooted in the principle that research should have an action component that has the potential to change the lives of the participants, the researcher, and the organizations they are residing in. In addition, multiple narratives are used to construct a more complete world view and the development of a trusting relationship between researchers and participants is considered essential (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Mertens, 2012). Transformative research consistently uses qualitative research methods in its data collection (Mertens, 2009). The paradigm's axiology emphasizes the promotion of social justice and human rights while being cognizant of the pervasiveness of oppression affecting the communities you work with. Its ontology recognizes that multiple interpretations of reality are shaped by contexts and privileges, where some versions of reality are typically valued over others. When engaging in research, the investigator needs to consider which versions of understanding will lead to furthering social justice. Additionally, transformative research is grounded in an epistemology that emphasizes the link between researchers and their participants in knowledge construction (Mertens, 2012). These fundamental components were reflected in the study's focus on reforming an educational space that had been identified by students as oppressive to racialized youth, while also using an anti-racist lens to guide my conduct during the partnership. The transformative ontological stance

acts a justification for prioritizing the narratives of racialized students who have experienced racial harm in the school environment, and its epistemology mimics best practices for youth-adult partnerships which emphasize establishing a co-learning environment.

This paradigm has strong associations with action research approaches and the frameworks of empowerment theory and Critical Race Theory (Cooper et al., 2013; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). As such, the transformative paradigm aligns with the theoretical underpinnings used throughout the research. Additionally, scholars have argued that in the context of youth-adult partnerships, having youth experience the outcomes of collective action itself can be transformative (Blanchet-Cohen, Warner, Di Mambro, & Bedeauz, 2013). Furthermore, the research project employed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach through active collaboration between me and the partnership members, and with my decision to include my own personal experiences in the research. PAR's other core tenets include relationship-building and balancing power between researchers and participants, as well as translating research into action (Mertens, 2009; Wong et al., 2010). Participatory Action Research is well-suited for youth engagement work because its tenets directly relate to, and help implement, the best practices of empowered youth-adult partnerships. By focusing on relationship-building processes and providing opportunities for the on-going, informed participation of participants, the study sought to accomplish a form of action research. This commitment to a PAR approach further enforced the connection between the study and its transformative paradigm.

### **Research Context**

**Location.** The study took place at a local high school located in a Southern Ontario school board. Home to a little over half a million residents, individuals who identified as visual minorities in the region make up 19 per cent of the total population, which represented an



increase of over 60 per cent over this decade (Region of Waterloo, 2016). The school board consists of more than 120 schools throughout the region, serving approximately 63,000 students, making it one of the larger school boards in Ontario. Within the school board there is an Equity and Inclusion Office consisting of two Equity and Inclusion Officers and supervised by one of the Superintendents of Student Achievement and Well-Being. The Equity and Inclusion Office specializes in addressing human rights issues within the school board and providing equity and inclusion-based programming for students and staff.

**Community partners.** The research represents a collaboration between Wilfrid Laurier University and a local school board. The decision to partner with the school board was based on recommendations in the literature for more research on youth-adult partnerships in different organizational contexts, such as public schools (Akiva et al., 2014; Checkoway, 2011; Ramey et al., 2016). To conduct work in a public school requires the involvement and approval of that school board's ethics committee, making a relationship with the WDRSB essential for the work. The school board's Equity and Inclusion Office was a direct link to the research by connecting the partnership to crucial resources at the board and by having an Equity and Inclusion Officer participating in the partnership as an adult member.

I also consider the local high school itself to be an immensely valuable partner, offering both student and staff support. Staff support took the form of one of the vice principals participating as an adult member in the partnership and making sure the project always had tangible supports such as dedicated spaces, recruitment resources, exemptions for students attending project meetings during class time or off-campus and acting as a contact for students in between meetings. Student support was twofold; both from the youth who participated in the partnership, and the original students who set the project's creation in motion by requesting a

collaboration with the school board to address issues they had identified in their school. While not all the original students participated in the project's partnership, without their initial efforts this project would have never been able to happen.

Finally, a key reason I felt comfortable taking on this work was because the project was supported by a representative from a local community organization (i.e., not the school board) which, among other objectives, advocates for the welfare of racialized youth. This individual participated in the original discussions that occurred before my involvement and provided a letter of support for the research during the ethics application process. During the research, a different member of this organization attended two of the meetings but was not a research participant.

### **Research Design**

The research was conducted as a descriptive, single case study which acted as an in-depth analysis of a single unit (i.e., an individual, organization, community or other group). This format allows for a richer exploration of the dynamics of a single case (Patton, 2002). For this study, the unit was the youth-adult partnership set within a local high school. Schools typically have access to the largest numbers of youth in a community (Youniss et al., 2002), making it an ideal environment for exploring youth engagement in organizational settings. Part of this case study's unit was artificially formed during an intentional recruitment process and the other part formed organically through meetings which preceded this research's development. The scope of the design was limited to a single school because the concerns of the original students were centered on this specific context.

The partnership was designed such that students and I attended all the meetings over the course of the project. However, the adults had less flexibility in their schedules and so were only brought in three or four times (depending on availability) over the course of the project. Focus

groups and interviews were designed to accommodate schedules. Students had their focus groups during the regularly scheduled project meetings and for any that were unable to attend, individual interviews were set up during spare periods. Interviews with the adults were conducted individually and were based on each person's individual schedule.

### **Participants**

The participants ( $N = 8$ ) included five students from the local school, one of the school's vice principals, a school board Equity and Inclusion Officer, and me; I directly participated in the research as a facilitator and a member of the partnership. Demographic information was not collected, so the descriptions here are a result of self-disclosure during the research process. At the time of the study, youth participants were in Grades 11 and 12, and all self-identified as Muslim women and racialized. Additionally, some students came from East-African backgrounds while others identified as South-Asian. Of the five students, four had immigrated to Canada within their lifetime. Regarding the adult participants, one chose to describe herself as a middle-age, upper-middle class, White woman with a partner, while the other chose to be identified as a South-Asian, heterosexual, cisgender, Canadian woman with privilege. Both adult participants hold positions of power within their respective workplace.

### **Procedure**

**Sampling and participant recruitment.** The research employed purposive sampling based on interest levels, commitment, and racialization. Youth participants were the only ones recruited as adult participants had already been self-selected. The invitation to participate was first offered by the Equity and Inclusion Officer to students involved in the original focus group that occurred before the research. However, many of them had already graduated by the time the project was beginning. Of the remaining students, one expressed an interest in maintaining their

connection to the work and eventually came on to join the partnership. The remaining students were recruited through classroom announcements and a school-wide poster campaign. The materials were created by me and distributed by the school's vice principal (see Appendix C and D for recruitment materials). Posters were placed in high-traffic areas throughout the school for the first month and a half of the school's winter term, while classroom announcements were done by student representatives twice in January 2018.

To determine if the partnership matched students' schedules and interests, all who expressed curiosity in the project were invited to attend the first meeting to learn more about its structure and goals. Students were informed about the time commitment (i.e., one-hour, weekly meetings over the course of three months) and given a brief overview of the project's timeline. After this, everyone attending the meeting still expressed an interest in participating, so we also discussed the consent process and students were given a consent form (Appendix E) for their guardians to sign and return the following week. While the invitation to participate was circulated to all students at the school, the emphasis was on involving racialized youth, which was reflected in the recruitment material. This was based on best practice recommendations which endorse including the most marginalized youth in partnerships centered around issues of social justice, such as racism. This approach helps ensure a more authentic inclusivity within the work (Bulling et al., 2013). In the end, only racialized students chose to participate.

The adult participants were predetermined based on the project's history. They had been involved in original discussions that occurred before the research's conception and had expressed a wish to continue participation. As previously mentioned, including adults from different organizational levels has been recommended as a best practice in youth-adult partnerships because of their ability to provide multiple resources and supports for youth. Moreover, having

an adult on-site after project meetings, such as a vice principal, acts as a direct point of contact for students if they were to experience any negative backlash from their participation in the project (Evans & Lund, 2013). I did not attempt to recruit any other staff or administrators from the school. This decision was made because the original focus group that led to the creation of this project had mentioned that some of the racial harm in the school was being perpetuated by select teachers (who were unidentified). To ensure that prospective students had access to a safe environment, it was decided not to invite any staff who could influence students' grades or their classrooms environments.

Finally, an invitation to participate was extended to the community member who had been involved in the original focus group from before the project's creation. While they were interested in participating, scheduling conflicts made this too difficult. Instead a different member from the same organization was recommended to us. This individual attended two of the partnership meetings, engaged with the students, and had many constructive discussions with me outside of the project. However, the person chose not to participate in the research portion of the project and so was not included in data collection.

### **Research Process**

Before the start of the study, there was a one-hour meeting in December 2017 with all adult collaborators to talk about the project structure, garner feedback, and discuss student recruitment. The study followed the progress of eleven weekly meetings which took place over the course of 13 weeks between February to May 2018, while data collection continued until mid-June 2018. All partnership meetings were conducted in a conference room at the school and occurred over the one-hour lunch break. The research process was split into three stages: an introductory phase, a working phase, and an exit phase. Whenever their schedules allowed,

students attended all meetings, which were facilitated by me, while adults typically attended one partnership meeting per stage (not including individual interviews).

**Stage one, introductory phase.** The first stage acted as an entry phase and lasted for five sessions; the purpose of this stage was to start relationship building through unstructured conversations and to understand more about the local school context. The first meeting functioned as an introduction between me, the students, and the vice principal. We engaged in discussions about the project's purpose as well as what types of outcomes could reasonably be expected. The intention was to start the partnership off with transparency by acknowledging potential limitations based on school or school board frameworks and protocols. As the school board's ethics committee required all students to have guardian consent, this meeting was also used to go over the youth consent forms and provide students with guardian consent forms to bring back the following week. The vice principal was also given their consent form at this time, while the remaining adult collaborator received their consent form when they joined the meeting the following week.

The second week continued relationship-building processes by bringing together all partnership members and providing a space for the students to talk with the two adults and myself. The goal was to learn more about each other through unstructured discussions. The remaining three sessions of this stage were semi-structured focus groups and included just me and the students. A set of questions were provided centering around personal understandings of racism, impressions of the school environment and previous experience or expectations of youth-adult partnerships. Students selected which questions to discuss each day and further discussions developed organically from these starting points. Around the same time, outside of the school meetings, I met with both adult members individually to have semi-structured interviews

utilizing the same core questions (See Appendix F for question set). Furthermore, time was used during this stage to collectively develop a Code of Conduct for maintaining respectful group discussions and I used some of time (and in subsequent stages whenever relevant) to explain the academic elements of the project. For example, I shared a timeline summarizing my research's proposed process, discussed the importance of studying youth-adult partnerships in schools, and explained how the partnership would be incorporated into my master's thesis work.

**Stage two, working phase.** The second stage of the research process took place over four sessions and involved having the partnership collaborate on what they would like to see implemented in the school to address racism. Also, at the start of each meeting in this stage, we reviewed the previous week's progress. This was done to update anyone who may have missed a prior session as well as to give members the opportunity to expand upon or clarify earlier statements or discussions. This phase was largely unstructured and changed week-to-week based on member's needs and questions. Students were asked to take an active, leading role in this stage by providing directions for discussions, feedback on that day's progress, and suggestions for future meetings. The purpose was to provide opportunities for students to make decisions that affected the partnership's progress as well as project outcomes. My role during this stage was to provide supplementary information, keep track of the meeting's progress through field notes, and synthesize discussions into thematic summaries for practical applications. Towards the end of this stage, the adult collaborators joined us for a meeting to see what recommendations we had developed and to provide their perspectives and feedback on which were most feasible as well as additional directions to consider. This focused our efforts in later meetings on recommendations that had the potential for the greatest impact.

**Stage three, exit phase.** This phase was initially planned to have a comparable number of meetings as the other two stages however, we collectively wanted to finish our weekly meetings before the start of the school's exam season. As such, the exit phase was the shortest stage, consisting of only two meetings. The first session was a semi-structured, student focus group meant to explore the partnership's strengths, areas for improvement, as well as participant's overall experiences of the project. The adult collaborators were also asked these questions in individual, semi-structured interviews outside of the regular meeting times (See Appendix G for question set). The final meeting was attended by all members and provided an opportunity for everyone to share their final thoughts or experiences as well as discuss next steps for our partnership and for implementing our recommendations.

Data were collected through field notes, focus groups and interviews. I took ten sets of field notes detailing the progress of each partnership meeting that occurred after consent forms were signed and returned (i.e., the first meeting in stage one was excluded). The first focus groups and interviews were used to better understand member's experiences and understandings coming into the partnership as well as the context of the local school. The second set of focus groups and interviews related to my research questions and were analyzed to inform the discussion portion of the thesis. A chart highlighting the connections between the data collection and analysis to the project's action and research components is in Appendix H. While the focus of the thesis was on how youth-adult partnerships are utilized, a tangible outcome of the work was a series of recommendations for programming and initiatives that can be implemented into the school to create less oppressive spaces for racialized students.

### **Data Collection**



Data collection occurred over the course of several months of interactions with the participants. Between March to June 2018, multiple forms of data were collected, including focus groups, interviews, and field notes. All focus groups and interviews were designed by me. My experience with focus group/interview guides was informed by a masters level qualitative methods course and all guides were sent to my supervisor for feedback prior to their use. A few days before the focus groups/interviews I sent the question sets to participants to allow them time to reflect on the questions. While all interviews and field notes were audio recorded, I also took notes of discussion points that stood out to me at that time.

In addition, student participants were offered the opportunity to provide feedback or additional reflections after the project's completion as well as in between meetings via an online, password-protected message board (i.e., Padlet) that automatically anonymized user's posts. This message board was also used to provide students everyday access to a blank consent form, our Code of Conduct for group discussions, and a copy of the recommendations the partnership had developed by the end of the project. In the end, one student chose to submit additional reflections on the project via email.

**Focus groups.** During the research, I conducted two focus groups for youth participants. The first focus group was initially intended to be a contained, semi-structured 60-minute session. However, after observing student dynamics and the flexibility in conversations, the questions from the focus group were split over the course of three meetings and used as jumping points for group discussion. Students picked which questions to focus on for that day and engaged in unstructured conversations around that topic. The purpose of the first focus group questions was two-fold. First it was meant to establish an understanding of each member's experiences and perceptions coming into the project regarding youth-adult partnerships and racism. Second, it

helped establish the local context by documenting student's opinions of their school as well as what prior initiatives have taken place to address racism and what students would like to see happen. These discussions were audio-recorded and turned into summary field notes which then informed meeting structures and dialogues for the later stages of the research process.

The second focus group was conducted by me during our second-last meeting of the project. It was a 60-minute, semi-structured format with questions that were constructed off themes that emerged during the research process. Questions centered on participants' overall experiences of the project, perceived strengths of the partnership, areas for improvement, and qualities they preferred in a partnership facilitator. The flow of the focus group moved from asking more general to more specific questions. As these questions addressed the project's research questions, this focus group was audio recorded to be fully transcribed for analysis.

**Interviews.** To accommodate for less flexible work schedules, and to create a focus group environment for youth without the added dynamics of partnership members with institutional power, the two adult participants were interviewed individually instead of participating in the focus groups. Interviews were conducted by me at the participants' offices and were between 45 to 60 minutes in length. Adult participants were asked the same questions as the youth and had the same purposes. Like the focus groups, the first interview was audio recorded and turned into summary notes, while the second interview was fully transcribed and analyzed.

Furthermore, two students were unable to attend the second focus group session because of prior commitments. Due to conflicting schedules, each student ended up having to be interviewed individually at school during a time that was convenient for them. These interviews

lasted between 30 to 45 minutes in length and they were asked the same questions as the other youths. Their responses were also transcribed and used in the final analysis.

**Field Notes.** Field notes were kept by myself during the entire process. During each meeting, I made notes of events or discussion points that stood out to me at the time. I tried to document themes that came up during the day's discussion, what steps were being taken in the partnership towards the goal of addressing racism, and my personal experiences of engaging in the partnership. All meetings were audio-recorded and once the meetings were over, I used those recordings to expand upon my notes, resulting in weekly summaries. These notes were used to address the research question of how youth-adult partnerships are utilized in a school context and were analyzed along with the data from the focus groups and interviews.

**Additional data.** One student chose to send me an audio recording and written reflection addressing some of the focus group questions and their experiences with the project. She was one of the students who had to be interviewed individually but felt she had more to add after the interview had concluded. This information was added into her interview transcription and was included in the data analysis.

### **Establishing the Quality of Data**

Several strategies were employed to establish the quality of data during the collection stage including: prolonged engagement, member checking, and auditing (Padgett, 2012).

**Prolonged engagement.** Padgett (2012) argues that prolonged, meaningful engagement helps build relationships between the researcher and their participants, which decreases the chance of contributors withholding information or experiences. The study sought to create an environment that fosters this type of relationship building by giving participants (including myself) numerous introductory sessions to engage in unstructured discussions. These

relationships were furthered strengthened over several months of collaborating and sharing together. Additionally, an unforeseen advantage was that some of the students came into the project already friends and all youth participants knew of each other and had had positive experiences with each other in the past.

**Member checking.** As detailed by Padgett (2012), member checking is the process of having the researcher garner verification of collected data by going back to participants for feedback. In the latter stages of the research process this occurred at the beginning of meetings when summaries of the previous week were shared with participants for clarification and validation. In addition, the recommendations that came out of our meeting discussions were provided online on our password protected message board. As such, youth has access to this document everyday as well as the opportunity to edit or expand upon it. Finally, an outline of the major themes that resulted from the data analysis were emailed to the participants to allow them the chance to provide feedback. The result of the member-checking did not result in any revisions to the final themes; however, some participants requested grammatical edits for their quotes (i.e., the meaning of the statements were not altered). It is important to note that Padgett questions the usefulness of member checking because it challenges the status of the researcher as objective and deals with multiple realities attempting to converge into one single reality. However, this research is rooted in a Participatory Action Research approach as well as the theoretical frameworks of empowerment theory and Critical Race Theory, all of which emphasize leveling power dynamics between researchers and participants. As such, within these frameworks, it is acceptable for the researcher's narratives to not be prioritized over participants'. As well, because the research is rooted in a transformative paradigm, there is no need for a singular reality to be agreed upon.

## **Data Analysis**

As the purpose of the second set of interviews and focus groups was to address the research questions by documenting participants' experiences, they were transcribed verbatim by me and included details such as laughter and pauses. The first set of interviews and focus groups were designed to better understand the school context, members' pre-existing experiences and knowledge, and act as starting points for further conversations. These were summarized into notes, akin to the field notes taken during each partnership meeting. When using note-based materials for analysis, scholars recommend using the audio recordings to verify points of interest and as material that can be returned to later to garner more information (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). Following this recommendation, I used the audio recordings of the first interviews and focus groups, as well as meetings where field notes were being collected, to isolate quotations and to expand upon notes taken at the time of that meeting. Once summaries and transcriptions were completed, I re-read the material to familiarize myself with the data, all identifying information was removed, and the data were uploaded into NVivo 11, a software program for organizing and managing qualitative data.

To maintain consistency during the analysis, several decisions were made regarding my approach to the data. First, I chose to conduct my analysis inductively, working with the data from the ground up and linking codes to the data rather than to preconceived categories based off of literature and theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002). Second, I initially approached the data at the semantic level, coding for what was explicitly present instead of identifying underlying assumptions, conceptualizations, and ideologies. Interpretations of broader meanings occurred after the data had been organized into patterns based off semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I also made a choice on how much of the total body of data to

code. As this was my first time conducting a qualitative analysis, I based my approach off recommendations for novices in this type of research and coded everything that was collected. This was also my rationale for choosing to split passages of data into several codes, maintaining more detail right from the start, rather than beginning by lumping passages into single codes, which may result in a superficial analysis if not done correctly (Saldana, 2009).

My coding methods came from the coding manual by Saldana (2009) and were based off the methodological needs of my study and my level of experience. Throughout the coding process, I engaged in memoing to document my personal reflections, justify the inclusion of a code, and to reflect on emerging connections. During the first cycle of coding I used the Descriptive Coding method. A type of elemental coding, Descriptive Coding summarizes the topic of a passage into a short word or phrase which builds the basic categories for future coding cycles. It is commonly used for those learning how to code and for projects that have multiple forms of data collected over various time periods, both of which were the case for my research. This initial cycle resulted in a categorized inventory of my data's content and was used as the basis for my second cycle using Axial Coding. By searching for shared connections and relationships, my Axial Coding cycle reassembled data that was split in the first round into conceptual categories. In this phase, codes began to move away from tangible topics to more abstract concepts. I continued this cycle until I achieved saturation, i.e., when no new information emerged from the data.

Both coding methods documented by Saldana (2009), are recommended as the basis for the first stages of thematic analysis. For this final stage, I used the guide developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) on thematic analysis in psychological research. Having generated initial codes and collated them into categories, I used mind-mapping to develop potential themes. I

then reviewed these themes by looking at how the initial codes and categories fit into them, as well as how the themes matched the entirety of the data and the research questions. Once each theme was clearly defined, they were related back to the research questions and a framework was created where categories and codes were merged under their corresponding theme (see Appendix I for the final codebook created in NVivo 11).

During the analysis process, I was fortunate enough to have multiple opportunities to share results with partnership members to receive feedback and ensure that it was accurate to their experiences. I met in person with five of the collaborators during the initial coding cycles, where I presented them with my preliminary codes and groupings. As well, once I had completed my analysis and had a framework in place, I sent it out an email to all members and invited them to share thoughts or feedback. Finally, quotes were selected from the data that illustrated some of the key themes and were run by each respective collaborator for their approval.

### **Findings**

For clarity, the final themes that emerged from the analysis have been summarized and presented based on which of the two research questions they address. Two of the major themes, student-driven discussions and adult contributions, spoke to the first research question and explored the tangible processes of how the partnership was utilized for its goal of addressing racism. Acting as a bridge between the two research questions, strengths and challenges document participants' reflections on the concrete elements of the partnership. The remaining themes of engagement, empowerment and allyship address the second research question by exploring participant outcomes from being involved in the partnership.

Please note that for all quotes, pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality.

### **Addressing Racism Through a Youth-Adult Partnership**

This partnership focused on giving students the agency to make meaningful decisions in the project's structure and content, with adults supporting these choices. As the partnership progressed, it took the form of student-driven discussions that helped identify areas of concern within the school and the school board at large. These conversations, coupled with resources provided by adults, formed the basis for developing recommendations and actions that target student, school, and school board levels (see Appendix J for the recommendations summary). This process did not always occur in a linear fashion. For example, one workshop proposal was developed in the middle of the final focus group when the talk circled back to student-teacher interactions, a discussion that had happened weeks prior. In the following section, I highlight the main topics that were discussed during the partnership and how adults contributed.

**Student-driven discussions.** Discussions were student-driven in that youth were the most engaged in these exploratory talks and directed their progress. As facilitator, I would provide an initial prompt based off the question set from the first focus group guide. The students would select which question(s) to use as starting points for that day and my responsibility was to ensure that each student had the opportunity to contribute and to keep conversation moving with additional prompts, if necessary. The rest of my time was spent in a reactionary role, taking notes, responding to conversations, and connecting to potential themes or courses of action. Similarly, other adult members also chose to focus on listening or adding onto ongoing discussions without directing the flow of conversation itself. During interviews, adults justified this non-directive stance by emphasizing the importance of centering student voice and choice.



“I tried not to insert too much of myself into the process or the project because this really is about student voice... In a general sense, youth-adult partnerships, adults should really pave the way for students to be able to share and lead the project and lead the process.” (Dhara)

As such, the following topics largely occurred organically through unstructured conversations led by students and with minimal direction by adults.

To establish an understanding of what knowledge and experiences each member was entering with, we started with discussions centered on previous involvement, if any, in youth-adult partnerships as well as conceptualizations of racism. Most members had minimal to no previous involvement in youth-adult partnerships, however some students had positive experiences with their school’s WAYVE program (mentioned previously as a student-led group with adult supervision). All students in the partnership had lived experience as racialized women and were well-versed on many sociopolitical topics. Some adults shared these experiences of being racialized in Canada, while both adult participants either were, or had previously been, employed as Equity and Inclusion Officers for school boards. As for myself, I had been working with the school board’s Equity and Inclusion Office since 2016 as a placement student, being trained to work with marginalized student communities. As such, it was found that all members of the partnership were entering with a similar understanding of racism, one that is multifaceted with multiple intersections of identities, entrenched in power and takes place at multiple ecological levels. However, some felt that their peers or coworkers do not conceptualize racism in a similar way and while many may have good intentions, there is less of a likelihood of critical engagement with racism.

This line of conversation evolved into multiple discussions of personal experiences of racism and struggles with racial identity. Students talked about trying to come to terms with their racial identity, moving from periods of self-hate and emulating Whiteness, to eventually finding comfort in being themselves. One youth expressed the frustration that comes with having to always be aware of race and the stressors of trying to find space to exist authentically in a society that centers White experiences.

“It gets overwhelming sometimes. As a White person who doesn’t need to go through that phase to recognize you’re White, you just simply don’t think about race... Where do I go in life as a person of colour without making White people feel discriminated against?” (Amyra)

Throughout the partnership, there were also numerous conversations about specific acts of racism that had been experienced by youth. Several students talked about witnessing divisions among their local, racialized communities, such as from tribalism, only to come to school and experience racism. All youth agreed that they most often experience indirect racism at school including microaggressions, which are everyday slights or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile or negative messages to marginalized groups. Generally, participants agreed that while it was easier to deal with direct racism, they still felt unsupported by the school when other students made explicitly racist remarks.

The next set of conversations centered around the school’s local context, namely the overall environment, student culture, and representation of diversity. The school was identified as a high-pressure environment with many complex issues for students regarding mental health and wellbeing. However, members also described the school as a great place to be, rich in

administrative resources with some excellent teachers, and as a community that values hard work and provides opportunities for student engagement. Participants identified many student-run initiatives that support racialized students, and while they generally agreed that there was diversity among many student groups, as well as opportunities for leadership roles, they noted that high-power groups with influence over school matters, such as student council, tend to be dominated by White students.

Both students and adults agreed that there is great diversity among the student population when compared to other schools in the district. Youth mentioned feeling represented among the student population and that many of their peers have a good understanding of different cultures. However, they also noted that students are often divided by cultural groups and external, political factors create barriers between them. In contrast, the staff at the school was described by all participants as very homogenous and not being representative of the student population. This segued into talks about student-teacher interactions and difficulties engaging with White teachers who do not share their experiences of navigating the world as a racialized person. Many participants noted that students do not feel comfortable going to White staff members for help, and that concerns over power dynamics have often kept them from addressing racism perpetuated by their teachers. Additionally, youth collaborators discussed how they can identify allies among staff based on explicit actions and demonstrated knowledge of racial issues.

The final set of discussions explored current approaches and supports for addressing school-based racism. Overall, participants agreed that most interventions are situation-based and focused on individual behaviours. While there are a few staff-level initiatives taking place to promote racial literacy as well as an official administrative stance on addressing non-inclusive behaviours, students expressed a lack confidence in the staff's ability to follow through with a

school-based initiative to address acts of racial harm. Adults acknowledged that many attempts are started but rarely finished and that a lack of transparency in school processes, as well as time needed for change, makes it difficult for students to see progress in anti-racist efforts during their time in school. Youth talked about receiving minimal support from staff when running events promoting racial awareness and that they are intimidated to ask for additional help. Moreover, there is a censoring of topics for some of these events, with students often being encouraged by staff to focus on celebration and unity, rather than more serious issues. Students felt that this pushback from critically engaging in race-based discussions continues in the classroom, where many teachers opt to talk about racism in decontextualized, generalizing terms and have trouble intervening when conversations get out of hand. This led to difficult experiences for racialized youth, with minimal to no debriefing afterwards.

**Adult contributions.** The discussion themes detailed above formed the bulk of the partnership's content. When combined with contributions by adult collaborators, it resulted in a framework of recommendations for addressing racism. Students were given the opportunity to decide how often they wanted other adults present at the meetings. Furthermore, adults were asked to provide guidance, but beyond these two factors, how adults chose to participate was not governed. Ultimately, adults contributed most through feedback processes, using institutional influence to further the partnership's goals, providing tangible resources, and by promoting an environment of transparency by sharing information about administrative policies and processes. This is not to say that adults did not also actively engage in conversations. Indeed, some adults were able to find common ground with students through shared experiences, and all adults would occasionally jump in with personal perspectives or an education piece that contributed to the overall conversation. Adults wanted to provide the space for student voice and chose to actively

listen during many of the sessions and focused the bulk of their efforts towards the contributions mentioned above.

Most often adult collaborators engaged by providing feedback on recommendations that students were developing. During the introductory stage, adults spoke of initiatives and programming they would personally like to see implemented. In later meetings, once the partnership had a tangible series of recommendations, adults provided guidance on which were the most feasible and had the potential for the greatest impact. In the final stage, feedback was directed towards helping students organize a presentation for the board as well as develop a workshop proposal for the school. Adults used their knowledge of the school system to suggest which presentation approaches and recommendations would have the greatest impact on superintendents and administrators. This feedback process was closely connected with another major contribution from adults, which was providing information on organizational processes. Adults would often share what processes and programs were taking place at the administrative level to address racism, usually in response to a question from another participant. One adult shared her experiences of this process and how it was positively received.

“The girls were so amazing and open, wanting to learn and hear and know more about what we’re doing as a school board. They’ve been so positive and supportive and excited about what they’ve been learning about what we’re doing ... I felt like my voice was respected and I was wanted to be a part of the project” (Dhara)

This type of information sharing had two outcomes in the partnership. First, by learning more about school procedures, we were able to create detailed implementation plans for some initiatives. For example, when talking about planning a club for racialized students, adults

provided tangible next steps (e.g., find a teacher sponsor, make sure all members have student cards etc.) as well as identified potential barriers (e.g., all student groups must be open to the entire student body, how can a safe space be ensured knowing this?). Second, these conversations expanded our general knowledge of the higher levels of the educational system, influencing how we developed recommendations. As a researcher, I also contributed to this process of transparency by discussing the research and partnership processes openly and often. I shared information on each step as we progressed through the project, garnered feedback for decisions like knowledge translation methods and explained the academic processes involved in the thesis development and defence.

The remaining two areas focus on concrete contributions made outside of the partnership's meetings, namely providing resources to support the project's weekly operations and using institutional influence to promote the partnership's goals. Resources included actions such as booking meeting spaces, providing students with permission slips, bringing snacks, and organizing presentation dates. While these actions were fundamental for the partnership, a short passage during a conversation between myself and one of the adults illustrates how their importance can be easily overlooked.

“And I appreciate all the organization you did on your end” (Sarah)

“I just opened a book and signed out that we needed the room” (Kathlyn)

“But if you weren't there it would be really hard for me to sign that book” (Sarah)

Adult participants also used their positions in the organization to further the interests of the partnership. For example, when youth wanted to share their work more broadly, adults used connections in their respective areas to bring staff and administrators to the table to discuss workshop proposals and to listen to students. Adult members also expressed an interest in

connecting these recommendations to upcoming workshops and staff meetings, illustrating how this type of influence can facilitate future action.

Lastly, having a dedicated facilitator was another large component of adult contributions. As a researcher documenting the partnership process, taking on this role in the project allowed me to be a part of every meeting. My responsibilities as facilitator included organizing meetings, communicating with partnership members, keeping track of meeting minutes, and maintaining a safe, productive environment for discussions. The importance of having a dedicated facilitator incorporated into the partnership's structure was noted by numerous participants.

“A facilitator should just be there to help facilitate and keep things moving forward and being a support to the students in the questions that they ask and the directions that they want to go. It needs to be regular contact, it can't be sporadic, or irregular because I think that says something about the adult's commitment.”

(Dhara)

“A lot of energy, which I think is really good to have because we didn't always have the most energy, but you did and coming in here is like, okay, time to get to work but be happy about getting to work.” (Maheen)

Both quotes illustrate the benefits of having a facilitator to make sure meetings progress productively, while the first quote also highlights why regular contact is an important trait when facilitating youth-adult partnerships.

### **Participant Experiences of the Partnership**

The following categories summarize participants' reflections on the concrete actions and structures that affected the partnership's efficacy. They act as a bridge between the two research questions, using participants' experiences to identify which components were successful and which would require changes in future iterations.

**Strengths.** Participants were asked to identify components that they saw as strengths in the partnership. They talked about how the partnership had been structured, as well as positive characteristics in other members. In general, participants thought that the partnership's flexibility, organization, and defined purpose were positive elements, as well as the group's collective understanding of racial issues and the types of adults involved. Participants also discussed what facilitator traits were the most helpful during the project.

One component identified as a strength was having a defined purpose. Members knew coming in that the group's objective was to address racism in the school, which was reinforced as the project progressed. One of the students talked about how communication and structure during the meetings helped achieve this sense of purpose.

"I think the structure was good. Especially because we were meeting weekly, we were getting emails about potential discussion topics, there was a Padlet to organize what we would be talking about. It kept things organized so it didn't feel like we were talking about things without a purpose. It felt like, 'Hey, we're gathering your ideas. I'm listening to what you're saying, and your opinion is valued.'" (Amyra)

Another member, this time an adult participant, was also able to articulate why having a purpose was beneficial for the partnership.



“I liked that there was a purpose and the girls participated with a purpose to their meetings. The recommendations that they came up, with your support, just demonstrates that they knew there was something to this. This wasn’t just about meeting and talking, or complaining or anything like that, there was a purpose to their meeting and that’s one of its strengths. The girls knew that there was something to come out of this.” (Dhara)

This sense of purpose helped direct the partnership’s progression and made participants feel something concrete was being accomplished. It is important to note however, that while the partnership had a clear purpose not everyone felt that meetings were always structured to make the most out of that time or that the group always worked towards that purpose. This will be expanded upon in a later section detailing challenges for the group.

Group members also identified organization and flexibility as positive elements for a youth-adult partnership. In the first few weeks, it quickly became apparent that we needed a system to promote organized communication among members outside of weekly meetings. As such, I created an email list for participants as well as a password-protected online message board. De-identified meeting summaries, consent form templates, in-progress mind-maps for recommendations and our Code of Conduct for group discussions were shared through these mediums. In this way, participants always had access to relevant information and could still contribute to meetings they were unable to attend. As facilitator, I also made sure to provide materials and resources in a timely manner, a quality that one adult highlighted as beneficial.

“You had your consents on time. There was no, “Oh, I forgot this, I forgot that” Everything was more our part, oh we forgot to get that back to you, but you’ve been very patient through all of that” (Kathlyn)

“So, there was a certain level of organization?” (Sarah)

“Yeah, that I appreciate because I can’t be running around doing all of that here in the building all the time” (Kathlyn)

This quote illustrates how maintaining an organized partnership allows for participants to focus on their own work and not bear the burden of additional responsibilities. Students mentioned that they appreciated the overall organization of the project, and how quickly notes or visuals were created for the group. Additionally, flexibility was highlighted as a strength, both in how students were able to dictate what they chose to talk about, as well as how the partnership itself was able to adapt to changes in directions, schedules, and outcomes. For example, participants were never required to attend a meeting and were encouraged to choose if they wanted to participate that week based on their own situations, and meeting days were often shifted to accommodate schedules. As well, while the first few meetings were initially leading towards developing a single initiative to implement, we ultimately ended up developing a series of recommendations and so the partnership shifted to focus on disseminating that information out to the school and school board.

The other strengths identified related to the partnership members themselves. Student collaborators appreciated that there were multiple people there to help create a safe environment and work through the process of engaging in difficult discussions.

“Knowing that there’s multiple support systems around makes it a lot easier to feel safer in my, and everyone else’s opinions... There’s a lot of self-exploration going

on and knowing that there's multiple solid support systems surrounding us makes it easier to grow." (Amyra)

Seeing adults at different levels in the school system and community wanting to collaborate with youth to address shared concerns made the students feel acknowledged and supported. These connections also exposed youth to positions they had been unaware of, like the role of Equity and Inclusion Officer. In addition, the partnership gave members the chance to network with one another and build relationships that have the potential to extend past the project.

"The opportunity to develop a relationship with the VP, that's a huge strength. Like someone that is in their school, someone that they know that they can go to who's going to understand where they're coming from and what their experiences are like. The opportunity to connect with someone from the community... Yeah, just the opportunities to connect with other adults, to know that there are caring adults in the world who are interested in making sure they feel cared for and included. I think that's another strength of the program." (Dhara)

All participants valued including adults beyond the local school. Specifically, adults in the partnership appreciated having a participating member of a local organization because it provided opportunities to build bridges with communities. As well, everyone in the partnership highlighted how important it was to have racialized adults participating in the project. For students, the ability to connect with others who had similar lived experiences made them feel better understood and more comfortable sharing their stories.

“It’s just like when I was talking about how we have no one here [the school] who we can relate to, sometimes it just helps to see someone who looks like you. Someone who probably has the same experiences” (Hasin)

“When I tried to share my issues, every time I looked towards [community member] she always looked like she just wanted to listen more, and she understood what we’re basically going through” (Alina)

This also connected to another component that participants found to be a strength of the partnership, which was that everyone came in with a solid knowledge-base on racial issues. This environment of shared understanding created an inviting space that did not have to focus on educating others. One student was able to articulate this during a group discussion about how I had come to be involved in the project.

“I liked how you, as the person organizing this, weren’t just anyone. It could have been someone who was like, “Really? But I don’t understand,” or someone who came from really ignorant views or something like that. Because if it was someone that said, “Are you sure?” or “I don’t think they meant this.” then we wouldn’t share as much.” (Xamaro)

The final major component identified as a strength was having a facilitator with specific traits that made participants feel at ease and supported in the partnership. Partnership members emphasized that having a facilitator who was open with appropriate self-disclosures and fully engaged did well in this context, and youth particularly appreciated consideration, empathy and friendliness as traits. Many of these characteristics coalesced into establishing a genuine connection, which was expressed by one of the adults.

“It has to be somebody who understands the youth, and I know I kind of laughed as I said that, but it’s an important thing. If you’re some crusty, crotchety old person who doesn’t understand the youth, you’re not going to get far with them because they know that you’re not genuine. And that’s a big piece of the facilitator’s characteristics, is that genuineness, that truth and honesty and that willingness to listen.” (Kathlyn)

The ability to actively listen with the intention of promoting action was highly valued by all participants which, as one student mentioned, also encompassed the capability to present the partnership positively to others.

“I think you have to be able to articulate yourself well. Not only yourself but the things that other people have told you, because you’re essentially going to be the voice for us in the adult world when you’re trying to open up more doors for us, like paving a pathway for us. So, the idea is that you have to be able to pitch us, pitch our project, pitch our program, whatever it is, and say, “This is what they’re doing, and this is why you should care about it,” and that’s the most important aspect.” (Maheen)

Having these characteristics as a facilitator helped the youth collaborators feel safe during meetings. During a talk about the students’ interactions with the other adults, one youth spoke of how having a facilitator she connected with contributed to her overall sense of comfort.

“I just felt more at ease with you, I don’t think if that was with anyone else, like if you weren’t present in any of the meetings, I don’t think I would have felt the same level of comfort” (Hasin)

As a last note for facilitator qualities, given that this work focused on racialized students, a large portion of this discussion centered on how my identity as a White researcher played into this facilitator role. All members of the partnership, including myself, agreed that having a facilitator who understands the lived experiences of the people they are working with is a huge benefit for a youth-adult partnership. The adult participants, who both had extensive experience selecting facilitators for equity-based programming, were very aware of this importance as illustrated by one comment.

“When I’m looking for facilitators, I want facilitators who come with personal experience. I want facilitators who are talking their story, their family story, their truth, their history. And I hate to use ‘they’, because that’s an othering, but as a White person that’s not my story and it’s not my experience and I don’t want to conflate things and I don’t want to flatten things” (Kathlyn)

Interestingly, while participants agreed that having a racialized facilitator would be ideal, they also believed that, at least in the context of this partnership, the characteristics mentioned above were as just as important, especially when coupled with an understanding of racial issues and personal privilege. The students talked about how their perspectives on this matter had shifted over the course of the project. By the end, having someone who is fully engaged, genuine, articulate, empathetic, and an active listener became key elements they preferred in a facilitator, irrespective of racial identity.

“I think in life, I’m always looking for women of colour to be around. Personally, I had no issue with the racial barrier because I didn’t feel like there was ever

anything that I could hold back from you. I think all of us recognized that no matter what we said, you weren't going to take it personally." (Amyra)

"Really, if it wasn't for you, then I would have only wanted people of colour. But after you, I really just want someone who has the same characteristics as you. Black or White." (Alina)

One adult participant was able to succinctly illustrate our discussions on facilitator traits by suggesting how future youth-adult partnerships working on racial justice issues can address identity when selecting a facilitator.

"About the facilitator for racially-focused things, for the facilitator to be racialized, that's beneficial. If not, making sure there're people who are part of the process who are. But all those other qualities are the same. Caring, dedicated to students, giving them a voice, understanding power and privilege." (Dhara)

**Challenges.** While participants had many positive things to say about the partnership, there were still challenges specific to youth-adult partnerships in school settings. Challenges centered around tangible elements of the partnership's structure as well as human factors. To start, a major concern was time. Simply put, the partnership did not have enough of it. The original intention was for the project to last an entire school year (i.e., either months). As it occurred however, the partnership was only able to run for four months and was constrained by school terms. Every participant stressed that time had been a challenge and that having additional time may have helped mitigate many of the other challenges that were experienced. This included not just the short length of the project in its entirety, but also the weekly meetings being confined to one-hour lunch breaks.

“I guess the only thing is time, like the amount. When you’re trying to take a large survey with a big group of people you obviously require more time for it and we had hour lunch breaks. It’s hard for everyone to get every idea out there. That’s the only concern, but I mean time is always limited, so we just have to make the best of what we get.” (Maheen)

“It would nice to have more time, sometimes those meetings were very rushed. But you were constrained to the lunch break at a high school... More length would have been great. I was thinking specifically time in a day, but no, project time. You could have spent half the year doing what you just did, connecting, brainstorming, sharing of ideas, and spent the other half actually developing the workshop and maybe even implementing. That would have been awesome” (Dhara)

Due to this tight timeline, the project was not able to continue into the implementation phase of our recommendations and proposals. While this stage will still take place, it will be outside of the context of the research and will have the added barrier of having to start during a new school year with many of the original student collaborators having graduated.

This issue with time led many students to feel as though the partnership had barely accomplished anything, which flows into the next challenge of sustainability, both in the partnership and in actions. Since students have yet to be able to see many tangible outcomes from the meetings, they maintain a healthy skepticism over how much can be accomplished. Almost all students acknowledged that most of these recommendations would take a lot of time to implement and that some are beyond the control of what members in the partnership have influence to change.



“I get that little changes can happen within the school, but most of the problems that we’re trying to address... it’s systematic [*sic*]<sup>1</sup>. I don’t think that’s going happen for a long time.” (Alina)

So, while they did express hope that small changes will take place in the school, without sustained support many of the issues in their school will continue. One student also mentioned concerns over having the work of the partnership fade away unless there is a concentrated effort to maintain it, citing previous instances of poor follow-through in the school. Additionally, the sustainability of the partnership itself was discussed quite often, with one interesting observation being made by an adult about shifting the structure away from research-led to school-led.

“...and then you have to think about what happens when all the students are gone. ... what does that mean for the project moving forward? Will we get some more students that come on that help these students? Continue on with the workshops, and awareness, and a student club? How much will you or can you be involved in that? I’m sure [Kathlyn] would love to have you, would be open and receptive to have your support and influence, but at what point then does the school then take over and the adult youth partnership then becomes in-school? (Dhara)

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<sup>1</sup> While the student said systematic, the conversation’s context (i.e., discussing racism and a lack of representation at the school board level) suggests that they meant systemic

“Ideally, I would like to work myself out of a job on this one where my job would be taken over by a teacher sponsor who has similar qualities and is willing to put in the time.” (Sarah)

Fortunately, both adult collaborators expressed a desire to continue with the partnership, as well as the remaining students. Even those who are graduating mentioned wanting to return to help continue work in the partnership.

Connected to these concerns about time and sustainability, scheduling also presented a major barrier for full participation.

“I think it was mostly just me being busy and everything.... It was so frustrating because I wanted to be a part of every single discussion.” (Amyra)

“Basically, I’m busy, but sometimes I felt really bad because I really wanted to be here, and I felt like you guys talk about really important stuff.” (Hasin)

We rarely had every student attending weekly meetings, and at no point in the entire partnership were we able to get every member together in one room. For the adults, this project occurred during work hours which made it difficult to attend without extensive pre-planning beforehand. Meanwhile, all the students were very involved in extracurriculars and their school communities, making scheduling a regular weekly meeting challenging. Furthermore, there were scheduling difficulties that were the result of a lack of support from outside staff. Few teachers or staff outside of the partnership knew about the project, and for some who did they did not support the students when scheduling conflicts arose. Youth and adult members mentioned that in future iterations they would want to get more of the outside staff aware of what the partnership is about and sort out permissions for scheduling issues before the project’s start.

Another complex challenge involved the partnership's structure. Oftentimes adult members would attend at the same time and these meetings were, in general, evenly spaced out across the partnership's timeline. However, a few students felt that they would have been more comfortable if adults had been incorporated in stages. It was difficult for some students to share personal experiences of racism or their opinions of the school when school administrators were present, but they really appreciated having them there when there were tangible recommendations that required knowledgeable feedback. Meanwhile, youth valued having the community member there for discussions on racial issues and would have liked to have them attend initial meetings.

There were also challenges in how the daily meetings themselves were structured. While some students liked having flexibility and felt meetings were sufficiently organized, not everyone agreed. Other students expressed concern that too much flexibility in conversations reduced the efficiency of that meeting. Furthermore, some wanted more structure by knowing in advance what topics would be discussed on the days that adults attended so that they could feel more prepared and comfortable. This related to another challenge where many students felt the need to self-censor themselves around adult members who held positions of power, out of concern of offending them. Some students were hyperaware that the adults had ties to staff and did not want to seem disrespectful when talking about issues in the school. As such, those youth felt more at ease in meetings with only myself and the students because there was no looming authority figure, or with us and the community member who was unaffiliated with the school. Adult participants also recognized that students may have felt the need to self-censor themselves.

“I think that was part of those first couple of meetings where it took some time for them to know what they could say and what they couldn't say. Because they're

such sweet students that they don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. But they've been hurt, and they need to get that out. And, I mean, racism is not an easy subject."

(Kathlyn)

This participant went on explain how she managed feelings of defensiveness through active listening, and the difficulties of being able to do that when your job involves answering to others.

"Yeah, so there were times when I would hear things and I would want to say, 'Yeah but we're fixing that'. In my head, I'm like, don't defend, this is not looking for defence that's not what's happening here. So just recognizing that was a good time to stay quiet and listen... and I'm a talker, so it can be challenging. But also recognizing that there was nothing I needed to be defending or saying. And I know I wasn't quiet every time, there were a few times where I was like 'Okay, well yeah, we've tried to do this, or we tried to do that' I mean sometimes they did ask questions for what staff are doing about this, what is the staff learning. So, I did have to explain those things but yeah, that was a challenge piece for me.... and I think that comes with the job. As an administrator you're constantly having to answer for things and have those answers" (Kathlyn)

The last challenge was largely noticed by the youth and involved a lack of diversity among the students. While some of the students differed in racial identity, they were all Muslim women in the upper grade levels and as such, all the youth agreed that they did not come from diverse enough backgrounds to account for the multitude of experiences of racialized students.

"I think, maybe not having everyone of the same background in the group. And it doesn't mean cut people out just because, but I think trying to diversify a little

more.... Because we were all kind of on the same page about what we wanted to see, which was great but then you're missing some of those aspects of, okay how can we build upon this or make this more accessible to others?" (Maheen)

Some suggestions that youth discussed for increasing diversity included recruiting participants from younger grades, bringing in non-Muslim students, including ally-identified teachers, and involving men. One student mentioned that while she would be okay with a co-ed group, she did feel more comfortable being with all women and so a potential alternative would be to run two separate partnerships. Interestingly, students briefly considered involving White students to try and understand their perspective, but ultimately decided against this as they were afraid of having to manage others' emotions and deal with White guilt after difficult conversations.

### **Participation Outcomes**

In addition to discussing the strengths and challenges of the partnership, participants reflected on their involvement and what it meant to them. These outcomes of participation centered around three overarching themes of authentic engagement, empowerment, and allyship. Most were influenced by the partnership processes and components mentioned in prior sections.

**Authentic engagement.** Many of the experiences that youth and adults talked about related to being able to contribute to the partnership in a meaningful way. Overall, each of the participants described the partnership as a safe and welcoming environment to share and work together, although this fluctuated slightly depending on who was in attendance. For youth, having a safe space that respected students' contributions made them feel more in control of how they chose to engage in the partnership.

“It’s kind of just a space where we say whatever we want and get a lot out and so it’s been really welcoming” (Hasin)

“The fact that it was very much student dictated allowed me to have power over what I was choosing to say and not to say. Also, it gave me the reassurance that I did not have to speak about a certain issue if I was uncomfortable. I didn’t take that option but knowing that it was there gave me so much ease, and ultimately made it easier to open up since I knew that it was a safe space.” (Amyra)

A space free of judgement fostered this feeling of safety and allowed for some students to be more comfortable voicing their opinions about the school, as illustrated by the following quote where one student was discussing what she had liked about the project.

“I think talking about staff is very risky, especially for a high school kid. That’s definitely a huge deal. If the information gets out of the room, and you’re put in a position where you’re interacting with whatever teacher you feel marginalized by, things get very uncomfortable... Being able to freely talk about my opinions and experiences without feeling like I have to characterize certain words to make it seem like I’m not attacking a teacher is so helpful. I felt that everything we talked about was understood before we had to clarify it.” (Amyra)

Feeling secure enough to share opinions was closely connected to participants’ reflections on voice and agency. All group members mentioned feeling as though their voice had been respected during the entire project. Both adults spoke of the importance of being able to hear what students had to say and how, when each adult chose to speak, they felt included and welcomed in the discussion. A few of the youth members noted that adult involvement often

centered on background actions such as summarizing, creating presentation outlines, and encouraging them to speak, which allowed for student-driven meetings. According to the students, this format gave them control over how they chose to contribute. Furthermore, respecting voice was tangibly demonstrated by having adults focus on the issues students spoke of, rather than setting their own agenda.

“It’s that aspect of youth and adult ‘partnership’, rather than overpowering youth voice. It’s listening to what the youth have to say and then reflecting on yourself as an adult and asking ‘Okay, this is what their concerns are, this is what they need. Now how can I help to meet those needs?’ So that’s kind of the ideal cycle that, so far, we have seen. Because we’ve brainstormed some really good ideas and we’ve had the talks with [Dhara] and [Kathlyn] as well. These talks have shown us that our concerns have been listened to and there is some kind of action being put into them. That’s how I can confirm that my voice has been listened to” (Maheen)

Valuing the voices of everyone in the partnership was only possible through mutual respect, which participants felt was demonstrated through a collective willingness to listen, not interrupting one another and supporting what each person had to say.

Participants also described experiences and reflections on co-learning within the group and how the youth-adult collaborations in the project influenced that. Adults talked about how being able to learn from the students energized them and helped them better understand the experiences of racialized students in their school board. Students felt that being able to hear from adults helped them comprehend their own experiences more by connecting them to established theories and concepts. In fact, a few students wished that adults had spoken and

shared more because they appreciated learning about new things that could be related back to their own understandings. As well, for some youth, listening to others' perspectives helped them sift through how they view race relations. One student described the partnership as a learning experience where engagement focused on growth rather than being 'right'.

“I think it's important to know that no one is trying to win an argument. There's common ground on everything. You can't go into this type of discussion the same way you do with a debate... I liked that I didn't feel like that in this project at all. Nothing felt like a debate. There was no fighting or finding a 'solution'. It was about how you feel and felt like a place to be open to experiences that I was limited from, because even as a female person of colour, I still have a lot of privilege... There are lots of experiences that I don't know anything about, and this experience allowed me to recognize my privilege as well.” (Amyra)

One last outcome contributing to engagement was the types of relationships that were developed, with genuine connections promoting a more honest form of involvement.

“You are so open to everything and are so willing to talk about and explore tough issues. Not to mention how much you care about the project in itself. It's just so good to know. It forms this genuine human connection, which makes it so much easier to explain everything we're feeling.” (Amyra)

We came into this partnership with three of the students already friends, myself and one of the adult participants having worked together for over a year, and with both adult participants having a positive working relationship. Over the course of the project, members grew closer to each other and during the final discussions each person spoke of liking everyone else and having



positive experiences. Students also talked about how their willingness to engage often depended on the types of relationships they had established with adults, where adults who shared more about themselves, had similar lived experiences, or were willing to be vulnerable made them the most comfortable. They spoke of how these types of meaningful connections could form over multiple interactions.

“I know that a challenge for me in the beginning was that I was trying to filter my words... but after several meetings and getting to know you, I just became more comfortable saying what I actually thought” (Xamaro)

Equally possible however, was how they could instantly bond through shared interests and displays of sincere friendliness.

“I wasn’t even intimidated, I was just like, ‘I already like her’... after you said you lived in Korea, that was definitely good for me.” (Alina)

“Right off the bat, you made a good first impression.” (Hasin)

As the project was ending, participants talked about wanting to maintain these relationships and connections and wanting to continue to participate in partnership’s work outside of school.

**Empowerment.** Another set of reflections coalesced under the theme of empowerment. In this theme, youth collaborators spoke of how they had experienced the partnership as a space of openness, which was fostered by the actions of the adults. Students mentioned that a warm acceptance by adults nurtured feelings of validation and reinforced that people in higher positions care about youth issues.

“The aspect of youth and adult partnership, I’ve really seen it come through, through you talking to us openly. You’re the only White person in the room at times and you have a completely different religion and culture from us, but I think that you have embraced us so openly and honestly... it makes you understand that someone different actually cares about what I have to say about the issues that I face. So, it makes a big deal that someone who isn’t necessarily going through the same things as you, acknowledges and validates those feelings.” (Maheen)

This was closely connected to acknowledgement, where all youth participants, at some point in their participation, felt their experiences were acknowledged by adults. For some students, this occurred when they were able to share personal stories with racialized adults who had similar experiences or shared relevant knowledge and concepts. For others, this happened when adults demonstrated a willingness to actively listen to youth and provided verbal support during difficult discussions.

“It’s really nice to have that kind of step-back, outsider perspective, but also the acknowledgement. Because you haven’t gone through the same things that we have, but you acknowledge that they’re there. So, this is the ideal kind of youth-adult partnership because so many times, as adults, what ends up happening is that you try to overpower youth voice or try to interpret it on your end.” (Maheen)

“I remember when I talked about my experiences as a person of colour, and [Dhara] told me that she felt the exact same way when she was a kid. That was a massive thing for me because it showed me that what I felt was universal. There’s never been a time where I can display my deepest race-related personal experiences in a

setting that they'd be agreed with. Of course, you can have discussions with your friends about race and someone will say, "Fuck, I relate to that" but no one really critically discusses the depth of racism because most of it is implied." (Amyra)

That last quote also illustrated another topic that many youth participants touched upon. In some instances, receiving acknowledgement from adults resulted in learning about the universality of their oppressions, which also encompassed the shared experiences and emotions of the other youth.

"I think the project helped me sift through my emotions about race relations and become more aware of how I view race and the different aspects of it. Like, listening to my other friends [in the partnership], seeing the way they view the world around themselves and thinking how it matches up with mine." (Amyra)

For youth, this process of collective sharing was healing for some and made others feel less isolated in their experiences of racism. Additionally, some spoke of how it contributed to a growth in their understanding of racial issues and identity.

"The idea that the things I feel as a person of colour are universal. If I could stress something outside of this project to fellow people of colour, it would be that the experiences and struggles that they're facing aren't something they're alone in. I think the project helped me grow as a person, as well as being a safe place to talk about all my experiences." (Amyra)

"This might be weird, but I found it therapeutic sometimes because we were sharing things we didn't go into detail before and it's healthy to get things like that out, right?" (Xamaro)

While adult participants did not mention having the same experience, both spoke of how this partnership was a process of sharing. One of the adults also felt that students' confidence had grown over the course of the project, becoming more assured in explaining themselves and sharing what they want or felt. While this observation was not explicitly discussed by the students, many of them did mention feeling more comfortable contributing their experiences and opinions as the partnership progressed.

Given that the partnership had a clear purpose addressing a specific issue, conversations often focused on action and expectations for change. Many participants expressed a sense of hopefulness from participating in the project. For youth, being able to meaningfully collaborate with adults and to be understood was motivating. While sharing stories that exposed racism in their school was alarming for some, participating in the partnership provided hope that change is possible, and altered how they viewed their school.

“I know that when we finish this project something good will come out of it ... I knew there were people in higher positions that wanted to make change. I liked that because I felt I wasn't the only one who thought we need change in this school, or in this entire system. There's also other people who felt that way” (Alina)

“It's also hopeful in that all these events that have happened before this group, I know especially [Hasin] and [Alina], we all felt like nothing would happen for our school and it would stay like this. Having you motivating and everything, that got us all kind of hopeful. And now look at our school, I have a different view on our school after this” (Xamaro)

This hope was tied to the belief that concrete actions will be coming out of the work. All participants recognized that this process will likely take time, but many seemed optimistic that at least some actions will occur. However, as mentioned previously regarding sustainability, there were still many worries about how much could be accomplished by the partnership alone. Furthermore, some students believe that their effect will be limited to the immediate school environment, with larger changes falling through at the institutional level. Even so, many of the youth talked about reserving judgement on the efficacy of the partnership to produce meaningful change until at least some proposals or recommendations start the implementation process.

**Allyship.** The final theme that arose was that of allyship. This was discussed both as the larger concept of adults being allies for youth and in the more specific context of White adults using their privilege to promote the interests of racialized students. While a couple of students reported that the power dynamics between youth and adults did not affect their participation, everyone in the partnership recognized there were differing power structures and hierarchies of authority amongst members. For the students who felt affected by this, they documented some successful instances of power sharing. They felt that relationships were more equal when they had enough time to get to know an adult or when adults shared personal stories and made themselves vulnerable. Additionally, youth valued when adults did not judge or doubt their contributions and were actively conscious of their position of power. Students felt the most comfortable working with adults who elevated and encouraged their voice, while also treating them as mature, competent individuals.

“Sometimes we speak to adults and they make us feel like we’re lower. They look down on you, or they listen to you, but you don’t feel you’re on the same level. With you it kind of felt like you’re an adult but maybe we had a closer relationship

and it felt like you viewed us as the same. So, you didn't undermine us or look down on us. That was a really good part of the project" (Hasin)

"I felt so sophisticated with us... You didn't put yourself in that higher position, you didn't think 'Oh, I'm better than you guys'. Not someone who's like, 'I know more'." (Xamaro)

"You didn't undermine our experiences, you didn't doubt anything that we said."  
(Hasin)

Both adult participants were aware of this power dynamic and sought to moderate it by trying to reduce their space in the partnership and making sure students had most of the meeting's time. One participant detailed her experience of explaining to some of the youth that she would not be attending the next few meetings so that students could have their own space to talk freely, away from the authority of a school administrator. She also mentioned using humour and good listening skills to try and make youth more relaxed in situations of uneven power.

Many of these power sharing techniques (and other successful components of the partnership previously described) hinged on promoting a certain level of empathy among members. The concept of fostering empathy and how it promoted a sense of allyship among participants came up numerous times during discussions. Many of the components that influence empathy have already been discussed (e.g., mutual respect, acknowledgement, genuine connections etc.) but as it relates to allyship, empathy influenced the collaboration between the racialized youth and White adults, including myself. Students felt comfortable engaging with adults who did not have the same lived experiences because they listened to students and presented visible displays of empathetic reactions.

“I thought it was so cute how when we were sharing sad things, it’s like you were second-hand hurt” (Xamaro)

This student then went on to discuss how the sheer amount of experiences of racism at the school was shocking to her, but after watching White participants react to these stories, she felt that not all White people agreed with these acts of racial harm and was more hopeful. Most participants emphasized the importance of empathy for adult collaborators, with some identifying it as the most important of all qualities because it can help mediate differences in experiences. They also stressed that empathy did not mean having to always agree, but instead being willing to place yourself in a position to listen to a different perspective with no judgement.

Finally, participants discussed allyship as it related to White adults utilizing their privilege to promote the interests of racialized students. Almost all participants at some point spoke of the importance of having White partnership members recognize their privilege and think about what they are going to do with that. One participant added that White participants can use their privilege and experiences in this project to reduce the stigma of engaging in race-based conversations by appealing to others outside of the partnership. As a White woman with privilege and a background in Equity and Inclusion, one of the adult participants discussed the importance of listening and centering marginalized voices, and how her actions following this partnership will focus on getting other staff to actively listen to their students.

“I don’t like to should on people, but I think that it’s part of me recognizing my privilege and the position that I sit in, but also helping staff to understand they need to close their mouths and listen to what kids are saying. Kids have feelings and they’re valid feelings” (Kathlyn)

As for myself, as a White facilitator I tried to center the voices of racialized participants by focusing my efforts on non-directive, supportive positions and making sure students got to share their narratives on their own terms during presentations and in recommendations and proposals. Youth spoke of their awareness of my authority and privilege but felt that our relationship and my actions gave them agency in this partnership. One of the adult participants also addressed this when talking about their observations of my relationship with the students.

“You approached this with such sensitivity and thoughtfulness. You recognized your Whiteness and your kind of power in that situation. I think because you have that level of awareness... it didn’t become an issue. The students absolutely love you, you can tell. They adored you. They appreciated your time, your energy, and the effort and time that you’re putting into this, whether they saw all this. There was no, you coming in telling them what they needed to do or say. You created a space that made it okay for you to be in that space as a White person facilitating a session for racialized students.” (Dhara)

This quote, along with student discussions, highlight how intentionally acknowledging and addressing privilege can help create an environment of allyship within a youth-adult partnership focusing on issues of social justice.

In sum, findings explored how this specific youth-adult partnership was utilized to address school-based racism. Participants also identified the strengths and challenges of this partnership and discussed outcomes from their participation. A visual summary of findings is illustrated in Appendix K.



### Discussion

The goal of this study is to contribute to current understandings of youth-adult partnerships, particularly in the context of addressing racism at a local secondary school. Regarding how a youth-adult partnership could be utilized in an educational setting to address racism, results illustrated a model of student-driven discussions which, when combined with support from adults, led to a series of recommendations for multiple levels of the school system. These discussions largely focused on racism and the school environment, while adult contributions centered on providing information, concrete resources and institutional influence. As for the second research question on how members experienced the partnership, data collected through interviews and focused groups highlighted two different sets of findings. One set explored experiences of the partnership itself, identifying components that acted as strengths and ones that needed improvement. The elements highlighted in this first set of responses were tangible and could be intentionally incorporated or altered for future youth-adult partnerships. Strengths of the partnership included having a defined purpose and certain level of organization, a dedicated facilitator who embodied specific characteristics, and a varied group of adult participants, with at least some of whom were representative of students' racialized identities. Challenges experienced by participants centered on busy schedules and a short project timeline, concerns of the sustainability for the partnership's outcomes, a lack of diversity among youth, power dynamics between youth and school/school board staff, and needing more structure during meetings to increase efficiency. The second set of experiences detailed participants' personal outcomes from involvement in the partnership. Many group members experienced a sense of authentic engagement through the maintenance of a safe space, promoting youth voice, establishing an environment of co-learning, and fostering genuine connections. Outcomes of

empowerment were witnessed through a sense of openness and acceptance in the group, acknowledgement of personal stories, recognizing the universality of experiences, and expressed hope for the future. Finally, given that the partnership contained various forms of power dynamics, several experiences from participants centered around allyship and how this was affected by power-sharing techniques, visible empathy, and addressing personal privilege. Together, these findings form a snapshot of one approach to school-based, youth-adult partnerships, along with its benefits and challenges.

Regarding the study's scope of impact, empowerment theory contends that generalizing does not work for most social issues and solutions should be developed from and tailored to their settings (Eisman et al., 2016; Rappaport, 1981, 1987). Keeping with this principle, the research does not seek to provide simplifying results, but rather, to illustrate an example of a youth-adult partnership in a contextualized space. Even so, the project's results connected to findings from previous literature on youth engagement, empowerment theory and Critical Race Theory, as well as components for effective youth-adult partnerships in school settings.

### **Connections to Previous Literature**

While each of the findings represent a wealth of information, there were notable links to previous research regarding best practices, participant experiences, and partnership challenges. The partnership model that came out of the study reflected many best practices identified in prior work including incorporating adults with institutional authority, connecting with the broader community, and recognizing the value of youth input (Cooper et al., 2013; Ungar, 2013; Vaclavik et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2010; Zeldin et al., 2005). Additionally, the results highlight the benefits from implementing these practices. Bringing in adults with institutional authority furthered the goals of the partnership by bringing other influential adults to the table so that

recommendations could be disseminated at the school-board level. Including a representative from a local organization further developed connections between adults and the community which could be leveraged in future initiatives, while this connection to a racialized adult unaffiliated to the school helped some youth feel more comfortable sharing personal connections to, and experiences of, racism. Even with these best practices in place, the partnership was unable to provide well-defined goals and structure, ensure group diversity, and reached the stage for implementing concrete actions. While limited diversity and concrete actions were the result of the study's limitations on recruitment and time, improvements can be made in future partnerships by starting off with a stronger focus on developing clear goals and incorporating more structure into weekly agendas.

The study's results contain a wealth of information on the experiences of participation for members with a particularly salient result being that of the importance of genuine connections among youth and adults in the partnership. It appears that sincere displays of friendship helped create a safe, non-judgemental space; where liking those you work with has been cited as a fundamental element of effective partnerships that's often overlooked (Pearrow, 2008; Yuen & Context, 2013). For this study, having supportive adults that youth felt connected with allowed for a certain level of comfort and promoted an environment of co-learning; it is entirely possible that without these relationships youth may not have been as willing to engage or provide recommendations based on personal narratives. Previous literature identified mutual respect, genuine interest and ongoing contact as facilitating positive relationships with youth (Vaclavik et al., 2017). The current study expands on these by highlighting the importance of displays of vulnerability, warmth and visible empathy. This is not to say that every single adult had to share meaningful friendships with youth but having at least one adult in the room with whom youth

felt connected helped address many concerns about power differences and encouraged open dialogue. These results suggest that to have a welcoming environment that encourages honest discussions, there needs to be sincere relationships present between members.

The findings also serve to emphasize challenges previously identified in the literature for maintaining effective youth-adult partnerships. One of the major barriers in prior research has been about how partnerships are often limited by tight timelines and requirements for specific deliverables (Cooper et al., 2013; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013). Even with attempts made to circumvent this, the current study still suffered from a constrained timeline of under four months. The results expand on this by highlighting an additional time-related barrier particularly relevant for school settings, which is scheduling. The project was set during school hours, which meant that meetings occurred during lunch hours. Not only did this conflict with adults' work schedules (most of whom had to leave their office to join these meetings), the students were also very proactive in their school community and were involved in several school programs and groups. As such, finding a lunch hour each week that matched multiple schedules was exceedingly difficult. This is one of the main reasons most adults only had intermittent involvement in the partnership, and oftentimes already-limited time during the lunch hour was sacrificed catching up those who missed prior meetings. One possible area for future research that may address some of these scheduling concerns would be to explore alternative methods of conducting meetings, such as through facilitating conference calls or online video meetings. If meetings did not require in-person contributions and were found to be just as effective, remote conferencing could increase attendance for weekly meetings and allow for a more efficient use of the partnership's time.

One last notable connection to the literature speaks to authors noting difficulties in fostering sustainable partnerships (Checkoway et al., 2005; Cooper et al., 2013; Zeldin et al., 2005). This was a concern raised by some of the participants regarding the future of the partnership and was related to participant attrition in school settings. Youth are only students for so long. Partnerships that take place in schools can only expect students to be able to participate for a few years before leaving secondary schools. As they graduate, the continuation of the partnership can be put in jeopardy and youth may never get to see their work implemented. In this study, the students who have graduated expressed an interest in maintaining their connection to the partnership but trying to implement multi-semester changes with an ever-changing roster of students is a daunting task. Future work could explore this challenge for school-based youth-adult partnerships by seeking ways to maintain participation through yearly recruitment and developing methods for a smooth transfer of knowledge and roles to new members.

### **Connections to Theory**

**Empowerment theory.** In addition to links with youth engagement literature, the results can also be viewed through the study's theoretical underpinnings of empowerment theory and Critical Race Theory. From an empowerment standpoint, results highlighted action-oriented goals, networking opportunities, and including youth in major decisions as positive components of the partnership, factors which have been previously cited as necessary for empowered collaborations (Camino, 2005; Shaw-Raudoy & McGregor, 2013; Zeldin et al., 2013). Additionally, the creation of an environment of openness, combined with having youth's racialized experiences represented amongst themselves and among some of the adults, appears to have resulted in a form of consciousness raising during the partnership. An element of empowerment theory, consciousness raising refers to the act of marginalized people analyzing

their social conditions to recognize the systemic nature of their oppressions and working towards addressing them (Ballard et al., 2016; Checkoway, 2011). Students mentioned that the act of sharing felt therapeutic and that listening to others helped them recognize the universality of their experiences, shaped how they conceptualized racism, and reduced their sense of isolation regarding racial issues. The results suggest that the partnership's focus on student-led discussions, which largely centered on racism, helped promote empowerment for youth not just through respecting student voice, but by also allowing for a space to share experiences and recognize the commonalities in each other's narratives.

To gauge the empowerment potential of the study's partnership model, I turn to the previously mentioned TYPE Pyramid developed by Wong, Zimmerman, and Parker (2010) which is grounded in an empowerment framework. Based on findings, it appears that the partnership fell somewhere between the pluralistic and independent partnership styles. Each style emphasizes having youth as active participants, but they differ in that pluralistic partnerships seek shared control while independent partnerships give youth more control. Many aspects of the partnership followed the pluralistic style of basing roles on each person's strengths, with the intention of maximizing youth impact. However, adults in the partnership actively chose to give up much of their deciding power and voice in favour of centering the students, which led to some students mentioning that they would have liked to see more adult contributions to discussions. This does not necessarily mean that empowerment potential was reduced as Wong et al. do recognize that the best partnership style is dependant on the context and specify that there are added considerations for partnerships involving racialized youth as it may be harder for non-racialized researchers to build an environment of trust. As such, it is entirely possible for a partnership such as this one, where there are power dynamics related both

to age and racial identities, to continue to promote empowerment even with a slight shift in control favouring youth. It also plays to the participants' strengths given that the issue being addressed, i.e., racism in secondary schools, is a part of youth member's current experiences, making them the experts in this matter. Finally, while youth retained most of the control over decisions, adult's contributions via feedback, institutional influence and resources helped ensure that the burden of responsibility was not designated to youth only. As such, though the partnership may not have been a perfect fit for the pluralistic model, it still held empowerment capacity and contributed to many of the positive experiences participants' discussed.

**Critical Race Theory.** The connections to Critical Race Theory were most salient in the content of the student-led discussions, the importance of representation among adult participants, and in members' reflections on having a White facilitator for the project. While meeting discussions often emerged organically, there was a substantial focus on personal experiences of racial harm and difficulties engaging with White people on topics of racism. Critical Race Theory posits that many current forms of racism are made invisible to dominant groups but are inescapable for marginalized communities (Breen, 2018; Curtis, 2017; Park et al., 2016). As such, racialized students would have a more intimate understanding of the nuances of racism as well as many experiences of racial harm to draw from, which is supported by literature showing that racialized students are more willing to discuss racism (Raby, 2004; Zinga & Gordon, 2016). This was reflected in how, while well-versed on racial and socio-political issues themselves, participants did not believe that their peers held such nuanced perspectives.

Another key set of findings related to CRT center around representation and the interactions between racialized youth and myself as a White facilitator. Race-based research has already highlighted the significant impact representation, or lack thereof, has for racialized youth

(Codjoe, 2001; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017), with prior studies using CRT hypothesizing that inter-ethnic mentor relationships with a non-racialized mentor may produce lower-quality outcomes (Park et al., 2016). The findings seem to support the first statement by showing participants' preference for the inclusion of adults with shared racial identities and its benefits for their sense of comfort. However, results also appear to refute the second claim, in that while participants generally agreed having a racialized facilitator is ideal, the personal qualities that individual has is just as, if not more, important. Adults spoke of how a lack of representation with a facilitator could be mediated by making sure other adults in the partnership were racialized, and youth discussed how a facilitator's characteristics and their relationships were fundamental for a positive partnership. It was initially surprising to hear how some youth have shifted their preferences from having a facilitator who was racialized to one that embodied characteristics such as empathy, racial competency, and friendliness, irrespective of racial identity; however, there is pre-existing research that supports this finding. In the same study on CRT and mentor relationships, Park et al. (2016) found that relationship quality, common interests, and mentor qualifications positively impacted outcomes regardless of racial identity. The findings from this current study did not delve further into how facilitator characteristics and identity interacted; it is possible that if these positive qualities were not present, a shared identity would become more crucial for youth. Future research may benefit from focusing on this finding in more detail to speak to how racial identity and personal qualities interact in promoting positive experiences with racialized youth. Future partnerships could also have a heavier focus on identifying the ways White facilitators or researchers can engage in meaningful ways with racialized youth on issues of social justice.



These connections to theoretical frameworks and previous research provide a brief overview of how the current study contributes to the larger body of literature on social justice-oriented, youth-adult partnerships in authority-driven educational settings. Combined with some of the tangible partnership components identified by participants, we move towards suggestions for school-based, youth-adult partnerships that are situated in similar contexts.

### **Recommendations for Partnerships Addressing Racism in Schools**

**School-specific recommendations.** Based on the results from this study, several proposals can be for implementing youth-adult partnerships in secondary schools, as well as for partnerships with a focus on racism. Specific for partnerships in schools, one of the first recommendations would be to include adult participants who are not affiliated with the school or school-board. Having adults involved who are not a part of students' school can encourage a more open, honest discussion by alleviating concerns of having to discuss sensitive topics with people who may hold power over students' daily life. Also, results from this study suggest that it is crucial that a school-based, youth-adult partnership has a dedicated facilitator. While some scholars have discussed the importance of having a facilitator for youth-adult partnerships (Bulling et al., 2013; Carson & Hart, 2005; Evans & Lund, 2013), this was largely absent in many of the other works focused on best practices. For a school-based partnership that will already have to contend with scheduling issues and over-worked students and staff, a facilitator can act like a common thread through the weeks as members flow in and out of meetings. A facilitator can also take on many of the day-to-day operations that keep the partnership running smoothly, thus reducing the burden on students and school administrators and allowing them to instead focus on fully contributing. These two actions address the question about who is contributing to the partnership and require intentional planning beforehand; however, making

sure there is at least one dedicated facilitator and ensuring a representative adult team should make the work more relevant and efficient.

A third recommendation specific to the school setting is to introduce adults through a staged process to help address power dynamics and maximize adult impact. During the first stage, when students are potentially sharing personal experiences, working through their conceptualizations of racism, or identifying sources of concern within their school, it would be important to introduce representative community members and a facilitator who are unaffiliated with the school. This can open the space for honest, comfortable dialogue without having to worry about a potential fallout among school staff. The second stage would be when students are at a point that they can present recommendations based off prior discussions and either need assistance solidifying ideas or implementing initiatives. This would be time to introduce school staff and school board administrators, as they would have the most knowledge about the institution and influence to further the goals of the partnership. This staged approach should reduce adult's time commitments over the project's entire timeline and increase efficiency by bringing them in when they can be the most useful for youth. However, it is unknown how this type of staged approach would affect the quality of relationships that was spoken of so positively by participants in this study. It is also possible that with enough time this approach would not be necessary as there would be more opportunities for youth and adults to interact and develop relationships that mitigate power dynamics. Future work could seek to implement this proposed partnership model to evaluate its effects on power dynamics and quality of relationships.

**Racism-specific recommendations.** A final set of recommendations relate to youth-adult partnerships which focus on addressing racial issues or include a power imbalance among members beyond intergenerational dynamics. One finding from the project highlighted how all

members came into the project with prior knowledge of equity and racial issues. Many participants' saw this as a positive aspect that strengthened the partnership and if this shared knowledge-base is not present at the outset, it could be useful to have a pre-partnership stage that focuses on getting people to a relatively similar level of understanding for key racial issues and concepts. Connected to this, at the opposite end, all youth participants mentioned that they would have liked to have seen greater diversity amongst themselves to foster a larger range in opinions and ideas. In future iterations, youth-adult partnerships could try to intentionally recruit youth from different grades, genders, sexualities, religions and racial backgrounds etc. Additionally, future youth-adult partnerships would want to encourage adults to contribute their voice but still center racialized students as the ones with current lived experiences of racism in schools and let youth maintain control over the types of discussions. Finally based off the importance all participants attributed to representation, it is essential that a youth-adult partnership that includes racialized youth also have at least some adults who shared similar racial identities and lived experiences. Future research could take these components for school-based partnerships that focus on racism and document participants' experiences to see if intentionally including these elements make any meaningful contributions.

The hope is that these recommendations can provide a loose model for other schools seeking to implement youth-adult partnership into similar contexts. In the local education system, schools require that student clubs have a teacher sponsor who endorses the club and acts as a contact point for students. Typically, teacher sponsors remain uninvolved in the operation of student groups and while ideally a partnership's facilitator would be unaffiliated with the school to reduce concerns of power, having a teacher sponsor take on the role of facilitator would make sense based on these prescribed structures. The study's results, combined with

these recommendations, could act as building blocks for a student group seeking to address racial issues within their school and emphasize the importance of adult involvement and level of commitment needed. Furthermore, participants identified that there is a dearth of representation among teachers within the school board, which means that there is a likely chance that teacher sponsors would be non-racialized, and these results help highlight what types of qualities and knowledges this person would need to help moderate this lack of representation. Thus far, these recommendations are hypothetical only, future research would need to implement these components to see if they alter the partnership's efficacy or member's experiences.

### **Limitations**

While this study provided a rich set of data over the course of several months, its findings, implications and recommendations still need to be considered critically. A significant methodological limitation in this work was that scheduling prevented group members from participating in similar methods of data collection. Adults were interviewed individually, some youth participated in a focus groups, and others did interviews to accommodate for conflicting schedules. However, this limitation inadvertently also served as a strength in that many of the experiences documented were reflected across different forms of data, suggesting that participants felt similarly about the partnership. Even so, some participants got more individual time to discuss their experiences in-depth, while others benefited from being able to build off each other. If this research were to be done again, one could do individual interviews for all participants and incorporate short focus group questions into a set of the final meetings, similar to how the initial focus group was conducted for youth.

Another limitation was the potential of self-selection bias among participants.

Recruitment was opened to the entire school community and no one who expressed an interest

was turned away. Additionally, adult participants were pre-selected based on their involvement in the original discussions and because they requested to continue to be a part of the work (as well as at least one of the youth participants). As such, many who participated were extremely motivated, not just in this project but in many other school programs which could account for the shared knowledge-base on racial issues, concerns with scheduling or quick consensus on many recommendations. For the purposes of this study, the connection to empowerment theory addresses this concern by appreciating the specificity of the local context in which the research is situated. Even so, it is important to keep in mind how participants came into this research and use this knowledge to consider its affect on the findings.

Another major limitation was time. This was previously addressed as a challenge for the partnership overall, but it also acted as a limitation for the completion of the research. The initial project was intended to run for eight months; however, ethics applications, recruitment and scheduling issues reduced the final project timeline down to less than four months. This had a major effect on how much was able to be accomplished and could also have influenced some of the results that identified strengths and challenges because we were working with an incomplete partnership. It is possible that with enough time to implement some of the recommendations, participant experiences about the partnership could have shifted significantly. As it stands, I have continued to meet with partnership members since the research's end date and we are intending to move into the implementation phase for some recommendations during the new school year. It would be interesting to revisit these research questions with the participants after some of this implementation work has been done to see if their experiences have shifted.

### **Personal Reflection**

Given that I started this thesis with a preface for my journey towards studying youth-adult partnerships, I feel it apropos to include a final reflection on certain understandings and experiences I garnered from the research process. This has been a process rife with uncertainty, sudden change, and a constant need for patience. I learned early on how difficult it would be to engage with youth in a way they wanted while still being held accountable to academia and the public-school board. Navigating multiple ethics committees helped ensure the research was being conducted in a thoughtful and respectful manner, but it also delayed the project enough that many of the students who originally requested this partnership lost interest. I find myself torn, I recognize the importance of the research process as it protects participants but struggle to see how transformative work can occur in these institutionalized spaces quickly enough for youth to see any tangible outcomes before transitioning out of the school system.

Another component that I grappled with throughout the course of this research was my engagement in the research process as a person with privilege working with marginalized communities. The focus on addressing racism was not where I initially intended to go, and while I support my partnership members unequivocally and whole-heartedly in this goal, I continue to question the appropriateness of my involvement as a researcher. It has been a struggle to find a way to center the voices of those I collaborated with while also learning to navigate my position of power as the one who dictates the final document for academic purposes. This is part of the reason why I chose to represent the findings' summary visually, knowing that this exact diagram has been seen, discussed, and approved by participants. Furthermore, while I encourage the reader to contemplate the connections made in the discussion, these are only my interpretations of a very complex and nuanced project. I urge you to closely consider the results section as it directly presents participant narratives and where each theme was presented to group members

prior to this thesis' creation and received their approval as representative of their vast contributions to the project. The space I take up in this research will continue to be a challenge for me as I attempt to balance respecting and highlighting my collaborators experiences while also trying to learn how to trust the value of my own voice and contributions.

Additionally, this entire experience has reinforced in me the responsibility I owe to the community I am working for and how this intersects with my academic role. For example, I wanted to be very intentional in explaining my research process to partnership members so that they had a clear idea of how their contributions were fitting into a larger academic process. Additionally, I have never been particularly comfortable with having the value of my community-based research judged by a dense academic thesis. However, this study has helped me better appreciate the value in completing these fundamental stepping stones for research and was my first major experience with disseminating information for what sometimes felt like two separate worlds. I hope to continue to improve my skills so that one day I will be better equipped to disseminate my work's knowledge in an accessible format right from the start.

Lastly, this research was forced to end prematurely due to time constraints, but this did not mean the partnership had to end. After data collection was forced to conclude to maintain academic timelines for my thesis, we opted to continue the partnership and focus our next steps on circulating our set of recommendations that came out of meeting discussions. The students and I put together a presentation for several superintendents, school administrators and consultants at the school board detailing youth experiences and recommendations. In addition, we are currently trying to get one of our workshop proposals implemented at the school and have plans to continue discussions over the fall semester to see how this partnership can continue. This additional commitment to carry through with the partnership has been very rewarding, and

while it feels more relaxing being outside of the prescribed boundaries of the research, getting to this stage would not have been possible without that initial work. My hope is that I will be able to carry these experiences with me to inform how I engage in research as I move into doctoral studies.

### **Conclusion**

The field of youth engagement is still in its infancy and contains many directions for research to have an impact. Youth-adult partnerships are one such pathway to promoting youth engagement, but previous literature has identified a need for more research on the components of empowering partnerships as well as examples in different contexts such as educational settings. Operating under a transformative paradigm and using the frameworks of empowerment theory and Critical Race Theory, this study contributed to this larger body of work by providing a detailed case study of a youth-adult partnership focused on addressing racism in a local secondary school. Findings showed that the partnership leveraged adults' contributions to support ongoing conversations driven by students, leading to a series of recommendations targeting student, school, and school board levels. Participants shared their experiences by identifying what partnership components acted as strengths and challenges, and by articulating how their participation contributed to instances of authentic engagement, allyship, and empowerment. Notable findings include the importance of genuine connections for establishing a safe environment and the unique challenges in school environments regarding scheduling and youth participant attrition. Findings were then linked to the theoretical underpinnings of the research. Empowerment theory was present in the partnership's ability to foster consciousness raising and in how the partnership's empowerment potential could be assessed based on the TYPE Pyramid for partnership styles. Critical Race Theory was connected to the results most



notably by focusing on the impact of including adults who share students' racialized experiences and through a reflection on the qualities and identities best suited for the partnership's facilitator. Each major finding was connected to potential areas for future research and helped inform a series of best practices for implementing social justice-oriented, youth-adult partnerships in school settings.

The study's findings were able to contribute beyond theoretical research and into practice by identifying several key components for carrying out youth-adult partnerships in schools. Elements unique for the school context included bringing in adult partners from outside of the school; introducing adults in a staged process to mitigate power dynamics; and making sure to include a dedicated facilitator who embodies specific, positive characteristics. Factors that spoke to partnerships focusing on racism included having members come in with a solid knowledge-base for racial issues; centering youth voice; ensuring a diversity of experiences among partnership members; and including adults who are representative of the youth in the partnership. The intention of providing such a detailed account of one partnership is so that others could integrate these best practices recommendations into schools with similar contexts, with the hope that it would lead to increased levels of empowerment, engagement, and allyship for youth and adults alike.

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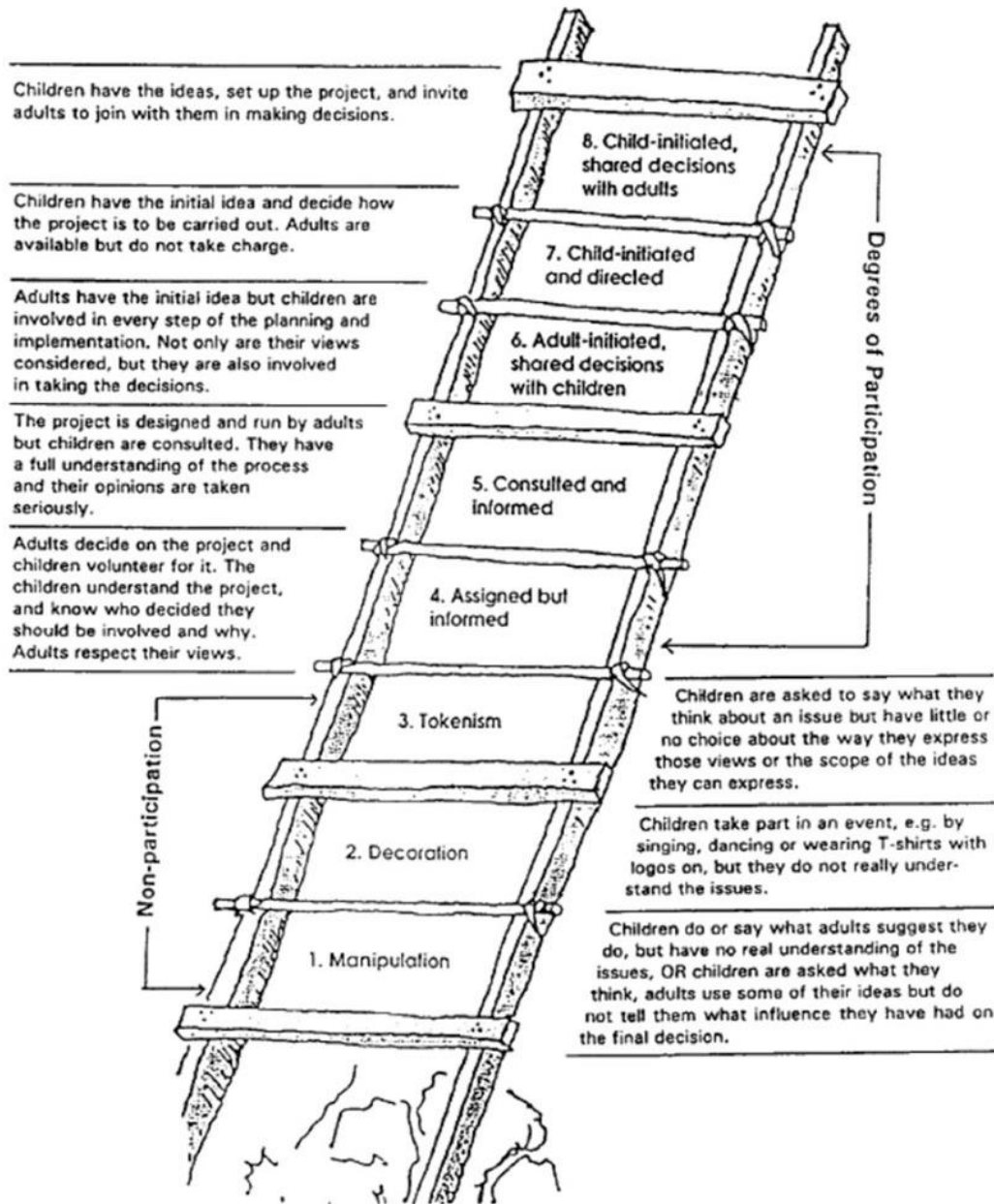
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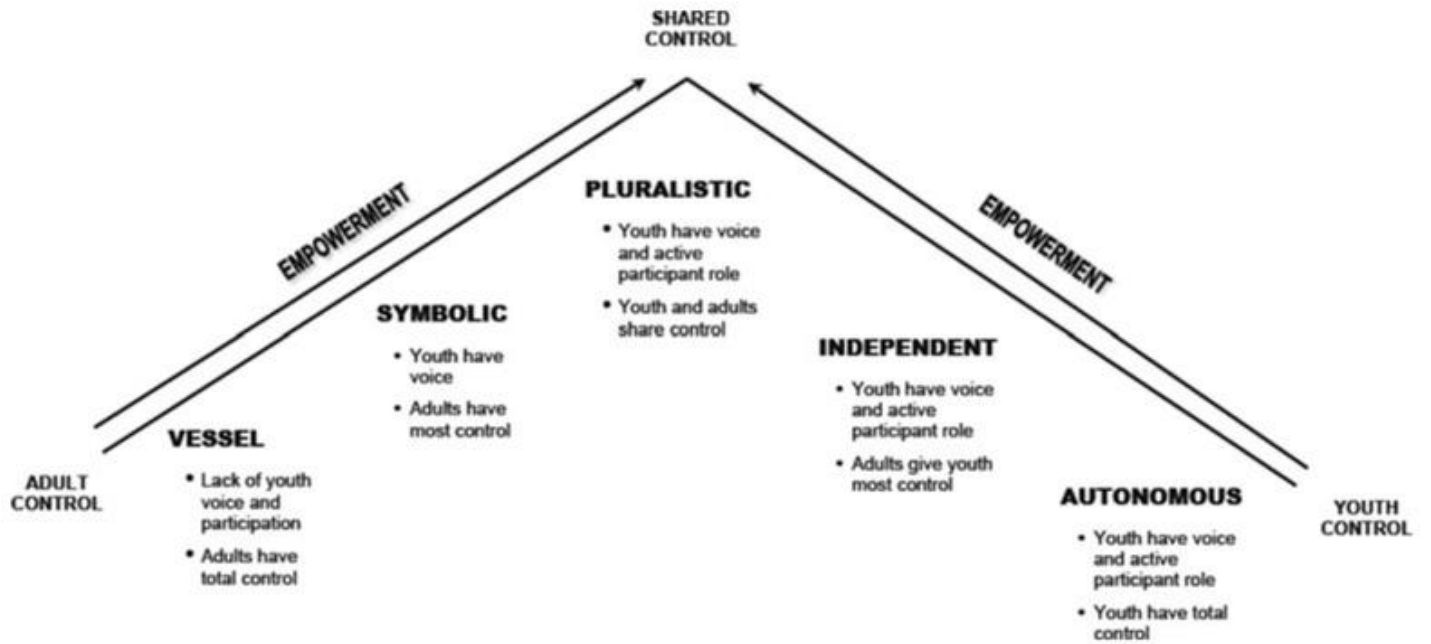
Appendix A

Hart's Ladder of Children's Participation



Appendix B

Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment (TYPE) Pyramid



## Appendix C

### Recruitment Materials – Poster



# Are you interested in addressing racism in your school?

If so, we want to hear your thoughts!

You are invited to participate in a research project about student-led programming, focusing on racism in secondary schools.

This project would involve approximately one group meeting per week from February to April. We are looking for six students who can speak about, or have had experience with, racism within schools.

Participation is confidential and voluntary, but weekly meetings will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. You can withdraw any time if you change your mind. This study has been cleared by the Laurier's Departmental Ethics Committee (REB #5432).

If you would like to participate, please sign up in the main office with [by Friday, January 19th](#). We will send you a follow-up message to coordinate a time for an information session.



This project is being led by Sarah Ranco,  
a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University,  
[ranc5320@mylaurier.ca](mailto:ranc5320@mylaurier.ca)

## **Appendix D**

### **Recruitment Materials – Verbal Script**

There will be a research project starting at [local school] this semester led by Sarah Ranco, a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University. It is a study about addressing racism in secondary schools through student-led programming.

The project would involve approximately one group meeting per week from February to April. They are looking for six students who can speak about, or have had experience with, racism within schools.

Participation is confidential and voluntary, but weekly meetings will be audio-recorded for accuracy and you can withdraw at any time if you change your mind.

If you would like to participate, please sign up with [name removed] in the main office by Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup>. The researcher will send you a follow-up message to coordinate a time and location for an information session.



## Appendix E

### Example Consent Form

**Wilfrid Laurier University  
Department of Psychology  
Informed Consent Statement (Youth)**

**Youth-Adult Community Partnerships: Student Voice and Choice in Addressing Racism**

Sarah Ranco (MA Student) – Wilfrid Laurier University: Faculty of Science | [ranc5320@mylaurier.ca](mailto:ranc5320@mylaurier.ca)  
Dr. Colleen Loomis (Supervisor) – Wilfrid Laurier University: Faculty of Science | [cloomis@wlu.ca](mailto:cloomis@wlu.ca)

You are invited to participate in a research study about student-led programming and youth-adult partnerships. The purpose of this research is to document what steps are taken to facilitate a student-driven initiative addressing racism, as well as youth and adult experiences during this process. The investigators for this project are Sarah Ranco, a 2<sup>nd</sup> year Master's student in the Community Psychology graduate program at Wilfrid Laurier University and her supervisor, Dr. Colleen Loomis, a professor in the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University.

**NOTE:** Participants 18 years of age and under must have parental consent (i.e., their parent/guardian's signature on the Informed Consent Statement for Parents) to be in the study.

#### **INFORMATION**

Approximately 6 students from Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute and 4 adults from the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) are being invited to participate in the study. Youth participants were selected based on interest levels, and adult participants were selected through recommendation by the Equity and Inclusion Office at the WRDSB.

This study will consist of weekly, 1-hour group meetings with youth participants and the principal investigator, Sarah Ranco. These meetings will take place on school property (Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute) during the lunch hour, beginning in February and lasting approximately three months (the exact length of time will be decided upon together to reflect school schedules). You will be asked to take an active, leading role in developing a school program to address racism by providing direction, feedback, and suggestions during each meeting. Each weekly session will also include a 15-minute, informal group discussion to discuss your experiences for that day. In addition, two focus groups will take place during these session times, one near the start of the study and the other towards the end. These 1-hour focus groups will act as semi-structured discussions of your experiences and understandings of racism within schools, directions to take this project, as well as your experiences with the study.

In addition to these weekly meetings, there will be five 1-hour meetings consisting of all participants (i.e., youth participants, as well as all adult participants and the principal investigator). Three of these meetings will act as member-checking sessions, where progress is discussed and adult participants can provide advice and suggestions for moving forward. The remaining two meetings will act as introductory and closing meetings for the study. During the introductory meeting, you will also be asked to help establish a set of guidelines for maintaining a safe space for discussions. The closing session will consist of informal discussions about study experiences. Finally, you will be asked to share your reflections on the entire study process through a medium of your choice (i.e., a piece of artwork, a written reflection, an individual discussion with the investigator etc.).

Focus groups will be audio recorded for data accuracy and are for research purposes only. They will be transcribed by the principal investigator, Sarah Ranco, and both investigators will have access to the recordings. Group meetings will be audio recorded with the purpose of creating weekly summary reports. These audio recordings of each weekly meeting will be deleted once the study has been completed.

Throughout the study, the principal investigator will keep field notes, detailing the steps taken during each session along with their own personal experiences.

While names may be recorded when audio-taping the sessions, transcriptions and field notes will only contain your initials to preserve your anonymity. Names will not be used in any final reports. You will be assigned a pseudonym for any publications, reports, or releases of study findings.

### **RISKS**

Potential risks to your well-being by participating in the study are minimal. Discussions that occur during this study may involve topics of racism, inequity, negative relationships, or other unforeseen conversations. It is possible that you may find yourself becoming upset by having these conversations or by recalling a negative experience related to these topics. As well, there is a risk of power dynamics developing among participants during the meetings, or potential distress from negative peer interactions. These feelings are normal and should be temporary. Please know that you are free to skip any part of the study and/or withdraw at any time. Each meeting will have resource information for counselling and guidance available for you. Additionally, at the start of the study we will collectively establish a set of guidelines for maintaining a safe space for discussions. The principal investigator will be responsible for implementing the guidelines and ending the sessions if adherence to the guidelines is not ensured. If you experience any persistent negative feelings as a result of participating in this study, please contact the investigators.

While your identity will be kept anonymous by the investigators (unless requested otherwise), full anonymity cannot be guaranteed because of the group setting. As such, there is the risk of loss of reputation, or an increase in harassment by other students in the school if your participation in this project is known. Cameron Height's Vice Principal, Krista Petrick, has offered her support for this study and will act as your everyday liaison, helping to maintain your safety if you are experiencing any negative social effects from your participation. We are also prepared to stop the project at any time if it is no longer deemed safe for any participant.

### **BENEFITS**

We do envision significant benefits to your participation in this study. First of all, you may benefit from having a space to exercise your voice and choice in meaningful initiatives that have the potential to directly benefit your daily life. Second, your experiences and participation could be useful in improving programs and services targeting racism in secondary schools. Finally, the results of this study will inform best practices for collaborations on student-driven initiatives, which may help adults better facilitate partnerships with youth in their communities. This could impact the lifetime trajectories of today's youth as well as future generations.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The investigators will keep everything you report confidential and private. Only Sarah Ranco and Dr. Colleen Loomis will have access to your personal data. Information shared during the group sessions (as well as the identities of participants) should remain within the group. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in a group setting. As such, you should only share information that you feel comfortable becoming public.

All data (audio recorded, written, electronic etc.) will be stored in a locked/password-protected file in the investigators' locked lab/office at Wilfrid Laurier University and will be kept for 10 years in the event that we conduct any future studies that may develop from this project. After that time, any paper data will be destroyed, and electronic files will be deleted by the investigators (i.e., 10 years past the end date of the study, June 30, 2028). The one exception is for audio recordings of the weekly meetings, which will be retained only until the end of the study after which time they will be deleted by the investigators (i.e., June 30, 2018). Consent forms will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in Dr. Colleen Loomis' lab,



separate from the data, and will be destroyed by June 30, 2028. We will ask for permission to store your contact information for up to 10 years (i.e., June 30, 2028) to be able to potentially invite you to participate in any future studies on program implementation and/or evaluation that may develop from this action research project, or a follow-up study on the research participants.

It is possible your quotations may be used in future write-ups or presentations. No identifying information will be associated with quoted text, unless otherwise requested by you. You will be able to vet any quotations before they are used in write-ups or presentations, and you may choose to participate in the study without being quoted.

### **CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), please contact: Sarah Ranco at email: [ranc5320@mylaurier.ca](mailto:ranc5320@mylaurier.ca) or Dr. Colleen Loomis, Department of Psychology, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5 1-519-884-0710, extension 2858 or email: [cloomis@wlu.ca](mailto:cloomis@wlu.ca). This project has been reviewed and approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board (REB #5432), which is supported by the Research Support Fund. The project has also be reviewed and approved by the WRDSB Research Committee. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Research Ethics Board Chair, Wilfrid Laurier University, 519-884-0710 ext. 4994, [rbasso@wlu.ca](mailto:rbasso@wlu.ca).

### **PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. You have the right to not respond and/or omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

### **FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION**

The principal investigator will prepare a summary of the results for the general public, including research participants, which will be given to the WRDSB's Equity and Inclusion Office for distribution. The summary report will be sent to you after all the data have been analyzed, by August 31, 2018. In addition to the summary, the research will be used to develop Sarah Ranco's Master's thesis. As well, we plan to present the results of the research at professional and scientific conferences and to publish the findings in professional and scientific journals. It is possible that results may be presented to the WRDSB on behalf of the Equity and Inclusion Office to inform best practices for programming addressing racism in secondary schools. The findings may also be made available through Open Access resources.

**CONSENT**

I have read the consent form or had it read to me and understand the above information. I understand that by consenting to participate in this study, I will be audio-recorded during all sessions. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**AGE OF CONSENT**

Please check ONE of the following:

- I am 19+ years of age.
- I am NOT 19+ years of age. I understand that my parent/guardian must also consent to my participation in this study.

**CONSENT FOR QUOTATIONS**

The researchers may find it useful to include one or more of your quotations in publications and presentations of this research. Please check ONE of the following with respect to the use of your quotations.

- I allow the investigators to use my de-identified quotations without my review
- I allow the investigators to use my de-identified quotations, but I would like to review them before publishing. If you choose this option, the investigators will send your transcript via email. Confidentiality of data cannot be guaranteed while in transit over the internet. Please provide your email address: \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not allow the investigators to use my quotations

**CONSENT FOR RETAINING CONTACT INFORMATION**

The researchers may wish to invite you to participate in future studies on program implementation and/or evaluation that may develop from this action research project, or a follow-up study on the research participants. With your consent, we would like to securely store your contact information for up to 10 years (i.e., June 30, 2028). Any future research that you may be contacted about that takes place within the WRDSB will require ethical approval from the WRDSB Research Committee. If you are contacted to take part in future research after you leave the WRDSB, the project may not have been reviewed by the WRDSB Research Committee. It will always be at your discretion to determine whether or not to participate in future research. **PLEASE NOTE:** For participants 18 years of age and under, parental consent must also be given to retain contact information.

Please check ONE of the following with respect to the retention of your contact information.

- I allow the investigators to retain my contact information for the purpose of contacting me regarding future research opportunities. Please provide your preferred contact information:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- I do not allow the investigators to retain my contact information beyond this study (i.e., June 30, 2018).

## Appendix F

### First Focus Group/Interview Questions

**Opening Question #1:** If you feel comfortable doing so, could you please share what identities shape who you are?

**Opening Question #2:** What is your opinion of this local school? This can be based on any factors you feel are important (i.e., academics, social climate, staff, student diversity etc.).

*Follow-up:* To the best of your knowledge, how does this school compare to other secondary schools within the school board?

**Key Question #1:** How do you conceptualize racism?

*Follow-up:* Do you think your peers/coworkers view racism in the same way? Why or why not?

**Key Question #2:** What does this school currently do to address racism?

**Key Question #3:** What else would you like to see happen at this school to address racism?

**Key Question #4 (Students):** Is there anything currently preventing these actions from happening?

**Key Question #4 (Adults):** Given your knowledge of the school board, which of these actions are most feasible?

**Key Question #5:** Have you ever partnered with adults/students to work towards a common goal before? If so, what were your experiences?

**Ending Question:** What do you expect to learn or experience, if anything, from participating in in this project?

## Appendix G

### Second Focus Group/Interview Questions

**Opening Question #1:** What has been your overall experience with this project?

*Follow-up:* To what extent has your voice been respected during this process?

**Key Question #1:** What did you like about being a part of this project (i.e., what were the project strengths)?

**Key Question #2:** What challenges or barriers did you experience during this project?

*Follow-up:* How were these challenges addressed, if at all?

**Key Question #3:** If you were to do this project again (or something similar), what changes would you like to see?

**Key Question #4A:** Describe your facilitator for this project, i.e., this youth-adult partnership.

*Listen and Probe for **concrete** examples of individual **characteristics or qualities***

*Listen and Probe for individual **identities***

**Key Question #4B:** Thinking beyond this project, describe your ideal facilitator, or vision for facilitating a youth-adult partnership.

**Key Question #5:** Are there any next steps you would like to see happen regarding this project?

*Follow-up:* How about with this specific partnership?

**Ending Question:** Is there anything else you want to share or discuss at this time?

**Appendix H**

**Data Connections to the Project’s Action and Research Components**

Data Collection	Action Components	Research Components	
		Research Question #1	Research Question #2
First Interviews and Focus Groups	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p>Responses used to structure meeting content</p>		
Second Interviews and Focus Groups		<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p>Responses identified strengths and challenges with the partnership’s structure, as well as participants’ personal experiences of participation within the project</p>	
Field Notes		<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p>Used to track how the partnership was utilized in this specific context</p>	
Additional Data (i.e., written/audio-recordings of personal reflections)			<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p> <p>One participant shared personal reflections on her participation in the project</p>

## Appendix I

### Data Analysis Codebook

Name	Description
<b>Adult Contributions</b>	This theme includes the different resources that adult participants brought to the partnership and tangible ways they participated
Dedicated facilitator	The partnership was structured to have a single adult at every meeting as a facilitator. This node looks at how this facilitator contributed to partnership's process
Feedback	Instances where adults used their experiences, knowledge and creativity to add to meeting discussions, especially as it related to the developed recommendations
Institutional influence	How adults used, or plan to use, their institutional power to further the partnership's goals
Tangible resources	Things that adult members physically provided and did during the project to help support the partnership and its students
Transparency	This includes instances where me or other adults provided information to the students about the partnership process or about school-based processes to foster a better understanding of what was feasible and maintain openness
<b>Allyship</b>	Instances of allyship with marginalized communities. This includes White allyship for racialized participants, as well as adult allyship for students.
Engaging with White privilege	Participant's discussions of engaging with racialized students while in positions of privilege and using that privilege to further the goals of marginalized participants.
Fostering empathy	Instances of empathy within the partnership as well as listening to others in a genuine way without defensiveness to learn from one another.
Power sharing	How participants tried to establish an egalitarian partnership and reduce power differentials. Also includes positive experiences participants had with power.



Name	Description
Researcher experiences and positionality	My reflections on my engagement in this work as a White researcher. Includes discussions with participants about this dynamic and having a White researcher as a facilitator. Additionally, includes experiences and discussions about tangible actions taken to incorporate an anti-racist lens while working with marginalized communities such as transparency on the research process and co-construction with participants.
<b>Authentic Engagement</b>	Abstract components of the partnership that relate to meaningful engagement for participants, as well as whether engagement was achieved.
Co-learning	Mentions of learning within the course of the partnership from both adult and youth participants
Genuine connections	Participants discussions of friendship, liking each other, emotional connections with one another and continuations of relationships
Mutual respect	Instances of participants discussing respect within the context of the partnership. Includes respecting space, decisions to engage, speakers' time etc.
Relationship building	Instances of participant experiences that relate to the development of relationships between students, adults, and intergenerational relationships. Includes the benefits that came from these relationships.
Respecting voice and agency	Participants talking about how their voice was respected during the project and how the partnership provided opportunities for this.
Safe space	Experiences of comfort within the partnership and elements that fostered or hindered a safe space for discussion
<b>Challenges</b>	Tangible components of the partnership that were identified as needing improvement or as an area for change in future iterations
Scheduling	Concerns about partnership member's personal schedules interfering with full participation
Structure	Includes participants concerns with the structure of the partnership's daily meetings, e.g., if meetings were too flexible or too unstructured.

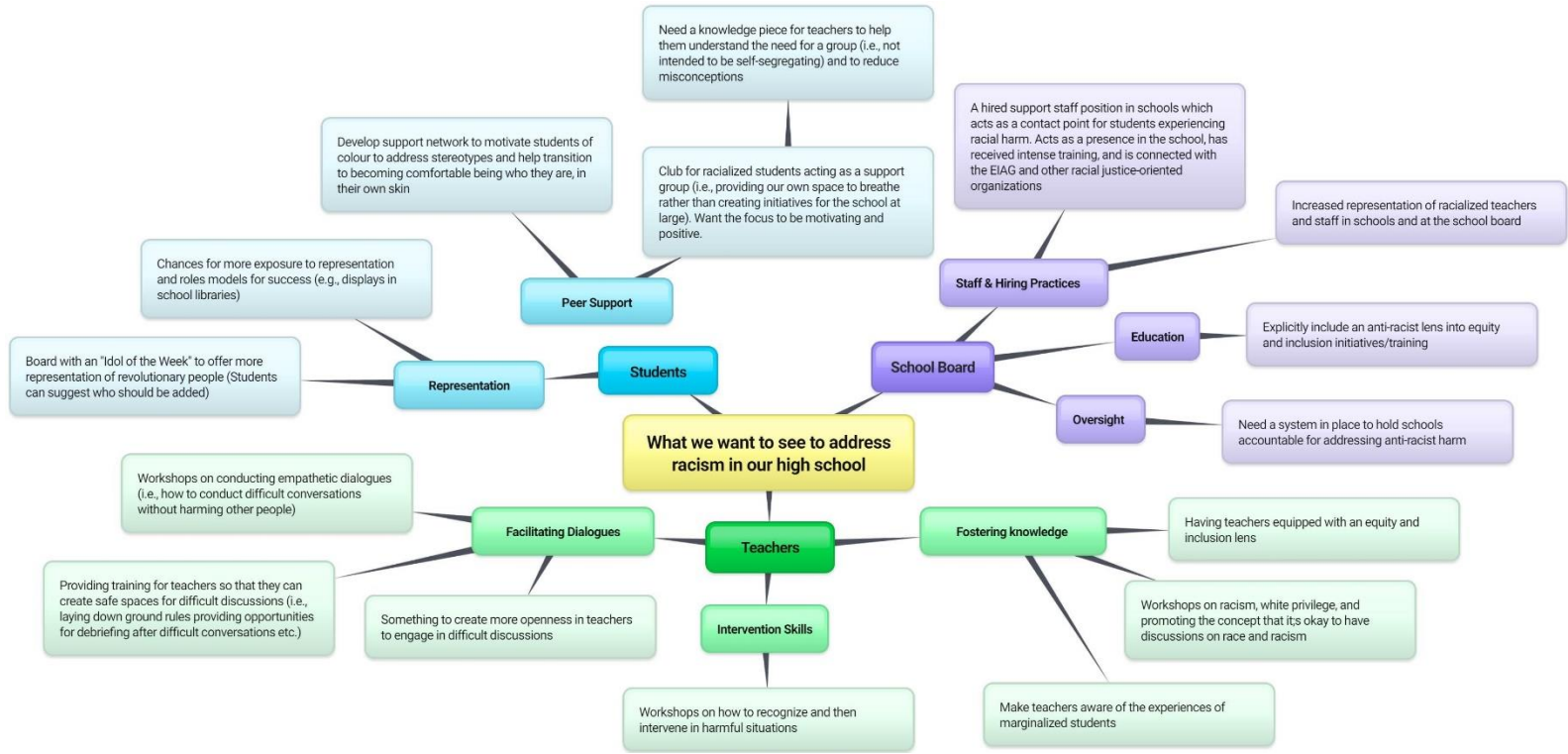
Name	Description
	Also includes experiences of the larger structure, such as the process of moving from discussions to recommendations.
Sustainability	Instances mentioning the sustainability of the partnership and of follow-through with recommended initiatives.
Time	Instances about the project's length of time, the duration of meeting times, and time taken when implementing initiatives/supports.
Youth Diversity	Mentions of diversity among members in the partnership. This includes the level of diversity among students and suggestions for increasing diversity.
Youth-adult power dynamics	Instances of when and how adults in positions of power participated in the partnership and how it affected the sense of comfort for students.
<b>Empowerment</b>	Includes participant experiences that are connected to the concept of empowerment and the components of empowering settings, especially for marginalized communities.
Acknowledgement	Includes participants' experiences of being acknowledged during the partnership and the effects of having people accept your narrative without undermining you.
Action	Instances of participants discussion tangible actions that came out of the project or hopes for future actions based on the work done during the partnership.
Hope	Instances of participants discussing hope for the future and their school because of their experiences in the partnership.
Openness	Participants' experiences of participating in an environment of openness and transparency. Also includes mentions of honesty.
Universality of experiences	Mentions of empowerment theory's concept of consciousness raising. Includes students learning about the shared nature of their experiences of oppression, their growth in how they view racial issues and their racial identity.
<b>Strengths</b>	Tangible elements of the partnership that were identified as strengths for the partnership. Does not include abstract components.

Name	Description
Adult participant characteristics	The number of adults, their diversity, and what each adult brought to the partnership. Also includes how adults utilized their resources, knowledge, and experiences to support students during the partnership process as well as discussions about representation and the diversity of adult participants,
Flexibility	Flexibility found within the partnership structure. Includes flexibility of schedule, adapting to new situations, and flexibility in discussion topics and participation.
Organization	Specifically relates to how organized the partnership was, how the facilitator managed communication between members, and the organization of paperwork, scheduling etc.
Positive facilitator characteristics	Having a dedicated facilitator during meetings focused on organizing, connecting, and helping to create a safe space. Also collects mentions of positive facilitator qualities.
Purpose	Mentions of concrete actions resulting from the partnership and moving towards the implementation stage (not included in this research). Also includes discussions about the sense of purpose from the partnership as it leads to tangible outcomes.
Racial literacy	Partnership member's pre-project understandings of racial issues and different forms of oppression
<b>Student-Driven Discussions</b>	Includes the themes of topics that were discussed during the partnership meetings and how students utilized their time as we worked through the months.
Current approaches and supports for addressing racism	Current actions the school is taking to address racism. Node includes facilitating discussions on racial issues, intervening in racist acts, racial literacy among teachers, and challenges with implementing anti-racist approaches. Also includes school and school board supports for racialized students as well as student's personal challenges when trying to address racism.
Previous partnership experience	If participants have any previous experience with youth-adult partnerships and if so, what were their experiences with them

Name	Description
Racism - Conceptualizations and Experiences	Participants personal experiences of racism, student- and teacher-perpetuated racism, as well as how participants conceptualize racism and racial identity
Recommendations	These include the recommendations participants made over the course of the partnership for addressing racism. This includes both recommendations, challenges for their implementation, and the feasibility of recommendations.
Representation	Discussions and mentions of representation among students and staff, and the effects of representation or lack thereof.
School environment	Includes a general overview of the school, opportunities for students, non-rationally focused student supports, as well as the student and teacher communities (not including racial diversity).
Student culture	Discussions about student-led initiatives in school, what's important to students, and social groupings among students.
Student-teacher interactions	Includes discussions on power dynamics between students and staff, teachers identified as allies, and experiences of interactions between students and teachers/school staff as it relates to racial issues and supports for student initiatives.

Appendix J

Partnership Recommendations for Addressing Racism in Schools



Appendix K

Visual Summary of Findings

