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HOW CANADIAN SCHOOL LEADERS PERCEIVE THEIR CAPACITY TO FOSTER
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES TO INFLUENCE STUDENT OUTCOMES

By

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HOW CANADIAN SCHOOL LEADERS PERCEIVE THEIR CAPACITY TO FOSTER
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Abstract

Despite numerous studies on race relations and racism in Canada, there is a relative paucity of research on school leaders' perceptions of cultural responsiveness in the Canadian educational system. Racial diversity among students enrolled in Canadian schools has increased dramatically over the last few decades. The diversity gap between a racialized student population and White school leaders continues to widen, with more than 95% of Canadian school leaders being White (Turner, 2015). The primary objective of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of how culturally responsive practices improve student outcomes. This study was guided by the following question: How do Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes? Semi structured interviews (30 to 70 minutes each) were conducted with five school leaders who identified as White, monolingual, cisgender, and able-bodied. Each participant had a master's degree and had been in the field of education between 14 and 22 years. Data was analyzed using critical race theory, specifically culturally responsive school leadership, as a theoretical framework to examine school leaders' perceptions through the lens of race and racism. The findings suggest that urgent changes in university educator programs, school leadership programs, and district professional development are necessary for preparing educators

and school leaders to address issues of racial awareness, equity, and social justice in Canadian schools and improve student outcomes for *all* students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Canada is a very diverse nation. In 2016, almost one-third of Canadians self-identified as racialized (Morency et al., 2017). What was once considered the minority has now become the majority in several Canadian urban areas. There are Canadian school districts with more than 50% of the student population identifying as racialized. By 2036, racialized people are projected to make up approximately 36% of Canada's population (Morency et al., 2017). Since 1981, Canada has had a proportionately higher intake of immigrants compared to the United States (Egbo, 2009). Canada's racial diversity continues to grow rapidly, the increased racial diversity is evidenced in classrooms. Although classroom demographics have changed, the racial composition of Canadian educators and school leaders has not. Most Canadian teachers and school leaders are White. More than 30% of the Canadian population are racialized. Yet only 9% of elementary school teachers and 10% of secondary school teachers identify as racialized (Kanu, 2011). The diversity gap among school leaders is substantially higher, with an estimated 95% of vice principals and 98% of principals identifying as White (Turner, 2015). This diversity gap is impacting students.

Researchers have documented the impacts experienced by racialized students who are taught by primarily White teachers with little critical understanding of race and racism (Dee, 2004; Delpit, 2006; DiAngelo, 2012; Heitzeg, 2014; Matias, 2016; Picower, 2009). The disproportionate number of White teachers compared to racialized students has led to issues involving discrimination, cultural discontinuity, and deficit perspectives by teachers (Grant & Sleeter, 2011). Discrimination and racism are experienced regularly by racialized Canadians.

Teacher representation that is reflective of racialized students has widespread benefits for students, such as increased attendance, a more positive association with school, increased family involvement in the education process, and closer community collaboration (Villegas & Davis, 2008).

Racism is often understood as something that took place primarily in the past (Schick & St. Denis, 2005), yet racism is a persistent feature of Canada's social fabric (Giwa et al., 2020). School leaders both influence and are influenced by racism (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007). There are barriers to discussing the influence of race in schools because not only is discussion about racism considered taboo, distasteful, and pejorative, but racial discussions risk provoking outrage (Schick & St. Denis, 2005) and discomfort. Many Canadians have overlooked or denied the parts of their country's history that have been marked by many incidents of racism. Claiming ignorance, educators may view themselves as nonparticipants in racism (Gebhard, 2017).

Scholars such as Henry and Tator (2006) and Lund (2006) noted the dismissal of historical and contemporary evidence of racism as a serious reality in Canada. Canadians commonly ignore the fact that racism and discriminatory laws and policies are embedded in the foundation of today's political, economic, social, and cultural institutions (Henry & Tator, 2006). Most Canadians acknowledge that racism occurs at least occasionally in Canadian society and is reflected in schools (Henry & Tator, 2006; Li, 2013; Lund, 2006), but some continue to perpetuate the denial that racism exists in Canada. Eurocentric ideologies coupled with exclusionary educational practices and systemic racism result in racialized students experiencing tenuous relationships with schools, and these fragile relationships have the potential to negate student identities and diminish the cultural capital of students (Egbo, 2009).

When confronting racialized inequities in education, mounting research has emphasized cultural responsiveness in educational theory and practice as a solution that promotes equity and addresses many of the school-based influences that lead to diminished outcomes for racialized student populations (Gay, 2002; Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Cultural responsiveness in education, which is rooted in critical race theory (CRT) (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), stresses that educators prioritize the racial and cultural contexts of their students and confront their own biases and positionality in their pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This research has made it clear that it is essential for researchers and practitioners to understand how school leaders and educators prioritize cultural responsiveness to serve racially and culturally diverse populations (Gay, 2002; Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Current literature suggests that the transformation of educator mindset and practice needed for culturally responsive curriculum and instruction to thrive and impact student achievement may not be attainable without the right leadership at the helm (Douglass Horsford, 2014; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). In addition, school leaders who undertake the critical action of examining their practices and beliefs through CRT can explore how race and racism impacts their students; therefore, they become better able to influence change and identify outdated policies and practices (Bridges & Lynn, 2010; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Hence, there is a need to further explore the perceptions and practices of Canadian school leaders, to determine better how they support racialized learners and to understand the racial beliefs that may shape their leadership mindset and practice.

When school leaders recognize racism, they often describe it as peripheral or a singular instance rather than systemic (Khalifa et al., 2016). Being a culturally responsive leader requires

implementing leadership philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Johnson, 2014). Culturally responsive school leaders acknowledge how racism has manifested in the construction of Canadian education and society (Brooks & Watson, 2019). Acknowledging systemic racism and its negative impact on students is necessary for school leaders to further examine racism in schools. Awareness and acknowledgement are important first steps toward culturally responsive action. To move toward the creation and sustainability of culturally responsive educational practices, school leaders need to comprehend the levels of racism in society (Miller, 2019). Given the persistent disparities between racial groups in academic achievement as measured by assessments coupled with the growing population of racialized students, school districts face a compelling need to develop, support, and communicate an intentional strategy to support the learning of historically marginalized students. Supporting and sustaining culturally responsive practices is one such strategy.

This research is set within a Canadian context where, despite overwhelming evidence that racialized students are marginalized by school practices and policies (McMahon, 2007), racism continues to be considered by some school leaders as a phenomenon that happens in other times and places. As expressed by Gay (2018), there are consistent levels of student achievement over time for various racial and ethnic groups, but there is also a wide variation of individual performances within each group. Gay (2018) asserted that achievement patterns among ethnic groups in the United States are too persistent to be attributed only to individual limitations. The blame lies within existing educational structures, practices, assumptions, and operational styles of schools, classrooms, and society. To tackle the inequities described by Gay (2018), school districts require a coordinated, thorough approach to organizational learning to alter the

institutional and individual dispositions and practices that contribute to these gaps. Coffin and Leithwood (2000) argued for a systemic approach that involves distributing learning among individuals in a district, strengthening the relationships and interactions of students and educators, and enhancing the tools and structures that support learning. Understanding how school districts respond to the need for their organizations to be culturally responsive is critical to reducing achievement disparities.

Canadian scholars have identified the need to embrace racial diversity to create a more equitable and inclusive and less Eurocentrically focused national discourse (Zinga & Gordon, 2016). School leaders cannot address racial differences without addressing race (Carter et al., 2017). Engaging in conversations about race requires developing the capacity to explicitly name and talk about race and racism in school settings. Many White educators and school leaders have struggled to talk about race and racism and defaulted to color-muteness, language that ignores race and racism (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012), or what M. Pollock (2017) called *clumsy race talk*. School leaders' reluctance to talk about cultural responsiveness and racial justice is grounded in discomfort and fear (DiAngelo, 2019) as well as a scarcity of culturally responsive role models in the field of education.

Overcoming the reluctance to talk about race will improve educational outcomes for historically marginalized students. However uncomfortable the discussions are, they are important, as they are linked to improved outcomes when attached to school reforms and practices focused on achieving equity in schools (Carter et al., 2017; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). The primary objective of this study is to explore school leaders' perceptions of culturally responsive practices to improve student outcomes.

With power comes great responsibility. It is generally acknowledged that school leaders are ultimately responsible for creating a school culture that encourages and supports educators' professional growth (Fullan, 2005). Schools provide a perfect starting place to explore changes in attitudes toward cultural responsiveness, and these attitudinal changes have the potential to expand to society (Syed & Hill, 2011). As Gebhard (2017) said, "I remain convinced that schools are society's most crucial identity-making spaces, and that no other profession is equal in its potential to inspire change" (p. 24).

Statement of the Problem

The main problem that this study addressed is that it is not known how Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. Presently, Canadian school leaders do not reflect the racial diversity of their student population (Turner, 2015). A culturally responsive school leader sets the culture and the climate of the school, which is pivotal on the success of *all* students (Lindsey et al., 2018). Research shows that although school leaders may encourage celebration of racial and ethnic diversity through Black History Month in February, occasional "multi-culti" potlucks, and acknowledgement of Indigenous Peoples Day in June and the recently created National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in September, many school leaders do not explore why discrimination and racism exist in society and in schools, and do not attend to the sociopolitical context of institutional and structural racism (Dei, 2000; Young, 2011).

Culturally responsive school leaders should be aware of their own culture, the cultures of those in their school, and the impact student culture has on learning (Lindsey et al., 2018). By interrogating their own understandings of race and the implications, school leaders will be better equipped to create a culturally responsive school environment, free of racism (Palmer, 2007;

Singleton, 2015). According to Palmer (2007), only those who are self-aware create authentic community, as self-awareness allows for participation in an exchange of sharing and learning. Becoming self-aware requires the acceptance that biases are deeply embedded in one's society and culture.

This problem is worthy of research because school leaders play a critical role guiding equitable and inclusive efforts in schools (Singleton, 2015). The school leader can make an important difference in establishing equitable school culture and climate, and may foster the participation of all teachers, students, and families in the learning community (Billingsley et al., 2020; Boscardin, 2015; DeMatthews, 2015; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Singleton, 2015; Theoharis, 2007). Few studies have focused on culturally responsive leadership practices in Canada, and emergent research is still attempting to understand some of the challenges and conflicts with which school leaders are confronted when they enact culturally responsive leadership (Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007). School leaders are often faced with tremendous resistance and pressure as they attempt to transform their schools (Theoharis, 2007); however, a willingness to engage in personal and professional risks may be required for transformation to occur.

Purpose of the Study

As stated by Howard (2003), "The increasing degree of racial homogeneity among teachers and heterogeneity among students carries important implications for all educators" (p. 196). The diversity gap between the overrepresentation of White educators and an increasingly racialized student population is resulting in cultural disconnect or racial mismatch, which can impede successful culturally responsive practice and further contribute to racial achievement gaps (McGrady & Reynolds, 2012). As such, the importance of racial identity in education must

be considered. In view of many students' racial identity not being reflected by the predominantly White school staff, the purpose of this study is to examine how school leaders make sense of and foster culturally responsive practice. This study has important implications for the education community because increasing a school leader's awareness of cultural responsiveness may greatly influence a school climate and student outcomes. In turn, this type of supportive climate may positively impact learner outcomes and students' educational experiences and successes in school and beyond.

The concepts of cultural responsiveness and culturally responsive pedagogies were introduced to the educational community only a few decades ago (Khalifa et al., 2016). I use *culturally responsive practice* as an umbrella term to encompass discrete elements of practice, such as culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL; Khalifa, 2018), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2014), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question: How do Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes?

Conceptual Framework

Whereas the theoretical framework underlines the assumptions guiding a study, the conceptual framework outlines a specific roadmap of suggestions connected throughout the literature (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). Because this study was concerned with school leaders' perceptions of how culturally responsive practices can influence student outcomes, one key

underpinning of the study was CRT, which entails a commitment to studying race, racism, and power. CRT critiques and challenges White normative standards and institutionalized practices.

This study also concerned the leadership behaviors of culturally responsive principals, which were examined through the lens of a CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016), which is rooted in CRT. Through a synthesis of empirical findings on culturally responsive leaders and leadership practices, CRSL can be categorized into four primary strands of leadership behavior: (a) critically self-reflects on leadership behavior; (b) develops culturally responsive teachers; (c) promotes a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment; and (d) engages students, parents, and community contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Brooks and Watson (2019) posited that racism occurs at multiple levels throughout the educational system. CRT highlights the ways in which racism is endemic, embedded as a normal part of how society functions, and how race affects all facets of daily life, including education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) and Solórzano (1997) were the first critical scholars to introduce and utilize CRT in kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) and higher education research as they sought to understand how racism operates in schools. CRT foregrounds issues of race and power as foundational to equitable practices in education.

CRT has evolved over the past two decades into an increasingly permanent fixture in the toolkit of education researchers seeking to critically examine educational constructs, school climate, representation, and pedagogy. CRT offers a lens through which educational scholars can recognize, understand, and analyze the experiences of racialized students. CRT is regularly used in education studies to examine the inequities that exist for marginalized and oppressed populations. CRT provides researchers with an epistemological and methodological tool to help analyze the experiences of racialized students. CRT scholars continue to illuminate the

culpability of systemic racism in inequitable school practices and outcomes by challenging ideologies, policies, and practices that are steeped in deficit thinking (Henry & Tator, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In the Canadian context, CRT requires deeper examination of the seemingly neutral Canadian multicultural mosaic. Multiculturalism in Canada is often viewed as an additive to the normative societal order that normalizes and centers Whiteness. Canada's multicultural policy can make it easier to ignore interrogations of Canadian societal inequities (Dei, 2000; Marom, 2019).

The study used CRT as a theoretical framework. CRT provides a racial equity lens through which to examine the actions of school leaders and culturally responsive practices. CRT is appropriate for connecting school leaders' conceptualizations of diversity with institutional policies, practices, and norms that create and sustain oppression in an educational setting (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). CRT asserts that in a racialized society dominated by Whiteness, institutional racism is embedded in schools (Zamudio et al., 2011). The central premise of CRT in this study is that race matters because of its systemic nature (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and racialized students continue to receive differential treatment in society and schools (Bell, 1992; Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRT offers conceptual tools for questioning the systemic nature of race and racism. It provides a helpful lens for investigating the Whiteness of teacher education and how because of this pervasive Whiteness, many White educators are not well equipped to teach a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse student population (Sleeter, 2017). According to Gay (2013), educators teach not only a curriculum of study, but they also become part of it. The subject matter they teach becomes mixed with their personalities and experiences. The conceptual framework supporting this study comes from understanding that school leaders' perceptions are their reality, and they teach who they are (Palmer, 2007).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

This study involved interviews with school leaders. An assumption of the study was that participants understood cultural competency, cultural responsiveness, race, and racism. The questions were based on perceptions, and personal and group ideologies may influence perceptions, but I hoped the participants would provide answers reflective of their personal ideologies and thus influence the interview results. All participants were advised of confidentiality, and it would have taken considerable time and effort to validate each participant's answers, so I assumed they provided honest responses knowing no identifying information would allow them to be traced back to their school district or school.

Study limitations include things that I, as the researcher, had no control over (Yin, 2016). Discussions about race, racism, and cultural responsiveness can trigger negative emotions, so school leaders may have taken a guarded approach to their answers. The sample size was another potential limitation, given that the discomfort of addressing cultural responsiveness could have led prospective participants to avoid getting involved in the study. The timeline of the study was December 2021 through February 2022. The location of the study was a Canadian school district that serves approximately 10,000 students. Interviewees included K-12 school leaders, including principals, vice-principals, and assistant principals.

Though it is paramount that teachers engage in this critical work, school leaders must model and participate in culturally responsive practice. School leaders must develop a critical consciousness of how they construct and conceptualize racialized identities (Picower, 2009) and how these social constructions determine how to lead the teachers in their schools. A critical understanding of the school leader's role and positionality within a framework of power and oppression is central to developing a critical consciousness of the operational aspects of White

privilege and how White privilege is manifested in teacher representation, and in turn how this impacts racialized students. Furthermore, as a novice researcher, I had to be able to identify a perception or feeling in a participant's reply and encourage the participant to give specific, detailed examples of why they perceived something to be, or felt a certain way. In the area of delimitations, the study was delimited to school leaders in one Canadian school district, and therefore the geographic area was limited.

Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, I examined school leaders' perceived capacity to foster culturally responsive practice and influence student outcomes. The primary instrument was semi structured interviews, and I used CRT to analyze the data. Many limitations in research, which are things that limit the way research findings and conclusions can be applied to contexts outside the research frame, are inherent to the research methodology and design. Because this is a qualitative study that did not seek to sample randomly from the population of Canadian school leaders, nor did it seek to (re)present beliefs, experiences, or opinions commonly held by Canadian school leaders, the results should not be used to form a sweeping general conclusion about Canadian school leaders. For example, Canada is the second-largest country in the world and is host to great diversity; thus, it is likely that the experiences of this study's participants—drawn largely from one school district—may differ significantly from school leaders in other areas of Canada.

Furthermore, the findings and conclusions presented herein are derived from my own interpretation of the perceptions, feelings, and sensemaking of the participants, as captured in the data. While I have made efforts to reduce the effects of my personal biases while undertaking interpretive analysis of the data, the fact remains that data analysis is essentially an act of

interpretation, and as such the findings and conclusions that rest on that analysis are not—and can never be—completely objective.

Rationale and Significance

There is important value in this for Canadian school leaders as this study will represent an emerging research agenda to address and guide cultural responsiveness in school districts. This study has important significance for intentionally increasing a school leader's awareness of how their culturally responsive practices and perceptions influence student outcomes. A culturally responsive school leader has the potential to ameliorate a school's climate, set an example for teachers, and influence student outcomes. This study can assist school systems and districts on how to properly provide knowledge, tools, and professional development for school leaders regarding culturally responsive practices. This study contributes to scholarship that may inform future research, policy, and practice.

Definition of Terms

The following section offers an overview of key terms in this dissertation.

Critical race theory (CRT), derived from critical theory, explains how race and racism are central to White innovation that evolved a normalizing of the social, political, and legal system that avoids racialized perspectives. Six tenets comprise the foundation of CRT: (a) the permanence of racism, (b) intersectionality, (c) interest convergence, (d) counternarratives, (e) colorblindness, and (f) critique of liberalism (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is leadership that develops and supports school staff to promote a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting atmosphere for racialized students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally relevant pedagogy is defined as the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of references, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant and effective for them (Gay, 2018).

Culture is defined as the knowledge, values, customs, attitude, language, and strategies that enable individuals and groups to adapt and survive in their environment (Egbo, 2009).

Diversity is a term used to encompass all the differences among people, including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, and so on (Pauchulo, 2013).

Racism is a mix of prejudice and power leading to domination by one group and exploitation of others. Racism asserts that the one group is supreme and superior while the others are inferior (Pauchulo, 2013).

School leader, in the context of this study, refers to principals, vice-principals, and assistant principals in K-12 school settings.

Whiteness is an interwoven system of structures, ideologies, and identities that assert one racial group as dominant over another (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Summary

Canada's diversity continues to grow rapidly, and the increase of racial diversity is evidenced in classrooms. Although student diversity continues to change, Canadian teachers and leaders have not, with almost 90% of Canadian teachers identifying as White, and more than 95% of school leaders identifying as White (Turner, 2015). This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the background and context of the study, the problem and purpose of the study and associated research question, and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks underpinning the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant research framing the study, including the historical context of Canada, CRT, systemic racism in Canadian schools, Canada's

multicultural policy, culturally responsive leadership, racial conversations, the diversity gap, and forms of racism. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology used for this study—a qualitative design using semi structured interviews. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, which are then discussed in Chapter 5 along with their implications and recommendations for future policy, practice, and research in the field of cultural responsiveness.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides background information and discussions of literature pertaining to multiculturalism, multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the role of culturally responsive school leaders in identifying and talking about the forms of racism that currently exist in Canadian schools. CRT forms the basis for how I approached this literature review. Though the context of racial diversity within Canada differs somewhat from that of the United States, much of the scholarly research from the United States can be applied to Canada's education system.

Canada in Context

Canada's national identity is often understood as what it is not: American. Canadians often embrace a narrative that differentiates their country from the United States, positioning Canadians as the enlightened northern neighbors. When Canadians talk about racism, discussions focus on individual actions by individual people, labelling them as moral or immoral, good or bad, rather than acknowledging racial stereotypes that surround—and are internalized—by Canadians (Goel, 2019).

Both Canada and the United States have long been dominated by a “nativist, racial ideology” (Frie, 2020, p. 277). Both countries share horrific histories of genocide against Indigenous Peoples (Tasker, 2015), and both countries have long histories of slavery and oppression. A common stereotype exists that racialized people in Canada have it better than racialized people in the United States (Teelucksingh, 2018). Canadians are influenced and inundated with American history, news, media, and culture related to race and racism, giving

Canadians with a false impression of national egalitarianism, which may result in a lack of critical national reflection. The perception of Canada as an egalitarian mosaic may be an illusion that sustains the status quo (Egbo, 2009). The national narrative of multiculturalism serves to uphold Canada as a progressive nation that welcomes, embraces, and celebrates cultural diversity. Canada promotes itself as a multicultural country built on polite tolerance and kindness (Syed & Hill, 2011). Despite the altruistic intentions of multiculturalism, it has been unable to effectively deal with inequitable practices that continue in Canadian society.

Critical Race Theory

CRT addresses why racial inequities exist in society and how people can work to eliminate them through a study of race, racism, and power (Gillborn, 2015). It critiques and challenges White normative standards and institutionalized practices. In the 1970s and '80s a group of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars recognized a need for a new framework to combat racism and oppression in America. Initially, CRT was mainly referenced in legal scholarship and challenges to U.S. legal culture, including civil rights legislation. In the late 1990s scholars were looking for ways to work against racism in education. Key education scholars of race, notably Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), adjusted the CRT perspective to include the educational field and to deconstruct the ways that education, steeped in institutionalized racism, affirmed the status quo (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Solórzano, 1997).

Thus, CRT was established as a theoretical lens for educational research and understanding school inequities. CRT is a practice that interrogates the role race and racism plays in society and can be used as an instrument to expose hidden systemic and customary ways in which racism works by drawing from a wide variety of sources of knowledge that range from statistics to social science research to lived experience (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). It works to

understand the centrality and normalization of racism. CRT scholars challenge the ways in which seemingly universal White views are grounded in White privilege. CRT researchers continue to illuminate institutional culpability and inequitable school practices and outcomes by challenging ideologies, policies, and practices steeped in deficit thinking (Henry & Tator, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Valencia & Solórzano, 1997). In the Canadian context, CRT compel a deeper investigation into the notion of multiculturalism, which has been unable to deal with severe interrogations of Canadian social inequities (Dei, 2000).

Systemic Racism in Canadian Schools

Schools are a microcosm of society, not only reflecting the diversity of the population but also the diversity of their values and epistemologies (Miller, 2019). Those involved in education need to understand how the rooted inequities of the Canadian society produce the stratification of people based on race, and in turn their participation in economic, political, social, cultural, and educational institutions. The entrenched culture, norms, values, and beliefs that permeate the institutions that shape lives in Canada every day uphold the status quo and influence individual behaviors, beliefs, and values. The Canadian education system is one that upholds White hegemony, resulting in racial inequity and institutionalized racism.

From dress code policies that uphold White supremacist structures (Aghasaleh, 2018) to teachers who manifest racism through (un)conscious biases, colorblindness, colormuteness and microaggressions against racialized students with enduring consequences, to curriculum and textbooks that depict a false narrative of Canadian history, racism shows up in the Canadian educational system in numerous ways. When racism is viewed as a foundational aspect of Canada's education system, educators may understand more fully the requirement for mental fortitude and emotional courage to disrupt institutional and systemic racism.

Acknowledging racism exists in Canadian schools is one thing. Disrupting racism may not be a priority for many school leaders who are not prepared and may be uncomfortable addressing issues of race. With more than 95% of Canadian school leaders and teachers being White (Turner, 2015), it is not surprising school staff struggle to recognize their Whiteness and often defend invisible privilege. The diversity gap between the racial identities of teachers and students in Canadian urban schools is a particularly significant issue.

Ladson-Billings' (1998) CRT tenets—curriculum, instruction, assessment, school funding, and desegregation—are identified by Capper (2015) as connected to school leadership. CRT suggests that when White people understand privilege and oppression, acting from a privileged space may become more sustainable and consistent and counterproductive behaviors like defensiveness may be alleviated. White educators may be uncomfortable talking about racism and using antiracist pedagogies because they are often unaware of their own racism (Rivière, 2008). School leaders who remain reluctant to have conversations about race create a culture of silence within schools. Avoiding discussions about race may also result in silencing those who experience racism in the school. Silence can be interpreted as complicity toward racism.

Canada's Multicultural Policy

It is beyond the scope of this literature review to fully address the history of racism and discrimination in Canada, but some examination of context is needed. By the mid-1960s, Canada's ethnocultural diversity had become an inescapable social reality. Canada's government adopted multiculturalism policy in 1971 to appease the French, English, and other ethnic groups. The policy was intended to reflect the government's shift from an assimilationist and integrationist social ideology to a pluralist ideal. Multiculturalism was intended to preserve the

cultural freedom of all individuals and provide recognition of the cultural contributions of diverse ethnic groups to Canadian society. In theory, multiculturalism provides opportunities to any Canadian regardless of culture and race. However, in practice, White Canadians continue to hold most of the power and privilege (Syed & Hill, 2011). This power and privilege are known as Whiteness. Matheson et al. (2021) argued that Canada's multiculturalism policy can also serve to disguise systemic racism and permit Canadians to willfully abstain from a responsibility to challenge contemporary mechanisms supporting racism (Dunn & Nelson, 2011) and serve to negate challenges regarding ongoing systemic racism (Donovan, 2020).

Multiculturalism, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Many Canadian students do not see themselves represented in the teaching staff, and less so in school leaders (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). This racial and cultural mismatch may result in school leaders not understanding race and culture in the same way as the students who attend their school. This pervasive Whiteness of school staff contributes to the perpetuation of a dominant hegemonic White school culture. Aiding students to make socially (and racially) just decisions while being immersed in conditions of unequal power relations is one of the key challenges of multicultural education (Barton & Ho, 2020).

Multicultural education emerged during the 1970s as an ideological approach to affirm diversity. Multiculturalism attempted to change the education system by allowing racialized students to maintain their cultural grounding (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Researchers have noted that multicultural education focuses on honoring cultural differences, celebrating diversity, and ensuring representation, but with little emphasis on racism, injustice, or the systems and structures that create disparate outcomes for racialized students (Bensimon, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ngo, 2012). Schools often encourage the

performing of multicultural festivals with different foods, music, and dances, which fail to approach topics of inequality and racism (St. Denis, 2011; Zine, 2002). Multiculturalism is viewed as an additive to the normative societal order, and not as an alternative to it (Marom, 2019).

Multicultural education implementation strategies in schools have emphasized culturally relevant or culturally responsive practices. Ladson-Billings (1995) coined the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* in a seminal study of eight exemplary teachers of African American students. This culturally relevant pedagogical approach evolves from previous anthropological work that noted a cultural mismatch between students from culturally diverse backgrounds and their White teachers, particularly in terms of language and verbal involvement.

The multiculturalism paradigm in schools was criticized by Zine (2002), who asserted that multiculturalism limits marginalized cultures by confining them to special days and song and dance, which does not lead to equity or challenge power, identity, or representational issues in education. Words such as *diversity* and *multiculturalism* may allow school leaders to falsely understand that good intentions will address the needs of each student and make the school's practice culturally responsive, while discounting race as a factor in the structural inequalities impact students' school experiences (Whipp, 2013). Canadian educational approaches have long focused on cultural awareness solutions, instead of antiracist approaches, for improving the educational experiences and outcomes of racialized students (Schick, 2009; St. Denis, 2011).

Evolving from multicultural education research, the terms *culturally relevant* and *culturally responsive* have become widely used in Canada's K-12 practice. Though the two concepts share distinct roots, with the former being a paradigm guiding all aspects of pedagogy, and the latter focusing more squarely on educator methods and practice, both concepts center on

social justice and consider the classroom a site for social change (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). School districts are striving to provide professional development around culturally relevant and culturally responsive practices, and the expectation is for Canadian schools to become proficient at implementing such practices.

Ladson-Billings' (2014) influential work highlighted three critical aims of culturally relevant pedagogy: to help students achieve academically; to maintain each student's cultural integrity; and to recognize, understand, and critique current social inequities. Ladson-Billings (2014) argued that many educators who embrace culturally relevant pedagogy often neglect its intended critical and sociopolitical aspects. If separated from a clear analysis of racism, culturally relevant pedagogy can work to affirm Whiteness in the education of racialized students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Becoming a culturally responsive educator is not just about adapting instruction or instructional techniques for specific cultural groups; it is about acquiring a mindset that consciously seeks out and promotes diversity in the learning experience (Ragoonaden et al., 2015).

Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogical theory that affirms that culture underlies every part of education, including curriculum and assessment, learning and teaching styles, and methods of administration and supervision (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching employs the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance studies of racialized students to make learning more relevant and effective (Gay, 2018). Culturally responsive teaching holds great potential to combat racist practices of classroom teaching and may provide an approach for reintegrating knowledge that was initially marginalized due to systemic racism (Matias, 2016). Cultural responsiveness in education is a socially just response for redefining, reframing, and reconceptualizing deficit perceptions of racialized students, who

are culturally rich and equipped with their own reserves of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Cultural responsiveness is more than learning about cultures. It is a process for living racial justice. Culturally responsive leaders and teachers cannot distance themselves from the discomfort of injustice.

The Role of School Leaders

School leaders are one of the most important factors for effecting change in a school culture (Fullan, 2005). They are influential change agents for increasing student achievement and educational opportunities, especially for students most oppressed by racial inequities (Solomon, 2002; Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). School leaders have the fundamental responsibility of leading their staff through the process of uncovering and resolving the systemic problems that are associated with racism within their schools (Skrla et al., 2004; Welton et al., 2015). Schools are facing challenges that underscore the importance of school leaders and teachers collaborating effectively. However, successful collaboration is dependent upon the capacity of school leaders to disengage from managerial approaches to leadership and upon leadership development opportunities for classroom teachers (Webber & Nickel, 2021). Theoharis and Haddix (2011) posited that school leaders, as lead architects of school transformation and improvement, have more power and a greater responsibility to disrupt the effects of systemic racism. A growing body of leadership research (Bogotch; ; Furman, 2012; Potter et al., 2017; Taysum & Gunter, 2008) calls for school leaders to be culturally responsive, social justice advocates, examine current social and educational arrangements, and respond with actions to promote school initiatives and practices that support justice and equity. ; Furman, 2012; Potter et al., 2017; Taysum & Gunter, 2008) calls for school leaders to be culturally responsive, social justice

advocates, examine current social and educational arrangements, and respond with actions to promote school initiatives and practices that support justice and equity.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Schools mirror and perpetuate the sociopolitical aims within which they operate. School leaders need to understand the workings of the society in which they serve. At the core of most definitions of leadership is the ability to provide direction and exercise influence (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Culturally responsive leadership has evolved from the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy. According to Johnson (2014), “culturally responsive leadership, derived from the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy, incorporates those leadership philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive schooling environments for students and families from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds” (p. 145). Recent scholarship efforts have attempted to apply a culturally responsive framework to school leadership. These studies characterize culturally responsive school leaders as those who stress high student achievement expectations, exhibit an ethic of care, promote inclusive instructional practices, and develop organizational structures that encourage parent and community connections to the school (Johnson, 2014).

Building from the culturally responsive pedagogical model, Khalifa et al. (2016) developed the CRSL framework, which investigates four major domains of leadership practice, including (a) personal beliefs, awareness, and reflection; (b) development of teachers and curriculum; (c) school culture and climate; and (d) the broader school community (Green, 2015; Khalifa, 2012, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). As a result, CRSL has become central to the emergent body of research that is interested in understanding how school leaders promote educational

equity in both access and achievement outcomes for racialized students (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Promoting CRSL is complex work that requires a safe collaborative space for school leaders to engage in critical self-reflection with like-minded colleagues (Donnor et al., 2016). A culturally responsive school leader recognizes the history of oppressive practices and policies in the Canadian educational system that have resulted in deficit thinking and the pathologizing of racialized students (Khalifa, 2018). Culturally responsive school leaders require skills and knowledge to change the curriculum to eliminate the promotion of power and privilege (Khalifa, 2018; Shields, 2018). Additionally, culturally responsive leaders strive to create system-wide change that considers the structure of the organization as well as the culture of the organization. Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggested that school leaders who want systemic change must identify the right drivers (capacity building, collaboration, pedagogy, and systemness).

Culturally proficient leadership, culturally relevant leadership, culture-based leadership, cultural competency, multicultural leadership, and leadership for diversity are similar terms that describe this approach to leadership (Johnson, 2014). Culturally responsive leadership often intersects with leadership for social justice approaches, a term that has been prevalent in educational leadership literature and focuses on improving the educational experiences and outcomes of all students, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized in schools.

Why School Leaders Should Talk About Race

Scholars have argued that aspiring school leaders must engage in courageous conversations about race and write their own racial autobiographies to develop racial awareness and go beyond a colorblind perspective to school leadership (Gooden & O'Dougherty, 2015; Johnson & Campbell-Stephens, 2013). There exists a paucity of research that examines the

capacity of a culturally responsive school leader to talk about race. With the increasing diversity in schools and the evolving needs of students, possessing cultural awareness and competency is key for school leaders and teachers to adequately serve students (Fraise & Brooks, 2015).

Cultural competency is an important asset that will allow leaders to effectively lead schools.

Thus, as school leaders are charged with bringing about change and innovation to ensure all students' needs are met, they must be cognizant of how to properly equip themselves to serve, aid, and guide and be culturally responsive and competent to best serve students. The demands on schools and the historical marginalization of racialized students must be discussed if school leaders are to create effective culturally responsive schools and influence the success of all students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

School leaders hold a superior position in school hierarchies and the presence or absence of racial diversity impacts students. Leaders' authoritarian conversation may support some power structures over others (Briscoe & Khalifa, 2015; Ryan et al., 2009). With power comes responsibility. As Johnson (2007) argued, to effectively refute racism, one must first see and talk about what is happening. One of the principles of cultural responsiveness is awareness of systemic oppression and the need for cross cultural dialogue (Lindsay et al., 2018). Developing a language of race consciousness will not itself lead to a practice of racial awareness and equitable practice if the school leader is reluctant or resists due to feeling incapable of enacting such a practice (Miller, 2019). Talking about race and racism is a difficult thing for many people, as it is deeply rooted in one's sense of being. It is connected to history, notions of power and privilege, and a sense of belonging. Talking about hierarchies, societal stratification, dominance, and White hegemony is not easy or comfortable.

Until school leaders move toward understanding and talking about race, they risk remaining complicit in White supremacy (Matias, 2016). To start conversations about race, school leaders must first see race. The reasons why conversations about race are avoided in schools are grounded in discomfort, fear of saying something unexpected or unseemly, and shame (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; DiAngelo, 2019; Matias, 2016) as well as a lack of culturally responsive positive role models in the educational field to model such complicated conversations. Paulo Freire's (1970) timeless work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasized the importance of dialogue. School leaders may not have been mentioned directly by Freire; however, many scholars have asserted the need for school leaders to foster supported and facilitated dialogue (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995, Singleton, 2015). School leaders who engage in critically conscious and intentional conversations about racial justice develop skillsets for addressing systemic racism in the school system (Diem et al., 2018). Discussions about race are necessary for the wellness of students, educators, and leaders.

Talking about race correlates to improved student outcomes when race talk is attached to actual school reforms and practices focused on achieving equity in schools (Carter et al., 2017). A school leader who engages in conversations about race allows for greater connectivity with students (Matias, 2016). School leaders play a crucial role in demonstrating to educators the importance in helping students talk openly about the historical origins and contemporary manifestations of systemic racism. Open discussion about race must address how colorblindness, race neutrality, and the denial that problems of racism exist operate as a roadblock to racial progress (Fuller-Hamilton, 2019).

Ryan (2010) revealed in a study of 32 school districts across Canada that school leaders were reluctant to talk about racial incidents in their schools. This reluctance was grounded in the

guilt these school leaders experienced about admitting that racism existed in their schools, rather than an inability to recognize racism. Additionally, Ryan found that school leaders often equated racism with overt individual acts committed by people whom they identified as *evil* or *bad* people. Similarly, there are teachers who purport they are not racist yet continue to engage in racially prejudiced covert behaviors (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Neville et al., 2013) by not recognizing unconscious bias, colorblindness, and microaggressions. Thus, there is an absence of understanding and a reluctance to acknowledge that, although racism can be an individual act, such individual acts exist within a context of systemic racism.

Cognitive Dissonance

Piaget (1977) described the concept of cognitive dissonance in which a person encounters new knowledge or information that conflicts with previously acquired knowledge.

Disequilibrium is an uncomfortable psychological state, which prompts a person to seek resolution through reorganization of their schema to accommodate this new information and experience or return to equilibrium, or mental balance. In Piaget's (1977) model, a person can develop cognitive growth through assimilating or accommodating new information into pre-existing schema. Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance argues that individuals seek to maintain consistency among conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors to avoid tension or dissonance. Cognitive dissonance has been considered one of the most simplistic and widely accepted accounts of cognitive change (Perlovsky, 2013). Cognitive dissonance research has primarily focused on reducing dissonance by enacting changes in beliefs rather than changes in behaviors (Cooper, 2007).

Cognitive dissonance theory has been employed in educational research related to cultural responsiveness and educator beliefs and practices. Some of this research has described

the role of cognitive dissonance as a strategy for social justice (Gorski, 2009). Cognitive dissonance theory, therefore, is likely to yield an informative account of different school leader beliefs and how these beliefs are explained according to leader practices in their schools.

Gorski (2009) reports that cognitive dissonance often features prominently in racial awareness as new information about race, racism, and oppression “collides with old prejudices when new truths battles establish beliefs for space in our consciousness” (p. 54). The new knowledge may be incongruent with deeply held ideologies and may result in engaging in a variety of defense mechanisms, especially when new learning conflicts with a person’s privileged identities. Many White leaders have been socialized to believe in the myth of meritocracy (Milner, 2010), or that hard work and equal opportunity allow anyone to succeed. They also may engage colorblind or deficit ideologies to explain the achievement of their students from different racial and cultural groups (Valencia & Solórzano, 1997).

When the topic of race comes up, the cognitive dissonance it raises for Whites often exemplifies what DiAngelo (2012) deems *white fragility*. DiAngelo argues that Whites are mostly illiterate when it comes to thinking critically about race, and grasp tightly to emotional, yet relatively uninformed opinions. When challenged about uninformed beliefs, Whites may encounter stress and have minimal tolerance for any perceived discomfort arising from these interrogations about their deeply held ideologies and worldviews. In conversations about race, Whites may defend, disagree, minimize, or ignore the issue as an acknowledgment of White supremacy, power and privilege may jeopardize their socialized sense of entitlement. The intense reactions may be an effort to maintain their racial comfort and their identity of *good* and *moral* even in the face of conflicting information (DiAngelo, 2012).

Diversity Gap Between Students and School Staff

The lack of diverse representation among school leaders and teachers can impact students. Current teacher demographics that are incongruent with today's diversity of students make possible a significant racial and cultural knowledge gap between teachers and students, which Gay and Howard (2000) referred to as the *demographic divide*. Ryan et al. (2009) outlined four types of reasons to be concerned about the demographic divide, cultural mismatch, or diversity gap, between educator workforce and students: symbolic reasons, relationship reasons, pedagogical reasons, and political reasons. The reality is that overrepresentation of White school leaders is not going to change anytime soon, and therefore it is important to acknowledge that school leaders can make a difference for racialized students by striving to become culturally proficient and establish unique relationships with students.

The success of students, especially diverse students, depends on guidance from school leaders. The impact school leaders have on students is only second to curriculum and instruction (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Denying racialized students, the opportunity to see themselves reflected in curriculum "is like erecting a wall of deniability, preventing them from accessing all that education has to offer" (Fuller-Hamilton, 2019, p. 762). School leaders guide the teaching and learning in their schools (Reyes & Wagstaff, 2005). School leaders play a critical role in implementing change in schools, and an investigation into the roles that they play in effecting school change is meaningful (Lee & Kuo, 2019; Yildirim & Kaya, 2019). School leaders who are culturally proficient and responsive, and who have a vision set through an equitable and cultural lens (Lindsay et al., 2018), can foster a vision for an inclusive school, shared leadership, and inclusive practices (Prokopchuk, 2016).

Many school leaders espouse the principles of equity and respect for diversity, yet the educational organizations in which they lead often do not produce achievement that is aligned with this rhetoric (Allen & Liou, 2019). School leaders may not be able to change existing laws, but they can be active participants in advising and communicating to policymakers the necessary guidelines to support fair and neutral educational opportunities (Allen & Liou, 2019). As Turner (2015) noted, those individuals in positions of authority who are responsible for teacher hiring and promotion are overwhelmingly White. Therefore, it is critical that the majority White administrators engage in critical dialogue and action to understand how their positionality reflects their hiring patterns through self-transformative praxis (Lopez, 2015; Wane & Cairncross, 2013).

If school leaders understand and are aware of what systemic racism is, how it came to be, and how it oppresses students, they are more likely to engage in the work of reexamining personal beliefs and biases (Gillborn, 2008). They are better equipped to disrupt their assumptions and strive to understand the perspectives of others if they get to know themselves, their privilege, positional power, and deep-seated racial beliefs and how these beliefs influence their decisions and leadership. School leaders who focus on their belief systems may come to realize that they hold several assumptions, beliefs, and assertions toward racialized students (Milner, 2010).

Transforming notions about racism should be at the heart of the work in schools. Tatum (2007) asserted that ignoring the past and hoping that race relations will naturally improve is not possible. Tatum and other race scholars (e.g., Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Irvine, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Pollock, 2017; Singleton, 2015) have urged school leaders to engage in open, honest, and uncomfortable conversations about racial justice. School leaders hold

positional power and control to create the climate and culture for meaningful race-based conversations to transpire in educational settings (Swanson & Welton, 2019). Scholars agree that although racial justice conversations are not easy, they are critical to move beyond perpetuating a status quo in which racism exists.

Forms of Racism

According to Gillborn (2008), racism includes a much broader set of actions and assumptions than the narrowly based definition of racially biased hatred. Racism is a complex, multifaceted, and constantly changing set of practices and beliefs that have the effect of disadvantaging, disempowering, marginalizing, and stigmatizing entire groups. Racism cannot be understood in isolation from wider economic, social, and political inequalities (Gillborn, 2008).

Canadian educators remain uncomfortable with the notion that racism still exists in schools today (Gebhard, 2017). This denial can be interpreted as a coping mechanism for dealing with the overwhelming dynamics of racism (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Claiming ignorance and pretending racism does not exist may also serve to perpetuate the racial order (Leonardo, 2009). The denial of the existence of racism may be the result of not understanding racism manifests in different ways. Developing a comprehensive understanding of racism is required for school leaders to take meaningful action to talk about race, racism, and racial justice (Hochman & Suyemoto, 2020).

School leaders are often unable to recognize racism because they have not been trained to do so (Pauchulo, 2013). In Canada's educational system, school leaders have not had to question their Whiteness. Studies demonstrate that even when school leaders admit that racism exists in their schools, they often downplay its significance, possibly because of not understanding the

different forms of racism. As in many countries, Canadians recognize and publicly criticize overt racism. Racially motivated hate crimes in Canada increased 47% from 2017 to 2018 and another 10% from 2018 to 2019 (Moreau, 2019). Overt racism does happen in schools in the form of graffiti (e.g., symbols and comments in bathroom stalls), name-calling and use of racial slurs, and racially motivated harassment.

According to Leonardo (2013), racism does not have to manifest as willful acts of hatred to be a formidable force in a student's life. A seeming lack of overt racism in Canada does not exempt the nation from its history of racism but rather suggests that most of today's racism is covert and not captured in explicit measures (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Stanley et al., 2011) and is a subtler agent of oppression. Kohli et al. (2017) identified manifestations of a covert *new racism* occurring in K-12 schools. Forms of covert racism include unconscious bias, colorblindness, and microaggressions, (Kohli et al., 2017). This new racism is evasive, subtle, and difficult to identify as it is normalized and often hidden. Covert racism is embedded in everyday conversation through derogatory comments and assumptions based on stereotypes. Even though covert racism may be less obvious it is not less powerful, insidious, or painful for racialized students. The increase of racial diversity in Canada's student population has created a critical need to provide antiracist curriculum and pedagogy in schools. However, educational expectations for the inclusion of cultural and racial awareness in preservice teaching programs and professional development have not kept pace (Dixson, 2018).

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias, also commonly referred to as implicit bias, is often recognized as one of the reasons for persistent injustices and discrimination despite assertions of equality and justice for all (Gullo et al., 2018). One cannot escape possessing unconscious biases.

Unconscious biases are deep-seated attitudes and beliefs that operate outside conscious awareness (Carter et al., 2017). Unconscious bias is a major contributor to discriminatory and racist practices in schools and should be addressed by school leaders. A racialized worldview is part of Canada's dominant culture (Smedley & Smedley, 2005) and shapes personal attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies. Concerted efforts from culturally responsive leaders are needed to recognize and understand how subconscious enactments of racial privilege may negatively impact racialized students and display poor modeling for all students.

Inequitable educational outcomes should have school leaders interrogating why equitable classroom practices are not translating into outcomes. There is an unspoken expectation that schools can facilitate racial equity for students; however, with an absence of training to address educators' unconscious biases, facilitating racial equity may be an impossible task, especially if racial biases mirror those of the population (Starck et al., 2020). Biases are a cultural by-product that can have important consequences in the classroom and can be a potentially significant contributor to inequitable school practices. Unconscious biases are unconscious beliefs. Racism is what happens when these racial beliefs or biases translate to action.

Racialized students in Canada may experience teachers' well-intended yet harmful transgressions (Starck et al. 2020). According to Stark et al. (2020) teachers' bias levels and those of the larger population are similar. Teachers tend to teach based on their own experiences and social location and, because Canadian teachers are predominantly White, this distorts the worldviews, knowledge, learning, and curricular approaches to which students are exposed (McFarlane, 2015). Egbo (2009) asserted that it is "illogical that educators are able to empower others if they do not understand the values that informs their own practices" (p. 125). These

deeply seated unconscious negative perceptions of racialized people will emerge in how they teach, given that teachers teach who they are, as posited by Palmer (2007).

Although overtly racist and gendered references have been removed from curriculum materials, Eurocentricity still permeates pedagogical practices and reinforces itself through the *hidden curriculum* (Giroux, 1978). The hidden curriculum subtly and invisibly operates by promoting Eurocentric epistemologies and by silencing other ways of knowing. For example, Eurocentric dominance is preserved in the education system through the omission and denial of Indigenous, African, and Asian pedagogies and scholarship in resources, materials, curricular content, and the construction of *othered* identities through a lens that privileges European worldviews (Dei, 2000).

One must learn to listen to oneself before one can really understand others (Schein, 1993). Taking time to reflect, recognize, and acknowledge one's unconscious biases may cause discomfort. People often believe their biases are the correct ones and thus make themselves impervious to other views (Schein, 1993). White school leaders' knowledge of their racial identity and history and implications of their White privilege impacts the way they lead (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). Without self-examination through reflection, deconstruction of ideologies, and breakdown of biases, school leaders may create barriers to establishing trust and creating a safe space for students and families. Khalifa et al. (2016) asserted that critical reflection is foundational and precedes any actions in leadership. An important aspect of school leaders' work is praxis — a combination of reflection and action.

Palmer (2007) said that only upon reexamination of their racialized ideologies can educators reimagine an education system that supports the success of *all* students. Palmer encouraged educators to chart their *inner landscape*. Overcoming unconscious bias takes a lot of

reflection and dedicated, emotional, hard work. Reflective practice makes teams in schools responsible for ensuring cultural responsiveness is alive in schools (Kowaluk, 2016). School leaders play a central role in both producing and reproducing knowledge (Petherick & Beausoleil, 2015).

Colorblindness

Colorblindness, also known as color aversion, is the resistance, failure, or refusal to describe people by their race or acknowledge that race exists (Davis et al., 2015; Pollock, M. 2017). Colorblindness allows individuals to claim they do not see or judge people by their skin color and to oppose interventions that could support tackling racial inequality just to appear moral (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Many school leaders believe that racism can be resolved through colorblindness. This form of racism negates or denies the negative outcomes of racism by conveniently reframing inequality as issues of individual ability or choice (Hartmann et al., 2017; Kohli et al., 2017), thus allowing White people to blame others for struggles they encounter and deny the existence of continued inequality, thereby absolving themselves of any responsibility for change (Neville et al., 2013). Colorblindness is embedded in schools from elementary through to higher education (Sleeter, 2017) and further contributes to discrimination (Price, 2009). A colorblind perspective suggests that race should not be discussed (Carter et al., 2017). When educators demonstrate colorblindness with race neutral comments such as *I treat all my students the same*, they promote the status quo of racial inequity by ignoring racial differences and maintaining pedagogy that supports White privilege (Milner & Laughter, 2015). Racism is sustained through race-neutral or colorblind approaches, which reify whiteness by resisting an awareness of racism (Kohli et al., 2017).

Colorblindness has become an accepted practice in schools for a myriad of reasons. Ideologies that support colorblindness as an altruistic framework and encourage teachers' refusal to see race and racism can often exacerbate the racial biases that students experience in school (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). Colorblindness allows for the status quo, thereby ignoring anybody who is not White. School leaders must be aware of how a colorblind ideology impedes a deeper understanding of the social and political significance of race (Diem et al., 2018). When teachers and school leaders ignore a student's identity and deny that differences exist, the student may be unable to respond in a meaningful way, thus impeding the student's success. These teachers and leaders are responsible for the academic success of students and thus affect their futures — students will carry with them the negative consequences of colorblind actions.

The related concept of colormuteness is defined in this study as actively suppressing the use of race-related words and racial categories. In a study of 84 European-American mothers, researchers found that nearly all the mothers used a colormute and colorblind approach to socializing their children (Pahlke et al., 2012). This approach does not reduce racism in children and, in fact, becomes a missed opportunity to teach children to be antiracist. With many White Canadian school leaders having experienced similar upbringings, White teachers and White leaders may not recognize how their own Whiteness impacts their lens in how they see racialized people (Utt & Tochluk, 2016).

In a study by de França & Monteiro (2013) involving 153 Brazilian White children, researchers discovered that concealing racial bigotry is a learned behavior that children learn more and more as they become older. In other words, rather than learn antiracist behavior, children become adept at hiding their racism through subtler forms as they get older (de França & Monteiro, 2013). White people express this kind of racism through at least four mechanisms:

expressing racial views while avoiding direct racial language; using rhetorical devices to safely express racial views; projecting; and using diminutives to soften their perceived racialized understanding (Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

Educational policy and school philosophy that promote colorblindness without examination of the ideologies underpinning White hegemony (Atwater, 2008; Gillborn, 2004) offers an excuse to ignore the cultural reality. By engaging in colorblindness, educators and school leaders deny racialized students their lived experience, which can differ from their White counterparts. An unwillingness to acknowledge students' race is also a refusal to name and see one's own race and its relationship to a system of privilege and denial. There are school leaders and teachers who admit they would prefer not to say they see race and default to colorblindness for fear of being called a racist. However, a colorblind perspective works to reproduce racism; it keeps the conversation away from race and is therefore more comfortable and perhaps safer for White people.

Microaggressions

Critical race theorists identify microaggressions as the covert manifestations of racism in daily life experienced by racialized people that usually go unnoticed by White people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Microaggressions are subtle racial assaults or insults (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Sue (2017) defined microaggressions as everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, or snubs, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based upon their marginalized group membership. Teachers enact microaggressions, whether intentionally or unintentionally, when attempting to ignore race or racial difference (Bonilla-Silva, 2019). Another type of microaggression, based on colorism, is failing to learn the names

of darker skinned students as quickly as those of lighter skinned or White students (Monroe, 2013).

Teachers and school leaders need to be aware of how microaggressions may influence students. Sue (2017) argued that microaggressions adversely impact one's psychological health and general well-being. The cumulative impact of racial microaggressions can have lasting and damaging impact on students' self-perceptions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Continuous exposure to microaggressions can result in internalized oppression (Freire, 1970, Steele & Aronson, 1995). Utt and Tochluk (2016) advised regular self-reflection and inquiry into how privilege manifests are necessary to interrupt subconscious enactments of microaggressions.

School leaders are learning to strive to recognize their own cultural constructions, biases, and prejudices to build stronger school and community collaborations. They are increasingly aware of their role in increasing teacher capacity in all its dimensions (Li, 2013). These dimensions include enhancing educators' knowledge and skills about diversity, changing their attitudes and outlooks toward self and their students, and developing their ability to translate this knowledge into practice (Li, 2013). School leaders who develop a complex understanding of their own race may begin to recognize how racism is embedded in society and is not simply individual overt acts of hate toward members of a racial group. Unconscious bias, colorblindness, and other microaggressions create barriers in Canadian schools. School leaders have power and agency and are well positioned to influence a school's culture in a positive manner and help bring attention to racial justice issues.

Summary

Most racialized students in Canada do not see themselves represented among school staff and leaders. Racism is the creation or maintenance of a racial hierarchy, supported through

institutional power (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Tatum (2007) contended that racism is akin to smog in the air; everyone inhales and is affected by it. The inequalities that continue to plague schools are the result of a racialized society in which discussions of race and racism continue to be muted (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and schools continue to reproduce race and social class constructs in ways that seriously impact student learning and life chances (Liou et al., 2016).

This chapter provided the literature review for the pertinent areas of this study. It looked at culturally responsive leadership, beginning with a brief history of Canada and its multicultural policy and explanations of multiculturalism, culturally relevant pedagogy, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The chapter then described the role of school leaders, the importance of CRSL, and the importance of leaders' understanding and recognition of covert forms of racism. It then proceeded to the core of this study, the diversity gap between students and school staff and the importance of school leaders' capacity to foster cultural responsiveness to improve learner outcomes. The next chapter addresses the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter first describes the purpose of the study and outlines the research question and research design, approach, and procedures. The next section elaborates on the procedures for site and participant recruitment, beginning with an overview of the selected site, a list of sampling criteria, and reasoning for inclusion in the study. Then I describe the instrumentation and data collection. The following section explains the data analysis process and is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the research design, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and ethical issues, as well as subjectivity and researcher bias. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of key methodological decisions.

Purpose of the Study

As stated by Howard (2003), “The increasing degree of racial homogeneity among teachers and heterogeneity among students carries important implications for all educators” (p. 196). The disconnect between the racial identity of predominantly White educators and school leaders and an increasingly racialized student population is resulting in cultural disconnect or racial mismatch, which can impede culturally responsive practice and further contribute to racial achievement gaps (McGrady & Reynolds, 2012). As such, the importance of racial identity in education must be considered. In view of many students’ racial identity not being represented among the predominantly White school staff, the purpose of this study is to examine how school leaders experience, understand, make sense of, and foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. This study has important implications for the education community because increasing a school leader’s awareness of cultural responsiveness may contribute to a

supportive school climate and in turn positively impact learner outcomes and students' educational experiences and successes in school and beyond.

Research Question and Design

The study was guided by the following research question: How do Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes?

I used a qualitative phenomenological study to address the research question. Qualitative research is inquiry that helps to understand a social phenomenon in its natural setting (Creswell, 2009; Gall et al., 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), and empowers individuals to share their stories, allowing for a deeper analysis of ideologies or beliefs the participants may hold about the topic of study (Creswell, 2009), which in turn allows for the researcher to have a richer understanding of how participants interpret their lived experiences, how they construct their worlds, and the meaning they ascribe to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I selected interviews as an instrument because I sought to understand how each participant made sense of culturally responsive practices and interviews are well suited for developing multiple interpretations and understandings of a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Site Information and Population

The target population for the study was school leaders from Quartz Hill School District (QHSD; a pseudonym), a Canadian school district that serves over 10,000 students and is located within proximity of a large metropolitan area in Western Canada. QHSD is a racially and ethnically diverse school district, which is defined by Ayscue (2016) as having three or more ethnic or racial groups constituting 10% or more of total student enrollment.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants had the freedom to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time. Prior to collecting data, I obtained a letter of support from the school district and received permission from the University of New England's Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee. Recruiting K-12 school leaders from the school district was important as I wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of how Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes.

Prospective participants were contacted by email by the district superintendent and invited to participate. The Potential Participant Email (Appendix A) provided information about the topic of study, the purpose of the study, confidentiality provisions, and anticipated use of the collected data. School leaders who were interested in participating and who had questions regarding the study emailed me. I responded to the interested participants via email, and an appointment for a virtual interview was mutually agreed upon. To protect their privacy, each participant was given a pseudonym. Prior to the commencement of the interview, I shared and reviewed the Information Sheet (Appendix B) with the participant to remind them of what is being asked of them as participant, and the possible risks and benefits of taking part in the study and answered any questions. Once the participant agreed to continue with the interview, the interview process began. Five interviews were conducted.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

Interviews are rich sources of data consisting of dialogues that can reveal critical elements about a segment of society's conversation with itself. I employed a semi structured open-ended interview as the primary instrument for data collection. Qualitative interviews are a common research method and data collection technique that have been used for decades in the

education field (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Semi structured interviews allow time for participants to share their perspectives without major restrictions. They also encourage communication between interviewer and participant, allowing the interviewer opportunities to find the reasons behind some of the information shared by the participant. This design allowed me to plan an interview that focused on the research topic and question while giving participants opportunities to elaborate when they felt it was necessary, creating more in-depth responses that contributed to my development of a better and deeper understanding of the participants' experiences, feelings, and ideologies.

I created an Interview Protocol (Appendix C) to guide the interview process. Field testing of the interview protocol ensured that interview questions accurately and ethically captured the necessary data to answer the research question. The interview protocol comprised important topics with questions under each topic to help me focus and organize the interview (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Utilization of an interview protocol helps to establish a replicable study and to generate consistent responses among the participants. I followed the interview protocol consistently with all participants, albeit with minor refinements. The protocol included 18 open-ended interview questions that I developed based on the literature review. Fink (2013) described open-ended questions as insights that are offered by people about why they believe the things they do. I asked similar questions of all the participants to understand more fully the human behaviors and perspectives of school leaders. They provided examples of how they foster CRSL practices to influence student outcomes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing mandates, I interviewed participants through a virtual platform (Zoom). Prior to the interview, I ensured that all technology, including my audio recorder, microphone, and internet connection were working

properly. I informed each participant the interview would take 30 to 60 minutes. The interviews ranged from 25 to 65 minutes and were audio recorded. At the beginning of the interview, introductions took place, and I asked each participant if they had any questions about the Information Letter. The participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the interview process. I answered any questions they had. In accordance with Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and International Review Board (IRB) requirements, participants were given the option to not answer questions if they did not want to, and they could withdraw from the interview at any point as participation in the study was strictly voluntary.

During the interview, I took notes on the process. At the completion of the interview, each participant was thanked for participating in the interview and informed a follow-up conversation would only be required if I needed to seek clarity about an answer. To facilitate member checking for reliability and validity (Creswell, 2009), I informed participants they would receive a copy of the transcript to review. After each interview, I reflected on the interview, reviewed my notes, and listened to the audio recording to ensure accuracy.

Five interviews were conducted with school leaders. A sample of five participants is an appropriate size for a qualitative study using interviews with extensive probing (Weller et al., 2018) and was determined to be sufficient for obtaining saturation. Saturation is the point in research where no new information is received from participants (Tran et al., 2017). Most qualitative studies have reached saturation points with small sample sizes (Malterud et al., 2016; Young & Casey, 2019).

Data Analysis

A thematic content analysis was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to focus on the main aspects of the interviews and highlight common themes across all the interviews. The thematic

analysis included listening to each interview and then reading through each transcript carefully and identifying themes and patterns.

Following the completion of an interview, I listened to the recording several times to ensure the participants' words were clear. I then transcribed the interview into a Google document using Google's Speech-to-Text feature. I proofread the typed transcript several times as I replayed the audio recording to ensure alignment, and then printed the transcription. I reread the transcript while listening to the audio to ensure the transcripts were accurate to the best of my ability. Within 48 hours of each interview, I employed member checking by emailing each participant a copy of their interview transcript. I requested each participant review the transcript for accuracy and asked that they notify me via email of any necessary changes.

I annotated the transcripts by labeling relevant words, phrases, sentences, or sections with codes. The coding assisted in the organization of the data and identification of patterns (Blair, 2015). The data was then aligned with the themes. Categories and subcategories were established for the groups of codes. The categories and subcategories were connected, and the connections described between them. Finally, I examined the information and determined if a ranking among the categories was evident and compared the information to the literature review.

Positionality

My positionality in this study may have influenced how I made sense of the data and interpreted and reinterpreted it, as the researcher is the major instrument for collection data (Green, 2015). Use of reflexivity meant that I acknowledged past experiences that informed my approach to the study and influenced the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is important in research when examining issues of race, racism, and power (Milner, 2010).

I identify as a White Canadian female, mother of two White daughters and grandmother of three Black grandsons. I live in a racialized community and work as a diverse learning coordinator in a large K-9 school. I am afforded the opportunity to work with a racially and ethnically diverse student body and their families, many who have immigrated to Canada and are learning to navigate not only its maze of educational opportunities, but the deeply embedded Eurocentric roots of the educational system.

Limitations of the Research Design

According to Mauch and Birch (1993), a limitation in research is a factor that could affect the study in a significant way but cannot be controlled by the researcher. Limitations in research are things that limit the way research findings and conclusions can be applied to contexts outside the research frame, and many are inherent in the research methodology and design. Because this qualitative study did not involve a random sampling from the population of Canadian school leaders, the results should not be used to form a sweeping general conclusion about Canadian school leaders. Canada is the second-largest country in the world and is host to great racial and ethnic diversity; thus, it is likely that the experiences of this study's participants—drawn from Western Canada—may differ significantly from school leaders in other areas of Canada.

Furthermore, the findings and conclusions presented herein are derived from my own interpretation of the perceptions, feelings, and sensemaking of the participants, as captured in the data. Though I have made efforts to reduce the effects of my personal biases while undertaking interpretive analysis of the data, the fact remains that data analysis is essentially an act of interpretation, and as such the findings and conclusions that rest on that analysis are not—and can never be—completely objective.

Finally, the data collection occurred during the unprecedented COVID-19 health crisis, specifically during the Omicron variant outbreak, which resulted in the closure of physical school buildings. As a result, all data was collected through virtual means, via video conferencing platforms such as Zoom and telephone. This eliminated in-person, face-to-face interactions, and should be considered in the review of the data.

Trustworthiness

This section establishes the trustworthiness of the study, which refers to the accuracy of the research, data, and findings. Trustworthiness in this study was established through credibility (inclusive of member checking procedures), transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility, or internal validity of a study, is the extent to which a study is believable and appropriate (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) and the findings follow logically from the data and the process (Patton, 2015). To establish credibility, I attempted to gather information from multiple perspectives. Triangulation of data sources is a primary strategy in qualitative research to view and explore the phenomenon under study from multiple perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A form of capture or corroboration, it has long been recognized as a means of achieving a degree of validity, or credibility, in the findings. Yin (2016) recommended triangulation as good practice. I used interview transcripts, field notes, and a reflective diary to help achieve data source triangulation.

Member Checking Procedures

Member checks were supported in the study by having participants review the transcripts and the accuracy of the interpretations I made. Field tests and peer debriefing were utilized to

check the accuracy of the instrumentation. Peer debriefing was also used to assess the reasonableness of my interpretation of the raw data.

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity of a study, refers to the degree to which the results can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018) with comparable characteristics. The external validity of this study may have been affected by school leaders not feeling comfortable discussing cultural responsiveness and racial diversity and not volunteering to discuss these topics with a researcher. I have attempted to include detailed descriptions of the circumstances, processes, and setting throughout the study to support transferability without jeopardizing the confidentiality of the participants.

Dependability

Dependability of a study is established when the study's findings are consistent with the data collected (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To establish dependability, I strived to remain consistent throughout the research process. This included the use of detailed field notes to record the process throughout data collection as well as maintenance of a journal for post interview reflections. An audit trail was maintained throughout the study to maintain the standards for meeting trustworthiness. Dependability serves the same function as reliability in this qualitative research study.

Dependability concerns the consistency of the conduct of the study, and the stability of its data (Patton, 2015). High-quality notetaking, video or audio recordings, and transcriptions will ensure data dependability (Creswell, 2009). Keeping a detailed, reflexive, journal (bracketing or epoche) throughout the research process is valuable for future researchers who may want to replicate the study.

Bracketing is the process of setting aside personal experiences, biases, and preconceived notions about the research topic. In qualitative research, bracketing is important as the views of the participants cannot be manipulated to fit the researcher's views. Bracketing required that I identify my biases, assumptions, positionality, and hyphenated self, with continuous reflection of my thoughts throughout the research process. Bracketing also required that I set aside knowledge of previous research findings and theories about my research topic. I needed to ensure my interpretation of themes could be reasonably understood by other researchers who may not share my personal biases, and for this purpose, I have used direct quotes from the interview transcripts to effectively demonstrate emergent themes instead of relying on my own interpretation (Darawsheh, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability of a study is established when data and interpretations of the findings are clearly obtained from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As part of the study, I employed peer debriefing to ensure my interpretations were representative of the raw data. I also used an audit trail. This means I detailed the process of data collection and analysis. My reflexive journal allowed me to record distinctive and noteworthy topics that emerged from the data. I strived to be vigilant in recording my thoughts about coding and explained the meanings of noted units and themes.

Assumptions

In research, assumptions cannot be verified and are accepted to be true. In this study, one assumption is that participants could recall their experience. Participants were probed during the interviews to get the most accurate response and were assumed to provide honest perspectives of their experience to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. Another

assumption is that participants had prior or current experience with culturally responsive practices and an understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy. I reminded and encouraged the participants to respond with their best understanding of the research phenomenon.

Ethical Issues

The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) is a source of prudence pertaining to research ethics. It was written by a panel of experts commissioned by the U.S. government in response to ethical failures in medical research. The Belmont Report proposes three principles that should be foundational to ethical conduct of research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. When faced with a research ethics challenge, revisiting these three principles can be helpful.

This study focused on how school leaders perceived their capacity to shape culturally responsive practices, a sensitive topic that may trigger emotional responses and vulnerability. I had to approach data collection with empathy and care and carefully consider ethical procedures throughout the research process. Given the sensitive nature of the interviews, confidentiality of all participants was prioritized. All participant identities will remain confidential, and each participant has been randomly assigned a pseudonym unrelated to their real name.

The Information Letter outlined the purpose of the study and what was expected of the participant, potential risks of participation (Creswell, 2009), and participant rights. Each participant was informed they could withdraw from the research at any time, without having to give a reason. Recordings were destroyed upon completion of the transcripts. All data was destroyed upon completion of the dissertation. There was no conflict of interest as I do not have any personal or professional connections with the school district where the study was conducted.

Throughout this study, IRB protocols were carefully followed. I employed and adhered to the ethical principles outlined by the Belmont Report and IRB.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study employed semi structured interviews as the primary data source to examine and understand how Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity in shaping culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. Although much research has been conducted about educators avoiding discussions about race, little research has been done to identify how experienced, culturally responsive school leaders in Canada, a country known for its welcoming and inclusive multicultural approach, perceive their capacity to shape cultural responsiveness practices and influence learner outcomes.

The methodology for this study was designed to allow me to not only explore, document, and describe the lived experiences of the participants, but also interpret the data to provide a deeper understanding of school leaders' experiences and perceptions without putting aside my own experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). A goal of this study was to contribute to the existing research and scholarship on culturally responsive school leaders' capacity to foster cultural responsiveness to influence student outcomes.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings from my interviews with five Canadian school leaders. The purpose of this study was to understand how Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to shape culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. This study was designed to explore the lived experiences, beliefs, and practices of Canadian school leaders through the lens of CRT, specifically CRSL, to disrupt educational inequities and to ensure an equitable and inclusive education for all students.

The research question for this study was: How do Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes? The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research approach incorporating semi structured interviews. It was conducted in the winter of 2021–22 after I gained site authorization from one school district and the University of New England’s IRB. I have no known professional or personal connections to the selected school district or the participants.

During the data collection period, the COVID-19 pandemic, and especially the Omicron variant, disrupted Canadian schools. The latter part of data collection was conducted with schools closed. It is important to note that school leaders continued to lead schools, navigating the ever-changing processes, procedures, and safety protocols of what a safe school looked like while planning the post pandemic future of schooling (K. Pollock, 2020). School leaders faced with the heightened stress of a third school year of unforeseen school closures, emergency remote learning and providing emotional support to staff, students and community may have resulted in lower interest of participant volunteers than I had originally hoped for in the

Information Sheet (Appendix B). In this chapter I describe the use of thematic analysis, the study site, demographics data, and interview data.

Thematic Analysis

The process of recording, transcribing, and analyzing the interview data for specific categories, themes, and ultimately patterns was well suited to thematic analysis. The interviews with the school leaders were guided by 18 semi structured questions (Appendix A). These interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. During the 4 weeks of data collection, I read the transcripts multiple times, both as individual cases and as part of cross-case listening to allow for coding of the data. The aim of the coding was to identify similarities and congruences in the participant interviews.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process of thematic analysis was used for coding the data. This method offered an effective way to navigate and understand the qualitative data sets as well as to build experience in organizing and deciphering qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 1: Familiarizing Oneself with the Data

The first step of data analysis was to review the audio data and interview transcripts multiple times to familiarize myself with the raw data. Following the completion of each interview, I listened to each interview several times to ensure I understand each participant's words. Next, I transcribed the audio recorded interview into a Google document by playing the audio recording and utilizing Google's Speech-to-Text feature. I proofread the typed transcript several times as I replayed the audio recording to ensure it aligned with the transcript, and then printed the transcription. I reread each transcript while listening to the audio to ensure the transcript was accurate to the best of my ability.

Within 48 hours of each interview, I employed member checking by emailing the participant a copy of the transcript. I requested each participant review the transcript for accuracy and asked that participants notify me via email of any necessary changes. The member checking process supported the credibility of the data and ensured the integrity of participant responses (Barnes, 2017). Once the transcription was member checked, I reread a printed copy several times over the data collection period to “gain an intimate understanding of the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 61).

Step 2: Generating Initial Codes

A code is a definitive label assigned to relevant and meaningful raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), in this case passages throughout the transcripts. Codes identify a feature of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way in relation to the phenomenon under study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this second step, I used in vivo coding to look for patterns of words and phrases that aligned with the literature review. In vivo coding means I used the raw data—the participants’ own words and terminology—to name the codes. This allowed me to capture the participants’ perspectives (Saldaña, 2015). I color coded similar words and phrases.

Step 3: Searching for Themes

After initial codes were identified, I combined relevant data extracts into categories for interpretative analysis, which marks the third step of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this step, relevant themes associated with the study’s theoretical and conceptual frameworks began to emerge. This step involved the analysis and reanalysis of the initial codes to arrange them into overarching themes, categorical themes, and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This was done by looking at the printed transcript that had been color colored in the second step. I considered the colors from the initial coding and aligned them to see how they situated within the

tenets of CRT and CRSL framework. I numbered them in accordance with the identified themes, categorical themes, and subthemes. Braun and Clarke (2006) reminded researchers that some initial codes may form main themes, whereas others may form subthemes, and others may be rejected. At this stage, I noticed that there were highlighted words and phrases that did not seemingly fit anywhere; I used a theme entitled *miscellaneous* (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for those codes that did not appear to fit into the main themes.

Step 4: Revising Themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended revisiting the coded data to verify patterns and themes for each interview. I used these themes to understand how the school leaders perceived their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices and to influence student outcomes.

Step 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasized that the researcher should be able to explain the relationship between the themes and the research questions and be able to construct an analysis of each theme. The relationship between the themes and the research questions in the current study made logical sense and provided a consistent interpretation of the phenomenon being studied.

Step 6: Producing the Report

To produce the report, Braun and Clarke (2006) stressed the importance of including data excerpts to support the prevalence of the themes. The use of thematic analysis resulted in rich, thematic descriptions of the phenomenon across the entire data set instead of focusing on one or two predominant themes from the data. Thematic analysis resulted in a factual, data-based representation from the five school leaders about how they perceive their capacity to foster

culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes, which was the desired outcome of this qualitative phenomenological study.

Description of Study Site

This section describes the Canadian school district within which the participating school leaders were employed, to foreground the analysis of the school leaders' perceptions of their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes and their responses to ever-increasing racial diversity in school districts.

QHSD (a pseudonym) is a Western Canadian K-12 public school district that serves over 10,000 students. It is a racially/ethnically diverse school district, which is defined by Ayscue (2016) as having three or more ethnic or racial groups constituting 10% or more of total student enrollment. QHSD is located within proximity to one of Canada's largest metropolitan areas. The city's racial diversity constitutes more than 30% of the population, and the number of citizens is expected to increase by another 1 million in the next two decades (Canada Population Organization, 2022).

Demographics Data

Five school leaders were interviewed for this study. They qualified for this study by identifying as a school leader currently employed with the site study. They were selected after they responded to an email soliciting voluntary participants that was distributed by QHSD's superintendent. The five participants represented elementary, middle, and secondary schools. Their educational experience ranged from 14 to 22 years. The semi structured, virtual interviews were audio recorded. Each interview lasted 30 to 70 minutes. The interviews were conducted over 4 weeks in the winter of 2021–22. To protect their privacy, the school division and participants were given pseudonyms.

It is important to understand that the five school leaders discussed here were White. With more than 95% of Canadian school leaders identifying as White (Turner, 2015), it was not a surprise to have only White leaders respond to participate in the research. Although this may be considered a study limitation, it also serves as a reminder that CSRL work must be undertaken by White school leaders, especially given their overrepresentation in Canadian schools. All five participants identified as monolingual (English) and able-bodied. Four of the participants in this study identified as cisgender female, and one participant identified as cisgender male. The highest level of education for all five participants was a master's degree. Three respondents had less than 5 years' experience as a school leader, one respondent had 10 years' experience, and the other had 14 years' experience as a school leader. All participants were born in Canada. Three were born and raised in urban areas, whereas two were born and grew up in rural areas.

Table 1 presents a demographic snapshot of each participant. To help make sense of this data, the five school leaders are also introduced in narrative form.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Participants				
	Cara	Eileen	Jennifer	Mandy	Joe
Race	White	White	White	White	White
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Languages spoken	English	English	English	English	English
Years as school leader	3	1	4	14	10
Years in education	20	17	21	22	14
Highest degree	Master's	Master's	Master's	Master's	Master's

Cara

Cara has three years' experience as a school leader. As an educator, she has only been employed at QHSD; however, she previously worked as a teacher in more than six elementary schools over the past 17 years. When asked what led her to become a school leader, she said she "enjoys problem solving." Cara enjoys being visible to students and staff and particularly enjoys

meetings with other school leaders, staff, and parents. She spoke about the achievement gap she observes between White and Indigenous students. Over the past couple of years, she has witnessed a positive shift with teachers understanding the difference between equality and equity. Cara was born and raised in an affluent urban area and recalls high school as being the first time she found herself in a racialized setting. She explained this by saying: “I was in a homogenous group until I went to high school. High school was maybe a little more diverse, but not really that much as it wasn’t very diverse here 20-plus years ago.”

Eileen

Eileen is in her first year as a school leader. Eileen has approximately 17 years’ experience teaching in K-6 schools within QHSD and in two other Canadian school districts. When asked what led her to become a school leader, Eileen put it this way:

I never thought I was leadership material because I was so shy and nervous in front of people I didn’t know. I thought I would be most effective working with children. Over time, I realized that as much as I loved teaching the children, I loved supporting other colleagues, and they encouraged me to apply for a leadership position.

She expressed feeling that she made the right decision and said she is enjoying her role as a school leader. Eileen noted she strives to be visible and involved in community activities and lives in the same community as her students. She also noted the increase in student racial diversity and is encouraged by how teachers in her school are starting to engage in topics of race and racism with students and staff when she said:

There is definitely an increase in the diversity of the students in our school over the past few years. Just walking through the school corridors, I see evidence of teachers being more comfortable with using resources that are more inclusive, and a couple of teachers

have told me how they have started to reexamine how their classrooms reflect their students.

Eileen was born and raised in an affluent urban area and remembers her first year of teaching as being the first time she interacted with racialized students. Eileen recalled her experience:

I accepted a teaching job for my first year of teaching that was in a remote town with a high population of Indigenous students and that was the first time I ever had to spend time with people who were not the same as me.

Jennifer

Jennifer is in her fourth year of employment as a school leader. She has 21 years' experience in middle and high schools, all within QHSD. Jennifer's only experience as a school leader is in her current school. When asked what led her to become a school leader, she described her reasons for becoming a school leader in the following way:

I've always loved working with teachers. I held many different positions in our district before I got into administration. I was the department head for my school, I was the district department head for English, I worked very closely with our local teachers' association. So, this seemed like the next step. I also feel that I enjoy a challenge and administration surely will give you that. I also feel that if you want to make changes you have to be willing to go in and do the hard work that necessitates having the changes being made instead of just standing back and saying, "Well, wouldn't it be nice if we did this or that or the other thing." You need to go in. You need to get the education and do the work so that you can see those things come to fruition that you think are important based on your experience in your education and all sorts of things, so it was kind of my

journey. I love, *love* talking about some of the ways that we can make our school better by having and influencing policy and practice.

Jennifer was born and raised in a middle- to upper-class rural area. She recalled her exposure to racial diversity by saying:

I was not really exposed, really, until university to anyone who didn't look like me. On TV, maybe a little bit, but that was even the Cosby family shows. It was very sheltered, not intentionally, but just because of where I lived and how my world worked out. And so, recognizing that my worldview, that that was normal, was skewed because I couldn't understand because I had never had those experiences was eye-opening for me.

Mandy

Mandy is in her 14th year as a school leader. She has 22 years' total experience in education, including teaching in K-12 schools, all within QHSD. Mandy has worked as a school leader at five schools. When asked what drew her to school leadership, she related:

I like leading others. I was the eldest in my family and maybe I am used to leading others. I enjoy being able to be a model for others, and I also enjoy supporting other adults in the building, not just the teaching staff but all the staff. I like to remind all adults in the school of how important they are to the children. I've always enjoyed being around children, but I especially enjoy being around adults. I'm always interested in what makes a person want to do the job they are doing currently, and then what other interests they may have, and then through those conversations I like to start feeling out where I can see myself helping them, where I know my own skill sets and where I can help support them.

Mandy was born and raised in a low-income community in an urban area. She shared: “I grew up with a lot of diversity, people from all kinds of different backgrounds, more racialized than most Canadian communities.”

Joe

Joe is in his 10th year of employment as a school leader. He has 14 years’ experience in K-12 schools. He has gained school leadership experience in four schools within QHSD, and he previously worked as a teacher in another Canadian school district. When asked what led him to become a school leader, he explained his decision by saying: “Through my role as a teacher and working with so many students and families, it became apparent that I was a school leader, and it seemed to be a natural fit.”

Joe was born and raised in a middle-class rural area in Canada. He discussed his upbringing and the absence of racial diversity in his life until he attended university:

Growing up with only Caucasians and with people who only spoke my language and shared my faith, I didn’t know anything about other cultures other than what we read in books, which was limited, or what was shown on TV, mostly just CBC [Canadian Broadcasting Corporation]. I had to leave my home to go to university in another province, and that was a bit of culture shock to see people of another color on campus.

Presentation of Results

Critical Race Theory (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. In educational research, CRT can be employed as an analytical tool to help educators make sense of the complexities of race and racism and understand why racial inequities exist in our society and how we can eradicate these inequities. In this study, I used CRT as a theoretical

framework to question school leadership intended to improve student outcomes and work to create equitable educative experiences for all children (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011).

The data analysis revealed six themes in response to the research question: (a) Waking up to Racism; (b) Challenging Liberal Ideologies; (c) Personal Beliefs, Awareness, and Reflection; (d) Professional Development; (e) School Culture and Climate; and (f) Overcoming Emotions. The first two themes align with two of the tenets of CRT. Waking up to Racism revealed the participants had been raised in Canadian society where racism is normal, persistent, pervasive, and systemic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The second theme, Challenging Liberal Ideologies, aligns with the CRT tenet of Critique of Liberalism, which challenges school leaders to examine four tightly held liberal ideologies about race that ultimately make efforts to address systemic racism more difficult. These ideologies relate to adopting a color-blind stance; confusing the meanings of equity and equality; insisting on gradual and incremental change, rather than radical change; and positioning oneself and the laws devised in a racist society as racially neutral. Such liberal ideologies do not take into consideration the persistence and permanence of racism and the othering of racialized people (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

The following three themes align directly with the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016): Personal Beliefs, Awareness, and Reflection; Professional Development; and School Culture and Climate. The sixth theme of Overcoming Emotions was pervasive in the conversations about embracing CRSL practices and antiracism work with staff and students.

Critical Race Theory Tenets

As this study was concerned with school leaders' perceptions of how they foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes, a key underpinning of the study was CRT. CRT explains how race and racism are central to White innovation and how social,

political, and legal systems have evolved that avoid the perspectives of racialized people. The first two emergent themes that resulted from analysis of this qualitative phenomenological study aligned with the first two tenets of CRT, firstly, the Permanence of Racism that suggests that racism is normal, persistent, pervasive, and systemic (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and secondly, the Critique of Liberalism that challenges the claims of meritocracy ideologies of neutrality, objectivity, and colorblindness in society.

Waking Up to Racism (White Normativity and White Privilege in Canada)

The five participants were asked how they think their personal and professional backgrounds and prior lived experiences have influenced their attitudes and feelings about racial diversity and cultural responsiveness. Participants responded that they are now aware of how White supremacy, White privilege and systemic racism has been at work since the inception of Canada as a nation. They shared many examples of how, when growing up, they thought of being White as ordinary and never questioned their White privilege or permanence of racism in Canada. Jennifer described her formative years in the following way:

I led a very sheltered life. I'm a White girl. I went to a few schools that were predominantly Caucasian as well in middle- to upper-class communities and so my understanding of what the culture looked like was very much from a White perspective.

Eileen illustrated her belief that her Whiteness was ordinary as she explained:

There was a long period of time in my life that I wasn't aware of differences among Canadians. When I first encountered students from other nationalities, I thought that their difficulties were due to behavior issues, I never thought about challenges. I thought my view was the normal view, the Canadian view.

The experiences of all five participants are similar and their backgrounds proved that White privilege is embedded in Canadian society and the five school leaders are very aware of the existence of racism in Canada and they are positioned and committed to disrupt systemic racism.

Mandy shared:

I see a shift in our school in terms of how teachers are waking up to racism. The past couple of years have put racial justice and awareness in front of our teachers and it can no longer be ignored. They are stepping up and making efforts to broadcast the difference between silence and antiracism. I see it on bulletin boards and in art projects. That's heartening.

The Diversity Gap. The theme of Waking up to Racism shed light on an overrepresentation of Whiteness in all areas of education discussed with the five school leaders, with inequitable representation in the classroom between students and staff, in the curriculum, and in the school council, reaffirming the first CRT tenet that racism is embedded in every facet of Canadian education.

When the school leaders were asked about how the racial diversity of school staff aligns with the racial diversity of the students, and whether students see themselves represented in the school staff, all five school leaders responded there was a racial incongruence between students and teachers. Joe commented:

We have zero teachers who are African. We have some EAs [educational assistants] who represent multiple ethnic backgrounds. At all schools, we should employ more diverse backgrounds to have students see themselves represented in the school.

Eileen and Mandy reiterated Joe's observations about the diversity gap that exists between students and teachers at their schools. Similarly, Cara described her school staff as not being very diverse:

We have a very homogenous teaching staff, with only one teacher of Filipino descent and we have one teacher of African descent. We have more diversity among our support staff workers. Students in our school are a very diverse group.

Of the five leaders interviewed, only Jennifer was able to report a higher level of racial diversity among staff:

Right now, I can say that our Filipino population would see themselves represented in our staffing. Our Caucasian students would, but unfortunately our Black students would not.

It is something that we are continuing to work on, but it isn't always the easiest thing.

Our Latino students, they would see themselves in our staff.

Jennifer shared one of the obstacles she has experienced with narrowing the diversity gap by saying: "One of the things I can say, having been on hiring panels for the last three and a half years, is we don't always get many applicants, period, let alone applicants who are applicants of color."

Although the participants are aware of the diversity gap between students and staff and recognize this is an issue that needs to be addressed and remedied, none of the participants suggested a plan to address the diversity gap between teachers and students.

Diversity Gap in Curriculum. When asked about school curriculum reflecting students' racial diversity, Eileen commented, "Not once in my many years as an elementary teacher did I ever think about the color of skin of the characters in the picture books. I never thought about

character names or who the authors were.” Jennifer talked about her previous role as a high school teacher:

I taught *Huckleberry Finn* for years because I wanted to teach that there’s equity and equality there.... What I realize is while I was not being intentionally racist, because I was still coming at this from a very White perspective unfortunately, I was being racist, and I didn’t realize it. That could be seen in, for example, the books that I chose to teach. Yes, I taught about racial equality, but I did so by using a White author writing about the Black perspective. Well, that doesn’t totally work, right? And so, I was very unintentional.

Jennifer described how her staff is working to be more aware of overrepresentation of White perspectives in the curriculum: “We have done a cultural audit of our curricula and our classrooms to see where we need to do better. In fact, we just did those cultural audits in October of 2021.”

Beyond the classrooms in his schools, Joe expressed his concerns about the most recent curricular proposal and impending changes that have been presented by the government:

Teachers are in a bit of a crisis right now as the government’s new proposed curricular outcomes of 2021 does not adequately address lack of historical awareness as it relates to the residential school system. I think it is inappropriate, and as educators, we have to make it clear to the government that the proposed curriculum is problematic.

Diversity Gap in School Council. All five school leaders reported their present school councils comprised of school leaders and community parents have minimal racial representation. Thus, the overwhelmingly White school councils are not representative of their racialized

students. Mandy responded to the question about the racial composition of the school council by describing what is happening at her school:

There is some diversity on council, but very little diversity, and so I always think of the school council as being less diverse than the actual student population, and I think that seems to be the status quo. Even in more populations that might have more diversity in their schools it always seems to be the case. In the schools I've experienced, the school councils have always been predominantly White, and sometimes with a few other nationalities tossed in, but very little color diversity.

Joe shared a similar example of his present and previous school councils:

I can only recall one school council that had an Asian parent. I don't recall a parent council at any of my schools that had an African parent. I do not feel school councils made up of parents have ... been diverse at all.

Cara's conversation revealed a similar situation at her school: "Our school council certainly does not represent the cultural diversity present among our students."

As evidenced by the participants' comments, all five school leaders are aware of the diversity gap that exists in their schools between students and staff, in the curriculum, and in the school council. Cara also identified a gap between district leaders and students when she said: "I think representation counts. A more diverse group at a senior administrative level is needed."

Challenging Liberal Ideologies

A second theme, Challenging Liberal Ideologies, emerged during the interviews in response to the question of how the participants think their personal and professional backgrounds and prior lived experiences have influenced their attitudes and feelings about racial diversity and cultural responsiveness. All five participants discussed colorblindness, learning to

recognize the difference between equity and equality, accepting the gradual change of dismantling systemic racism, and neutral positioning as forms of racism. At the beginning of the interview, when participants were asked how they self-identify racially speaking, three of the five participants responded with “Caucasian.” Eileen hesitated, with a long pause, before saying, “Caucasian. You know, I’ve never been asked that before.” Another participant identified her ancestry as German but did not speak to how she identifies racially. Only Cara responded to the question with, “I am White.” The active suppression of race words and racial categories is colormuteness, a form of colorblindness. As the interview progressed, one participant used “White” and “Black” more when describing racial identities. Two participants demonstrated colormuteness throughout their interviews and referred to Black people as “African,” “African Americans,”. Presumably, the participants were not familiar with terms like *African Canadian*, or *Afro Canadian*, which are used by Canadian Black communities. The term “other nationalities of color” also showed up in the interviews, which suggest the participants may not recognize that many of these racialized families in their school communities are Canadian. The same two participants referred to White people as “Caucasian” or “people of European descent.”

Cara talked about being raised in a society that espoused equal treatment for all, the myth of meritocracy, and being told to treat all people equal:

As a kid, from a very young age, I was lucky enough to have parents who insisted that I include all people and treat all people equally, regardless of their backgrounds. I was also taught that if you work hard enough, that hard work can overcome all obstacles. Now I realize that isn’t true and that equity and equality are not the same thing.

Cara continued to discuss how her recent recognition of meritocracy as a myth has changed how she views others when she said:

Understanding the difference has definitely helped with how I approach my personal and professional relationships today. I recognize the challenges other people may face on a daily basis. I understand that I do enjoy certain privileges due to race.

Jennifer talked about witnessing colorblindness among teachers when describing some of the colorblind statements she has overheard teachers saying:

Many of our teachers would say “I don’t see skin color,” not recognizing that it’s a microaggression and really coming from that faith piece of “we are all God’s children, we are all equal, we are all made in the likeness and image of God.” And yes okay, but let’s unpack that, and when we say “we don’t see skin color” we’re missing out on the experience that the students are facing because of their skin color.

Jennifer further explored equality, colorblindness and microaggressions when she recalled:

I was always taught that equality was right. I’m Catholic, and so I was always taught that God made us all equal, doesn’t matter our skin colour, and so I went into my teaching with that idea, and teaching as an English teacher teaching literature that espoused equality. That could be seen in for example the books that I chose to teach. Yes, I taught about racial equality, but I did so using a White author writing about the Black perspective. And so, I was very unintentional. When I look at things like microaggressions, for example, again, oftentimes microaggressions are unintentional and I definitely fell into those traps. It took me some time to be able to come to the place where I could say I have been racist.

The participants talked about their journeys and what they have learned about racism and culturally responsive practices in their schools. Eileen said: “I hope it changes and we can all

look back and see how far we've come." Cara said: "It's an important topic, and we still have a long way to go." Mandy said:

I often wonder where we go from here. I feel like we've been in a lot of the knowing, knowing, and now where are the actions, the doing. And for me, I believe in "you have to talk the talk and walk the walk."

Jennifer commented:

We're still on that path, we're still on that journey. What we also know is that the work that we have done isn't going to stop here. We can't say, "Okay, now we've done a cultural audit and now we've done webinars, and we talked about microaggressions, to talk about this and that, so we're good." We recognize that this is ongoing and will continue to be ongoing for as long as we're in our careers.

I'm really proud of our staff, and I'm really proud of our community because I think we have been doing a lot of work and I think we have really demonstrated to our students and to our community that we recognize where we went wrong, we recognize where we need growth. and we're working to be better.

Joe added:

The extent to which we make progress with students dismantling systemic racism, creating an environment that is safe and comfortable for people. I feel this is best taking the advice by Robin DiAngelo [antiracist author] and that we are all part of the spectrum of growth. Being antiracist, open to discussion, and being open to the topic of systemic racism is a great place to start. To be an actual antiracist, we need to be setting small but concrete steps that are directly measured to combatting systemic racism. Discussion is not enough. Action is also necessary.

Importantly, despite four of the participants engaging in forms of color muteness during the interviews, and all five participants' acceptance of incremental change over radical change, they all expressed a desire to continue to embrace CRSL practices and continuing to support teachers' growth in antiracist practices. This supports Milner's (2010) assertion that cultural responsiveness is a life-long process.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

The next three themes that emerged from the interviews align with Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework: Personal Beliefs, Awareness, and Reflection; Professional Development; and School Culture and Climate.

Personal Beliefs, Awareness, and Reflection

Another theme, Personal Beliefs, Awareness, and Reflection surfaced when participants were asked how they thought their personal and professional backgrounds and prior lived experiences have influenced their attitudes and feelings about racial diversity and cultural responsiveness. Two school leaders willingly acknowledged that their past personal beliefs, even though unintended, were racist. Eileen expressed this as follows:

There was a long period of time in my career that I was unaware of my own racism. I don't think I ever felt racist for a long time, but as I became more aware of student differences, I became more aware of my own racism.

Jennifer spoke about her journey toward acknowledging and openly admitting her own racism:

I will say is in the last year and a half, specifically based on my lived experience working in administration with the murder of George Floyd and the backlash that came because of that and the lived experience of our school, that what I realize is while I was not being

intentionally racist because I was still coming at this from a very White perspective unfortunately, I was being racist, and I didn't realize it.

Throughout the interview with Jennifer, there were numerous times when she talked about her self-awareness and explained this by saying:

It took me some time to be able to come to the place where I could say I have been racist. I might be racist again because I grew up in a culture that really was intended to forward the White identity, but I didn't realize I was doing that.

Reflection is a key factor of culturally responsive leadership, which Mandy expressed by saying:

I think the style of professional and personal development that I've found most interesting have been the sessions where you are given time to reflect on how you would answer, or how you would behave, in a certain scenario, and then time to share your reflection or your response with others.

Joe spoke of reflection when he said: "I think the people who are reflective in their roles of dismantling racism in their personal life are more apt to do this work in their professional life." Jennifer also expressed the importance of reflection when she said, "I have to become reflective and that's not easy because then I have to be very comfortable with who I am to be able to say, 'Okay, you're right, there's some problems here. I need to look at them.' She described how she used a racial autobiography—a personal narrative written to explore how race has manifested in one's life—as part of her reflection process:

Recognizing that my worldview, that that was normal, was skewed because I couldn't understand because I had never had those experiences was eye-opening for me. I think that one of the things that I recognized was when I brought a couple of my students into

my office who had been very vocal and who were very hurt by the fact that we hadn't responded [to the murder of George Floyd and its effect on students]—and at first, my attitude was, why don't they understand that they are loved and cared for? I took it very personally and I got to a point, especially with that racial autobiography, where I brought those students in and I said, "I have to apologize to you." It was a complete shift for me and I said, "I have to apologize to you because whether I understand it or not, or agree with it or not, you were hurt and whether I did that intentionally or not, that happened, I have to recognize it, I have to admit that I hurt you and I have to apologize and promise that I'm going to do better." That racial autobiography really exposed me to an understanding of how much I didn't know, if that makes sense, and how much I needed to continue to work.

The participants' experiences with personal beliefs, awareness, and reflection show the willingness of these culturally responsive leaders to engage in meaningful, critically conscious personal development to improve their leadership capacity.

Professional Development

All five participants confirmed that they have never been required to receive any cultural responsiveness training as a preservice teacher, a classroom teacher, or school leader. The participants discussed QHSD's recent initiatives to promote culturally responsive professional development. The five participants were asked to reflect on professional development opportunities about racial justice or cultural responsiveness, and the sessions or topics that have been the most beneficial or influential. Eileen stated:

It has really helped for all staff to address this topic by having resources available and PD [professional development] committed to teaching all staff about cultural responsiveness.

I think clear and consistent expectations of staff about cultural responsiveness has been valuable to our learning and sharing.

Mandy shared:

I have been really affected by the stories of people's experiences and hearing their stories. I have been shocked by some of the stories, how some people in our own school district have been treated differently based on their race.

Joe described the impact that professional development sessions have had on him when he recalled:

Starting last year, schools initiated and encouraged staff to engage in activities around racial diversity and I feel it is one of the most beneficial opportunities in my career as it highlights racial diversity for all staff and students. Last month, I attended a great virtual session about racial diversity that was very beneficial. I learned a lot at that session. I learned things at last month's presentation that I didn't know. I believe increased education in this area for all district employees would benefit all staff and students and I look forward to more. When I get to participate in the presentations, I think I have learned more about myself as well. I have a greater knowledge about racism and particularly systemic racism in Canada because of these important opportunities.

Cara stated, "Some of the district and provincial PD [professional development] opportunities about Indigenous perspectives have been very informative. I have found that it has been helpful to have other administrators to discuss the impact of residential schools with."

Jennifer discussed her role as school leader as essential to the development of teachers. When addressing teacher evaluations and cultural responsiveness in the classroom, she explained:

When I go in to observe them, and I am not seeing something that would suggest to me there's been some intentionality and cultural competency, that's not something I'm going to mark them down on, but it's certainly going to fuel a piece of the conversation on that evaluation.

When sharing experiences about the development of teachers and curriculum, both Jennifer and Joe commented that in addition to professional development opportunities, books have been influential on their journeys. Jennifer said:

I have been reading a book called *Principal Leadership for Racial Equity* by Candice Raskin, Melissa Krull, and Antonia Felix. The book really looks at some of the different things, those different pieces, that we can be bringing into our classrooms right away. We do so many things well, but we are unconsciously competent when we do them, and to recognize that if we can do it with conscious competency—which means that we are doing, we are planning, and we are ensuring that we are doing things with intentionality and with purpose—that is going to allow for shifts to happen and for students to feel safe, and cared for, and loved, and supported and they see themselves in what we're doing.

Jennifer referred to this book as being important for her staff's development and she explained this when she said:

I think it was a big piece for our staff because it wasn't "I'm adding something extra to your plate." No, you're doing this already, let's just shift the way we're thinking about it now and make sure that we are consistently doing it and doing it with intentionality because that is going to be so helpful for us.

School Culture and Climate

Student connection was mentioned by all five leaders as being key to establishing successful relationships and ameliorating the school culture and climate. Mandy described how she tries to improve school culture and climate by establishing successful relationships with students as follows:

I enjoy taking the time to get to know the students, calling them by their first names when I greet them with “good morning,” knowing the parents’ names when they come into the school and being able to say their name and “how are you doing?” I love getting to know what makes the kids tick.

Joe spoke of how he strives to be visible and available for students and staff:

I make myself available to all. I work to ensure our students with food insecurities are fed, and it is an absolute pleasure to help kids that way. There is no greater feeling than ensuring kids have a full belly in the morning. When kids know they are taken care of, then they can be at their absolute best and fulfill their potential for the day. I like to help with extracurricular activities when I can, so students can see me as an administrator who enjoys sports and other things.

Jennifer’s school has been working on improving school culture and climate by connecting with students and listening to them at Inclusion Club. Jennifer remarked how conversations about race and racism in her school were extending beyond school leaders and staff to include student voices:

Last year, we began an Inclusion Club where we allowed students to have a voice and just tell us what they were seeing, what they were experiencing, to give us their stories and to help us to respond to that, to the point where our students, our Inclusion Club

students, who were predominantly Black women, presented to our staff on white fragility, racial microaggressions.

Additionally, students at Jennifer's school participate in monthly cultural responsiveness sessions:

Every Thursday for half an hour we do some sort of other teaching, and once a month that other teaching has to do with cultural responsiveness, and with diversity and with antiracism. Students see that we are still committed to this, and the Inclusion Club has some voice in that as well. I will tell you our Inclusion Club was very much more active last year than it has been this year and when we have asked the students why, they've basically said, "Well, we feel that everything is being done, we don't need this right now." They're feeling supported—because if they weren't feeling supported, they would go to Inclusion Club and they would do something about it.

In consideration of the school culture and climate, the five school leaders were asked about hiring practices and whether prospective teacher candidates are asked about their experiences with culturally responsive teaching practices during interviews. None of the school leaders were able to recall any culturally responsive questions ever being asked in an interview. Cara's recollection sums up all five participant responses: "No, none of the questions asked during interviews have directly addressed culturally responsive practices." Mandy elaborated on this:

In terms of culturally responsive practices, I don't think that is a common question that comes up in interviews. Of course, we talk about their training and their experiences but not necessarily about cultural sensitivity. I can't even think of one time that it was ever brought up.

To better understand if they think their staff members are invested in creating a positive school culture and climate, I asked the five participants if they have encountered obstacles or resistance to culturally responsive practices. Cara acknowledged there is some resistance: “We have many students in our building who have used racial slurs. Staff members are less obvious about their resistance, but it is still there.”

Jennifer discussed a disorienting dilemma that occurred for her students, staff, and community, which may have been the catalyst for her and her staff to work at overcoming obstacles and resistance to cultural responsiveness:

George Floyd was murdered on May 25, 2020, and it was within that next week that our school was very strongly called out for not responding to that event properly. We had very angry students who were very vocal about the fact that we had not done enough to support them. Our school population is 75% emergent multilingual and approximately 75% of our students identify as people of color or students of color. When that happened, it was very disorienting for us, for many of us. We were really shocked at how strongly we were attacked because we felt that our students felt safe and cared for. We worked our hardest to make sure that they knew that we loved them. And so, to be told that that wasn't the case because we were racist, because we were White, was frankly devastating. We spent the summer really looking at how we were going to respond to that. In the 20-21 school year we started to do a lot of work with our staff on that and so we looked at some webinars on antiracism and microaggressions and what it meant to have White privilege and all of those keywords that are so important when we're looking at this work around racial equity. We really had to do it carefully and slowly. I think we are now at a point because we have continued that work this year. Talking about cultural competency in our

classrooms and making sure that our classroom reflects the diversity of our students is very normalized.

Jennifer acknowledged fostering culturally responsive practices has not been easy and she explained it in the following way:

To get people there is not easy to do and it's still a journey for some of our teachers, less so than before, but it's still there. If we are looking at how do we help teachers who are resistant to move forward, how do we get teachers to see that this is not a personal attack, you know—looking at making us into better teachers for those little precious people sitting in front of us who we are forming so that they can go out into the world and do amazing things.

Mandy spoke of occasional resistance from her staff when she remarked, “I’d like to view it more as a collaborative culturally sensitive leadership style, but I do know that sometimes there is resistance, but not always. In this case, being open-minded and flexible would be the two key words.”

Joe was the only participant who could not recall facing any obstacles or resistance to his culturally responsive leadership practices, “I have never encountered a situation where someone was against being culturally responsive.”

Overcoming Emotions

A final theme that materialized from the conversations about race and racism was emotion. When asked how often they talk about race and racism with their staff, all five participants shared experiences with conversations about race and talked about observed emotions such as anger, agitation, discomfort, shame, resistance, denial, and fear.

Eileen, Jennifer, Mandy, and Cara described how strong emotions surfaced among staff members when conversations about race were initially introduced at staff meetings. Eileen recalled the first conversation about race and racism at a staff meeting:

In the first staff meeting when race was brought up, I think in the fall of 2020, I remember teachers becoming agitated, some looked angry. There was a change in the atmosphere and people were uncomfortable. One teacher told me after the meeting that she was angry that she felt she was being felt shamed for the color of her skin.

Jennifer spoke about the reaction of some of her staff during inaugural discussions about racism in schools:

We were coming at it from the emotional side of it. To be called a racist, and I was called a racist, personally, some of my other staff were called racist and that really hurts, especially to those in a giving profession. I would say categorically there's not a person on my staff who is waving a Confederate flag or wearing a swastika. At first, there was resistance because it was, "Well no, I'm not [racist], and how dare you say that I am, I am absolutely not, I've done this, this, and this." That was even my response.

Mandy recalled the initial staff meetings that included conversations about race and racism. She described the atmosphere in the following way:

In the beginning when we talked about racial terminology and such, it would be very, very quiet at our staff meetings. Now people ask questions and share resources about racism. A couple of teachers are more vocal about talking about unlearning racism and that is a good thing.

Although these participants experienced and observed differing emotions at the initial meetings that addressed racial issues, they have noticed an improvement. Jennifer explained:

We can absolutely have this conversation divorced of the emotions tied to the idea of white fragility, white supremacy, and racist language. We had to take time to come to terms with what those words meant and to recognize that it wasn't a personal attack. Once we took the emotion away from it, no, I haven't met resistance at all. We all recognize that this is important, and as a predominantly White staff we've all come to a place where I think we realized that we need to understand the experiences of our students better, so that we can respond in a different way. And we also understand that we can't fully understand because that's just simply not our experience.

Similarly, Cara commented that conversations about race are more comfortable now:

The conversations are getting better. I think people were afraid to say the wrong thing in the beginning, so nobody wanted to talk about diversity. Now more people are talking about racial issues in front of their colleagues, but I think there is still a lot of, I guess you could say, unconscious bias, with some teachers' attitudes. Administrators and staff do not know what they don't know. School leaders need to see themselves as learners and be open to the perspectives of those around them.

Despite the discomfort and range of emotions in initial discussions about race recalled by most of the participants, all five school leaders expressed a willingness to continue with racial conversations with staff and colleagues. Conversations about race were mentioned by participants as being one of the more valuable personal and professional development experiences. Jennifer described the importance of school leaders taking the initiative to self-educate in culturally responsive practices in the following way:

It is our responsibility, as leaders, to educate ourselves more, because at the end of the day we will have these students in front of us. We are serving these families and it is our

job to lead our teachers to be the best teachers they can be, for the students in our schools. If we're not willing to do the hard work, how can we ask our teachers to? How can we ask our families to trust that we have their best interests at heart? How can we ask our students to recognize that we do love and serve them? We all went into this job because we love kids, we love people, we want to help, we want to make the world a better place. But as a leader, you have to get in and do the hard work yourself. That can be challenging and time-consuming and finding that in and amongst all the other demands that we have, it's tricky, but if we don't, we're not totally fulfilling our job, and the trust that has been placed in us, as leaders.

At the end of each interview, I asked participants if they wished to share any other experiences about culturally responsive practices in their schools. Mandy related:

Joe acknowledged that culturally responsive practices in his school require ongoing attention, "We have a lot more work to do in this area and I look forward to collaborating with my teachers toward that goal." Similarly, Cara acknowledged there is still work to be done when she said, "It's an important topic, and we still have a long way to go."

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of how Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. Participants who met the criteria were interviewed and each participant was asked specific questions about their leadership practices. Six themes emerged from this process: Waking up to Racism; Challenging Liberal Ideologies; Personal Beliefs, Awareness and Reflection; Professional Development; School Culture and Climate; and Overcoming Emotions. The interviews revealed that all five school leaders are

embracing culturally responsive leadership practices, and despite being in different places on their personal and professional paths, all five participants began their culturally responsive leadership journeys by examining personal beliefs, creating awareness, and embracing reflection.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion uniting the relevant research with the study's key findings. Furthermore, I provide guiding principles developed from the interviews I conducted with school leaders who strive to enact culturally responsive practices to influence learner outcomes in their schools. I discuss the implications of my research, recommendations for culturally responsive Canadian school leaders, and conclude this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Canada's population continues to grow rapidly, and increased racial diversity is evident in classrooms. Although the student population has changed, the racial composition of Canadian educators and school leaders has not, with almost 90% of Canadian schools being led by White teachers and school leaders (Turner, 2015). In an increasingly racialized country, it is imperative that Canadian school leaders support success for all students. This can only happen if school leaders understand the complexity of difference within their student populations and beyond, how to address these complexities, and how their own understandings, biases, and beliefs influence their leadership styles.

Since its inception in 1867, the Canadian government has responded to racial diversity with assimilation practices, commonly known as the *melting pot*, whereby Indigenous peoples, racialized Canadians, and immigrants were encouraged to assimilate to the dominant values and cultural norms. In the early 1980s, the Canadian government introduced the Multiculturalism Act, promoting the nation as *a cultural mosaic* and encouraging individuals to retain their culture, language, value, and traditions. Although Canada appears to be a welcoming and inclusive country, the reality is Canada's education system continues to be deeply seated in Eurocentric ideologies and assimilative practices. Eurocentric ideologies coupled with exclusionary educational practices and systemic racism result in racialized students experiencing tenuous relationships with schools, and these fragile relationships have the potential to negate student identities and diminish the cultural capital of students (Egbo, 2009). Culturally responsive school leaders who are committed to ensuring school experiences are more equitable

for all students are needed to disrupt the current barriers that continue to marginalize racialized students.

To address this important diversity gap, I examined the stories of five Canadian school leaders and their perceptions of culturally responsive practices, exploring their experiences in education through the lens of CRT. This qualitative phenomenological study used semi structured interviews to capture the nuances and details of school leaders' experiences and perceptions.

Participants who met the criteria outlined in Chapter 3 were interviewed. I used qualitative methods to examine the school leaders' perceptions of culturally responsive practices that influence student outcomes. Interview questions focused on CRT in education, specifically a CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016). Each participant had the opportunity to conduct a member check of their own transcript. The member-checking process supported the credibility of the data and preserved the integrity of participant responses (Barnes, 2017). I coded the data using in vivo coding, as it brings out the participants' expressions and voices. In analyzing the data, I used memos to help me deepen my understanding of the participants' experiences and develop categories. Moreover, throughout the study, I made ample use of the constant comparative method to continue to develop the study.

Viewing this study's findings through the lens of CRT was necessary to examine and understand the practices that the school leaders employ in their schools. CRT highlights the ways in which race and racism are embedded in Canadian society. Race is a social construct and the realities associated with racism affect all facets of daily life, including education. CRT highlights that in a White-dominated society, institutional racism is embedded in schools (Zamudio et al., 2011). CRT questions the notion of racial progress and helps in understanding how racism has

shaped systems (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT provides a means of interpreting historical and current privileged assumptions as well as the organizational and structural norms, traditions, and practices that reinforce the deficit discourse that perpetuates racism (Yosso, 2005).

I reviewed the data multiple times to look for patterns of words and phrases that aligned with the literature review. After a thorough review of the responses, the analysis revealed six major themes in response to the research question: (a) Waking up to Racism; (b) Challenging Liberal Ideologies; (c) Personal Beliefs, Awareness, and Reflection; (d) Professional Development; (e) School Culture and Climate; and (f) Overcoming Emotions. The first two themes reflect critical tenets of CRT. The next three themes align with Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework, which was central to this study, and the last theme emerged as a hurdle encountered by school leaders and staff. All domains of culturally responsive leadership practice emerged as essential components to how each participant perceived their current leadership practices. In the next section, findings that address the research question that underpinned this study are addressed. The findings are aligned with the literature, and recommendations are offered for practice and future research.

Interpretation of Findings

This section discusses the six major findings from this study relative to the study's research question and literature. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. In doing so, this study not only provides insights into the perceptions school leaders possess about culturally responsive practices, but also examines the impact cultural responsiveness has on student outcomes, and additionally taps into the resistance and obstacles school leaders may encounter in pursuit of cultural responsiveness. To

this end, the study was guided by the following research question: How do school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes? The analysis of the school leaders' experiences was framed within CRT and CRSL frameworks.

Waking up to Racism

When discussing their lived experiences, the five White participants shared their individual experiences of growing up in Canada and being oblivious to the White normativity and White privilege that upheld racism as a persistent feature in Canada's social fabric. Four of the participants were raised in middle to high socioeconomic areas and these four school leaders noted their awareness of racism in Canada did not happen in their formative years. Eileen discussed the unawareness to racism in her life and admitted she thought of her White perceptions as the *normal view*. She was unaware of the impacts of racism and oppression and assumed that the difficulties experienced by racialized students were due to behavioral issues. She thought of her White views as being the *Canadian view* and it took her time to understand that her ideologies were racist.

Jennifer explained that she required time to understand her views were racist. She admitted that she now understands that due to her Whiteness and growing up in a society that promoted the White identity, she may still be susceptible to harboring unconscious racist viewpoints. She realized her unawareness was problematic and she needed to reexamine her racialized ideologies.

Tatum (2007) contended that racism is akin to smog in the air; it is inhaled by and affects all. White school leaders' knowledge of their racial identity and history and implications of their White privilege impacts the way they lead (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011). It is only upon

reexamination of their racialized ideologies that school leaders can reimagine an education system that supports the success of *all* students (Palmer, 2007).

The Diversity Gap

The diversity gap was underscored in the problem statement for this study and situated the research question. All five participants recognized inequitable representation in their schools, with an overrepresentation of White people in the educator workforce, curriculum, and school council.

Diversity Gap Between Students and Staff. The participant data revealed that the lack of racial diversity among school leaders and teachers continues to be a problem. All five school leaders acknowledged that this diversity gap can impact racialized students' outcomes. The diversity gap between majority-White educators and leaders and an increasingly racialized student population is resulting in cultural disconnect or racial mismatch, which can impede culturally responsive practices and further contribute to racial achievement gaps (McGrady & Reynolds, 2012). Previous research has indicated that the incongruence between teacher and student demographics makes possible a significant racial and cultural knowledge gap between teachers and students (Howard & Navarro, 2016). Ryan et al. (2009) outlined four reasons for concern about the diversity gap between the educator workforce and students: symbolic reasons, relationship reasons, pedagogical reasons, and political reasons. Deeply embedded unconscious biases held by White educators can impact racialized students and impact what and how students learn (Ryan et al., 2009). The diversity gap sends the message that schools are doing little to counteract the stratification that exists in society at large (Villegas & Lucas, 2004). Teachers and school leaders who are culturally mismatched with students are more likely to misinterpret or denigrate students' languages, physical movements, cognitive styles, nonverbal cues, and

worldviews (Ryan et al., 2009). Jennifer acknowledged that her experience as a White woman is different than those of her racialized students and her Black vice principal and she is committed to examining their experiences and amplifying their voices.

Additionally, the racial identity context occupied by students affects their motivation in school. Racialized students who see representation of their racial identity among the school leadership have more positive connections to their school and attend school feeling much more satisfied (Byrd & Chavous, 2011), as racialized teachers and leaders can understand and communicate with racialized students in ways that their fellow educators cannot (Ryan et al., 2009).

When schools meet students' needs and educators teach students and families how to access all that school offers, student achievement is augmented (Lindsey et al., 2018). Many White people support the idea of racial equality but are less supportive of policies that could make it more possible, such as reparations, affirmative action, or education reform. The five participants acknowledged the diversity gap between the educator workforce and the student body; however, none of them discussed how to move forward with reparations, affirmative action, or any type of reform measures.

Diversity Gap in Curriculum. Although overtly racist and gendered references have generally been identified and removed from curriculum materials, Eurocentrism still permeates Canadian pedagogical practices and reinforces itself through the *hidden curriculum* (Giroux, 1978). The hidden curriculum operates imperceptibly, promoting Eurocentric epistemologies and by suppressing other ways of knowing. For example, Eurocentric dominance preserves itself in the education system through the omission and denial of African and Indigenous pedagogies and scholarship in resources, materials, curricular content, and the construction of *othered* identities

through a lens that privileges European worldviews (Dei, 2000). This overrepresentation of White perspectives in the curriculum continues to pervade much of what is being taught in Canadian schools. DiAngelo (2019) purported that because of White privilege, White educators may be challenged in knowing how to reduce White privilege present in their curriculum and pedagogical practices. Racism cannot be understood in isolation from wider economic, social, and political inequalities (Gillborn, 2008). Three of the participants acknowledged that exclusionary practice occurs in curricular delivery. Eileen explained that her own lack of understanding of the permanence of racism allowed her classroom curriculum and resources to go unchallenged for many years, and conceded that as a White teacher, she never took notice of the color of the skin of the characters in the picture books or thought about character names or that all authors were White.

Jennifer also discussed her inability to understand the permanence of racism in terms of curriculum in her classroom. She spoke of being taught through her formative years that everyone was created equal, and this belief permeated her teaching and how she espoused equality. She came to realize her unawareness of White privilege may have had unintended consequences on her racialized students. As Jennifer's realization of her White privilege has surfaced, she now seeks to improve curricular and pedagogical practices. She is invested in conducting cultural audits of curricula and our classrooms to see where her school needs to "do better." When probed about the cultural audits, she explained how conversations during teacher evaluations may include cultural responsiveness, fueled by observations made during classroom cultural audits.

Joe voiced his concerns about the government's newly proposed curriculum and potential negative impacts on student outcomes. Joe contended the learning outcomes are greatly affected

as curricular outcomes are tied closely to Eurocentric values, and how this Whiteness is an inaccurate representation of Canada's history, further upholding racism. Eileen discussed how some of her teachers are re-examining resources and their classrooms to be more reflective and representative of all students. Joe and Eileen's statements speak to the importance of teachers' recognition that curricula, resources, and classrooms require a critical examination and reexamination. Teachers "pushing back at the government" suggests teachers' understanding of a diversity gap in the curriculum, misrepresentation, and a dominance of White perspectives is no longer going to be acceptable in Canadian education. Addressing diversity gaps through a schoolwide cultural audit has opened the door for Jennifer to address cultural competency, intentionality, and inclusivity of all students in curriculum. Denying racialized students the opportunity to see themselves reflected in curriculum "is like erecting a wall of deniability, preventing them from accessing all that education has to offer" (Fuller-Hamilton, 2019, p. 762).

Diversity Gap in School Council. The participants recognized the existence of a diversity gap within their school councils. The councils are organizational structures that encourage parent and community connections to the school. Having a majority-White school council silences the voices of racialized parents and community members who need to have representation. Even though participants mentioned a couple of isolated examples of racialized parents being part of school council, all participants agreed that school councils are not representative of the racial diversity of students in their schools. Cara echoed all participants and further commented that she is unaware of any school councils that are representative of Canada's racial diversity.

A school council whose membership comprises overwhelmingly White parents and White school leaders may further uphold racism as normal in society. School councils make

impactful decisions on students as they often determine how to fundraise, how to allocate funds, and what activities, festivities, music, food, and special events are made available to the students. The council members' personal childhood experiences and White perspectives on what is deemed fun, engaging, and meaningful for White children may not align with racialized students' experiences, interests, and worldviews. Culturally responsive school leaders are characterized as those who stress high student achievement expectations, exhibit an ethic of care, promote inclusive instructional practices, and in the case of the diversity gap of Canadian school councils, develop organizational structures that encourage parent and community connections to the school (Johnson, 2014). Four of the participants were raised in White normative societies, with no racial diversity in their communities. One participant grew up alongside racialized peers. All five participants accept and acknowledge that they now are cognizant that racism is a normal, and sometimes invisible, construct of Canadian society. According to DiAngelo (2019), once one can accept the existence of racism, which may be difficult for many White individuals to do, only then can educators work towards eliminating racism in schools.

Challenging Liberal Ideologies

Prior research has shown that colorblindness is a form of racism that negates or denies the negative outcomes of racism by reframing inequality as issues of individual ability or choice (Hartmann et al., 2017; Kohli et al., 2017). Colorblindness manifests itself in an unwillingness to acknowledge students' race and refusal to name and see one's own race and its relationship to a system of privilege and denial. Critical race theorists have concentrated on colorblindness in thwarting race-neutral practices and thus reducing White dominance (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). Jennifer supported the idea that colorblindness is a system of privilege and denial when she spoke of her teachers who maintained a colorblind perspective when they would say, "I don't

see skin color”. She had to encourage these teachers to ‘unpack’ the deep seated ideologies and educate them on how not recognizing skin color is a microaggression and denying the experiences and obstacles racialized students encounter because of their skin color.

Colorblindness is embedded in Canadian society and exacerbates the deeply rooted discrimination within schools (Price, 2009). Current educational policy and school philosophy that promote colorblindness without examination of the ideologies underpinning White hegemony (Atwater, 2008; Gillborn, 2004) ignore the social reality. A colorblind perspective works to reproduce racism; it keeps the conversation away from race and, therefore, more comfortable, and perhaps safer for White people.

Many White educators and school leaders have struggled to talk about race and racism and default to a form of colorblindness called colormuteness, where the language used ignores race and racism (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Four of the participants engaged in degrees of colormuteness when asked how they identify racially. Three of them answered “Caucasian,” and one said “German.” Only one participant answered “White.” Throughout the interviews, participants described racialized people as “African Americans,” “immigrants,” and having “different ethnic backgrounds,” They all discussed race during their interviews, yet their word choices indicating colormuteness may be a result of not having to use racial words in their daily practice. Colormute terms prevent the ability to hold discussions that focus on explicit ways to make learning equitable for racialized students (M. Pollock, 2017). To start conversations about race, school leaders must first see race, and to continue these conversations about race, school leaders must name race.

Efforts to address systemic racism are made more difficult when people adopt a colorblind stance; confuse the meanings of equity and equality; and insist on gradual and

incremental change, rather than radical change (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Meritocracy is a system that assumes that hard work will be rewarded regardless of race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression (Teelucksingh, 2018). The school leaders discussed being raised with the ideology of meritocracy and recognizing as school leaders, that meritocracy does not function the same way for all students in all schools. Urgent and radical change was not mentioned or advocated by any of the participants.

The participants shared examples of how their teachers are working toward understanding embedded racism in education and becoming more comfortable discussing systemic racism at work. Jennifer spoke about QHSD district leaders encouraging the educator workforce to be “on the path to change.” She admitted that there are some leaders who are still working with their teachers to understand the importance of becoming racially responsive and eradicating systemic racism. Cara acknowledged the journey and admitted there is a lot of room for continued improvement. Mandy questioned what the next steps toward cultural responsiveness for her staff will be as they have been working on building knowledge capacity and she would like to see the acquired knowledge transferred to classroom practice. Joe asserted that small steps may be necessary, and he shared Mandy’s viewpoint on moving the knowledge to practice. Joe related that his staff is on a “spectrum of growth” when it comes to being antiracist. Despite none of the participants discussing a sense of urgency to dismantle systemic racism, their shared experiences support Milner’s (2010) claim that understanding racial diversity is a life-long process. The participants did speak about noticeable changes related to racism that are happening in their schools and an understanding that everyone is working toward understanding racial diversity.

Personal Beliefs, Awareness and Reflection

All five participants spoke about how their personal beliefs, awareness, and reflection about race and racism have affected their leadership practices. Eileen discussed how her awareness took many years to realize as she had always been surrounded by Whiteness and was affected by the White attitudes of her counterparts. It was not until her first year as a teacher in a small town with a large population of Indigenous students did Eileen first realize that her White ideologies, ignorance, and lack of training and education about diversity contributed to her racism.

Jennifer explained the impact a racial autobiography has had on her practice and how, through this racial autobiography, she came to realize how much she did not understand about racialized views because of how she was socialized. Having never encountered anyone who was not White until university, she realized how sheltered her life had been. She became aware that her White normative worldview was *skewed* due to lack of experience. Joe discussed the impact of reflecting on race and racism, and how it has influenced him. His personal journey of culturally responsive growth has coincided with the district's diversity initiative, and he has come to understand systemic racism and its detrimental impacts on racialized students. Joe believes that people who are reflective in their roles of perpetuating or dismantling systemic racism in their personal lives are more apt to do this work in their professional life. Eileen also discussed how a school leader who does not embrace culturally responsive practices can negatively impact the school staff. Eileen attributed a school leader's avoidance or lack of interest in addressing the topic of racism to discomfort and ineptitude, as leaders who are not trained in how to be culturally responsive do not want to appear inept or inexperienced in front of their teachers. Eileen expressed that the teaching staff of those school leaders who ignore race

and racism are being denied opportunities to ameliorate their classroom practices, further disenfranchising racialized students.

Reminding school leaders that only upon reexamination of their racialized ideologies can they reimagine an education system that supports the success of *all* students, Palmer (2007) encouraged them to chart their *inner landscape*. Research indicates that school leaders who examine their practices and personal beliefs can explore race and racism and how it impacts their students; therefore, they become better able to influence change and identify outdated policies and practices (Bridges & Lynn, 2010; Lynn & Parker, 2006). Samuels et al. (2017) argue that it is only after one becomes self-aware of their personal beliefs and values can one begin the ability to consciously embrace culturally relevant pedagogy and minimize oppressive elements within the curriculum.

Culturally responsive school leaders should be aware of their own culture, the cultures of those in their school, and the impact student culture has on learning (Lindsey et al., 2018). Joe confirmed the importance of culturally responsive school leaders' awareness of their own culture when he shared, "I do think we have a responsibility as school leaders to acknowledge our own ethnic backgrounds and how we function in our profession."

As the participants demonstrated through the conversations, by interrogating their own understandings and personal beliefs about race and its implications, school leaders will be better equipped to create a culturally responsive school environment, free of racism (Palmer, 2007; Singleton, 2015). According to Palmer (2007), only those leaders who are self-aware create authentic school community, as self-awareness allows for participation in an exchange of sharing and learning.

Jennifer confirmed Palmer's (2007) assertion when she spoke of her participation in an exchange of sharing and learning. Jennifer and her Vice Principal recently prepared a presentation to other school leaders in the district about the work on racism that has been occurring at her school. She challenged the other school leaders to examine and reflect on where they are at in their journeys, professionally and personally.

Becoming self-aware requires the acceptance that biases are deeply embedded in society and culture. White educators who do not see their racial identity as meaningful often allow the unconscious biases of White privilege to create unsafe and unwelcoming classrooms for students (Matias, 2013; Sue, 2017). Participants discussed an awareness of past behaviours in their classrooms that impacted their students. Jennifer spoke of her coursework in her master's program that focused on trauma and resilience and has come to realize that racism is an adverse childhood experience [ACE].

Self-awareness is challenging work and overcoming unconscious bias takes a lot of reflection and challenging work. Utilizing reflective practice ensures school leaders' cultural responsiveness is being applied in schools. Culturally relevant pedagogy is embraced only once school leaders become aware of their personal beliefs and values (Kowaluk, 2016; Samuels et al., 2017). If school leaders understand and are aware of what systemic racism is, how it came to be, and how it oppresses students, they are more likely to engage in the work of re-examining personal beliefs, unconscious biases, and how these ideologies impact their worldviews.

Professional Development

When the participants discussed developing and supporting the professional growth of staff, all five discussed conversations about race with their staff. Joe admitted that there are teachers at his school who feel uncomfortable discussing race and racism but asserted that it is

his responsibility as the leader to help educate his colleagues. Joe contended he wants to create an atmosphere where others feel comfortable talking about race publicly.

Jennifer has sourced community members to help develop her staff's professional growth. The invited community members have addressed the staff about the educational practices of the varying cultures in the community to provide a better understanding about the educational expectations of the families from different countries. Cara confirmed the importance of leaders having courage and examining existing educational structures and thinks that professional development of the school leaders is required to overcome the discomfort of school leaders talking about a topic that they have not been trained to discuss. Alleviating this discomfort through education, training and professional development is needed as culturally responsive leaders must have conversations about race and racism with school staff members as part of the learning process. Eileen also spoke of the connection between education and leadership practice when she said, "a school leader's behavior and beliefs are directly correlated with the amount of education about cultural responsiveness they have received."

Despite uncomfortable emotions, four participants said they understood the importance of these valuable conversations and have continued to engage in conversations about race and racism. Engaging in these conversations requires developing the capacity to explicitly name and talk about race and racism in school settings. Previous literature noted that when discussions of race and racism continue to be muted, the inequalities of a racialized society will continue to plague schools (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and schools will continue to reproduce race and social class constructs in ways that seriously impact student learning and life chances (Liou et al., 2016). School leaders who remain reluctant to have conversations about race create a culture of silence within schools, reifying racism.

In addition to the value of the conversations to professional development, four of the participants discussed ongoing district professional development opportunities, as well as videos, personal stories, and books, as instrumental to professional development. All five participants acknowledged QHSD is striving to provide professional development around culturally responsive practices, and the expectation is for school leaders and teachers to become proficient at implementing such practices. Jennifer applauded the district's professional development opportunities. Eileen similarly commented on the district's stance on cultural responsiveness and that clear and consistent expectations of staff about cultural responsiveness have been valuable to learning and sharing. Joe expressed his gratitude to the district for taking a stand against racism and he feels the professional development sessions have been the most beneficial opportunities in his career for professional and personal growth. Prior research has noted that it is acknowledged that culturally responsive school leaders are ultimately responsible for encouraging, developing, and supporting school staff's professional growth to create a welcoming, inclusive, and accepting atmosphere for racialized students (Fullan, 2005; Khalifa et al., 2016).

The school leaders interviewed in this study are considered formal leadership. Formal leadership establishes what is discussed and what training is needed to implement change. Yet, informal leadership is important because they are the ones who will change the system.

School Culture and Climate

Student success is impacted by a school's culture and climate (Prokopchuk, 2016). The participants all indicated they strive to create a positive school culture and climate. Mandy discussed how she works at creating a positive school culture and climate by having conversations with students, getting to know what their lives are like, and being interested in

them. Jennifer shared how her school wanted to ensure an inclusive climate where students' voices were being heard and last year, an Inclusion Club to give students a voice to talk about their worldviews and their experiences, to share their stories, and to help others learn how best to respond to their needs. Cara talked about how she strives to create a positive school culture and climate by having students feel valued for who they are. She works hard to have staff and students understand the difference between being treated equally versus being treated equitably. She tries to ensure students receive the necessary support they need.

Taking school culture and climate into consideration, school leaders are tasked with hiring teachers who will best support all students. The five participants in this study all confirmed that questions related to culturally responsive practices have never been asked at any teacher interviews in which they have participated. Mandy, having the most years of experience of the five school leaders, and having conducted numerous interviews with prospective teachers, responded similarly to the other participants.

Turner (2015) noted that those in positions of authority who are responsible for teacher hiring and promotion are overwhelmingly White. A critical understanding of the school leader's role within power and oppression is central to developing a critical consciousness of the operational aspects of White privilege and how White privilege is manifested in teacher representation, and in turn how this current gap in representation impacts racialized students. School leaders must acknowledge the racialized power relations that perpetuate White privilege in teacher hiring in Canadian school boards. Cara confirmed this when she said: "I think representation counts. It would be nice to see a more diverse group at the senior administrative level." Therefore, it is critical that the majority-White school leaders engage in critical dialogue

and action through self-transformative praxis to understand how their positionality reflects their hiring patterns (Lopez, 2015; Wane & Cairncross, 2013).

Overcoming Emotions

Throughout the interviews, the participants used vocabulary indicative of strong emotions they have experienced and witnessed throughout their journeys as culturally responsive school leaders. One participant spoke at length about personal observations at school regarding people's emotions when discussing race and racism. This school leader mentioned "hurt feelings" and "being very angry," as well as having "very angry students," and "angry teachers." Three other participants also used emotional descriptors such as "agitated," "devastating," "shame," "resistance," "hot-headed" and "uncomfortable" throughout the interviews. Until recently, conversations about race and racism have largely been avoided in QHSD, and these culturally responsive school leaders have found themselves navigating through uncharted territories due to the scarcity of culturally responsive role models in the field of education (Singleton, 2015). Research has shown that discussions of the impact of race in schools risk provoking outrage (Schick & St. Denis, 2005). The reluctance to talk about cultural responsiveness and racial justice is grounded in discomfort and fear (DiAngelo, 2019), and those strong emotions may be conjured in those who have not examined their lives through the lens of race at the suggestion they are privileged (Singleton, 2015). A well-planned, well-thought-out professional development program founded on an authentic dialogue about issues of race and racism presents the possibility that educators can effect systemic change to eradicate the inequities that affect educational achievement (Singleton, 2015).

Cognitive dissonance theory supports the participants' descriptions of the cognitive conflicts that they experience as school leaders, as well as those cognitive conflicts of their

teachers. For White leaders to become culturally responsive school leaders they must experience and give voice to dissonance. In the early stages of their careers as educators, all five White leaders discussed how colorblind and myths of meritocracy were accepted, even when faced with overwhelming evidence to the contrary. The participants acknowledged that growing up in a White normative society, they were socialized into this dissonance. Providing White leaders with instruction, information and reflection on cognitive dissonance theory may present an opportunity to unpack the origins and continued presence of dissonance.

This study examined how school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. All the participants expressed that examination of their practices and beliefs assists them to influence change and identify Eurocentric policies and practices that continue to permeate the Canadian education system. Joe commented: “The more I learn about racial diversity, the greater understanding I have of the need for us to do a lot more to dismantle systemic racism.”

The research findings enable me to discuss implications for practice at various levels of the education system, namely the district school boards and universities. can be used to inform teacher leadership preparation programs, teacher evaluation practices, teacher hiring practices, and professional learning opportunities. Data from participants indicated that there was a strong relationship between leader preparation and leaders’ perceptions of cultural responsiveness to support racial diversity and address inequitable practices.

Of the five participants, one school leader emerged as being more comfortable speaking about her experience due to her recent completion of a master’s degree that focused on trauma and adverse childhood experiences, including racism. Her educational experience contributed to a higher level of preparation to be culturally responsive to support racialized students and

address inequitable practices. This participant's experience as a school leader was substantially less than two of the other participants; however, her recent education in culturally responsive and antiracist practices implies that education and training for school leaders is fundamental to addressing racism in schools. This finding supports Milner's (2010) suggestion that the more leaders learn about cultural and racial diversity, the higher the competency, skills, and knowledge they possess in leading diverse populations. Though school leaders may perceive that their lived experiences outside of formal leadership training can better equip them for cultural responsiveness, professional development and higher education about race and racism may have a greater impact on cultivating the necessary knowledge and skills to apply to their daily practice.

Implications

The results from this study indicate that school leaders are interested in learning, creating awareness, and fostering practices about racial awareness in their schools to improve outcomes for all students. The results may influence other Canadian school leaders to enact CRSL practices to improve outcomes for all students. Recent research characterizes culturally responsive school leaders as those who stress high student achievement expectations, exhibit an ethic of care, promote inclusive instructional practices, and develop organizational structures that encourage parent and community connections to the school (Johnson, 2014). School leaders who examine their practices and beliefs through CRT can explore race and racism and how it impacts their students; therefore, they become better able to influence change and identify outdated policies and practices (Bridges & Lynn, 2010; Lynn & Parker, 2006). There is an implication that what students are taught rather than how school authorities think and act will achieve racial

justice without infringing on White institutional power (Gillies, 2021). School authorities need to be intentional in their thoughts and actions to disrupt systemic racism.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of the semi structured interviews highlight the narratives of school leaders as they work to create a more equitable school system. More specifically, the participants' responses provide new insights into effective strategies used by culturally responsive leaders to shape school experiences and improve outcomes for all students. School leaders need to investigate how their identity affects all aspects of the school, including curriculum, pedagogy, classroom décor representative of students, dress code policies, assessment practices, and relationships with students, families, and community.

Canadian school leaders are majority White, and this is not going to change anytime soon, so having culturally responsive school leaders is critical. School leaders need to not only talk about cultural responsiveness and antiracist practices, but also hold these in their thoughts, opinions, and actions. Modeling exemplary CRSL behavior to staff, students, and community requires that school leaders are courageous and willing to move past obstacles and resistance. Adhering to a CRSL framework can assist school leaders to ensure their leadership praxis is built upon personal beliefs, awareness, and reflection; development of teachers and curriculum; school culture and climate; and the broader school community. Modeling effective CRSL practices and building capacity of teachers through intentional professional development is a fundamental aspect of school leadership.

District Influence

QHSD's authorities are all White. This diversity gap impacts students and may result in racially discriminatory disciplinary actions, inequitable funding practices, racially discriminatory

dress codes, racialized hiring and promotion practices, and overall racist assumptions about student expectations, beliefs, and needs. Policy change may prove difficult to achieve with White gatekeepers, who may be unaware of how their unconscious biases impact their decisions and have unintended consequences on racialized students. District leadership needs to model cultural responsiveness by demonstrating that an effective leadership praxis involves building supportive relationships, being open to criticism, being accountable, and being willing to be courageous.

Recommendations for Further Study

Findings from this study suggest it is important for school leaders to embrace a CRSL practice to critically self-reflect on leadership behaviors, to develop teachers, to promote inclusivity, and to improve engagement with students, parents, and community. With the contribution of this research, researchers and practitioners should continue to study the culturally responsive practices and perspectives of school leaders as well as how these leaders develop teachers and instructional practices that challenge oppressive and inequitable systems within education and position racialized learners for academic success.

Four of the participants referred to various difficult emotions experienced personally, and by their teachers, while analyzing personal privilege and oppression. Based on the accounts of the participants, these emotions closely mirror the emotions in the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Discarding and letting go of ideologies that no longer serve us may require time for grieving, and even though these emotions are like what DiAngelo (2019) terms as White fragility, this may be considered an area for further exploration. Additionally, future studies should be conducted on emotions, specifically how to overcome uncomfortable discussions on race. Another recommendation is for this study to be conducted across Canada, in the United States, or globally. Counternarratives is a tenet of CRT; however, in

this study all participants identified as White, which may be considered a limitation, therefore, it is recommended that this study be conducted with participants who do not identify as White. The voice of students is missing from this study, and interviews with students are recommended to determine how they are influenced by culturally responsive leaders in schools.

Conclusion

A school leader is one of the most key factors that can affect change in a school culture (Fullan, 2005). Canadian schools need courageous leaders who are willing to advocate on behalf of students to create a more inclusive and culturally responsive education system. This dissertation raises awareness of the necessity for all Canadian school leaders to function in a culturally responsive manner, regardless of their student population. When school leaders start with understanding themselves and then expand that to understanding the experiences of others, they can intentionally cultivate a learning environment that honors racial and intersectional diversity within the classroom, the school, the community, and the larger society. It is not a practice that is finite; rather, it is a process that requires consistent reflection, learning, and growth. School leaders must strive to continually identify culturally responsive leadership behaviors and practices that will make it possible for students of diverse backgrounds to experience equitable terrain with students from the dominant culture. School leaders need to develop positive relationships with staff, students, and parents to influence student outcomes by promoting culturally responsive teaching within the classroom and school-community cultural responsiveness.

School leaders in Canada need to acknowledge that the racial diversity of students continues to increase, and that racial diversity is a reality all schools must embrace. Changes are needed in both policy and practice to address existing disconnects between sensemaking and

practice; specifically, these changes must target the content and delivery of professional learning policies around equity and inclusion. Student success is paramount.

Overall, this study reinforces that culturally responsive school leaders are needed to advocate for and extend professional learning opportunities in cultural responsiveness. Cultural responsiveness is a necessary tool to reduce the White dominance of policymakers, educators, school councils, and curriculum. A culturally responsive leader is intentional in their efforts to support equity and success for all students and introduces strategies to eradicate oppressive practices and dismantle racism in Canada's education system.

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APPENDIX A

EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Subject: Research Study Participant Search

Dear School Leader,

My name is Heather Saunders, and I am a doctoral student at the University of New England. I am working on my dissertation, "How Canadian School Leaders Perceive their Capacity to Foster Cultural Responsive Practices to Influence Student Outcomes" In addition to my doctoral candidacy, I am employed as a diverse learning coordinator.

I am looking for six to ten volunteers to interview. To participate in this study, you must be currently employed as a school leader (principal, vice principal, assistant principal). Interviews will be conducted through an online communication platform such as Zoom and are expected to last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. I will discuss and review the Information Page at the beginning of the interview. Also, volunteer participants can ask to review a transcript of the interview to ensure that information was accurately captured. The identity and privacy of all participants will be protected.

I would very much appreciate your help, and your input may benefit other leaders, teachers, and students in the future. If you would like more information about this study or would like to schedule an interview, please contact me at hsaunders2@une.edu.

Thank you,

Heather Saunders

APPENDIX B
INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: *How Canadian School Leaders Perceive their Capacity to Foster Culturally Responsive Practices to Influence Student Outcomes*

Principal Investigator(s): Heather Saunders

Introduction

Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study. You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

This study is being conducted to explore how school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes.

Who will be in this study?

Those participating in the study include school leaders (principals, vice principals and assistant principals).

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in a recorded interview, which will last 30-60 minutes. Interviews will be conducted either by telephone or online, via a teleconference medium such as Zoom. Transcription will be done by Rev.com, or another similar web-based transcription platform. The transcript will be provided to you for accuracy, at your request. There is a possibility that the principal investigator may need to reach out to you after the data has been coded.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

The research poses minimal risk to the participant, principally being attributed to a small risk of a breach of confidentiality. Potential difficult questions may arise during your interview that may cause discomfort. If that occurs, you do not have to answer the question(s) or any question that makes you uncomfortable. You may end the interview at any time or exit the study at any time without repercussions and any collected data will be deleted and not part of the study results.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

There are no personal benefits for participating in this study; however, participation in this study may potentially provide the academic community greater insight and a better understanding of your role as a culturally responsive school leader.

What will it cost me?

Participants and schools will not incur any costs.

How will my privacy be protected?

Participants, schools, and the school district will be given pseudonyms to conceal their identities. For interviews conducted via Zoom, participants have the option to not turn on their camera if they choose (as a measure to protect their privacy). I will be in a private setting to ensure that others will not be listening to the conversation.

How will my data be kept confidential?

All collected data will be maintained by the researcher. No personally identifiable information (PII) will be used and no PII will appear in the transcription of the interview. A master list to house participant identifiable information from recruitment (e.g., name, e-mail address, telephone number, etc.) will be kept until the transcription is complete. The master list will be destroyed after transcription. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer and an external drive, in a locked office. Only Heather Saunders, as researcher, will have access to the office, password protected computer, and external drive.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with your school.

Whom may I contact with questions?

The researcher conducting this study is Heather Saunders.

For more information regarding this study, please contact the researcher at hsaunders2@une.edu.

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Heather Saunders

Interviewee:

Position of the Interviewee:

Description of Project: *How Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes.*

Script prior to interview:

Thank you once again for being willing to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As mentioned, my study seeks to understand how Canadian school leaders perceive their capacity to foster culturally responsive practices to influence student outcomes. Our interview today will last between 30 -60 minutes.

(Review aspects of Information Sheet)

Are you okay with me recording our conversation today? _Yes _No

If yes: Thank you! Please let me know at any time if at any time you want me to turn off the recorder or keep something you said off the record.

If no: Thank you for letting me know. I will only take notes of our conversation.

Before we begin the interview, do you have any questions? [Discuss questions]

If any questions (or other questions) arise at any point in this study, feel free to ask them at any time. I would be more than happy to answer your questions.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your childhood, where you grew up, where you attended university and what degrees you have obtained?
2. Tell me a little bit about your prior teaching experience. (Where? How long?)
3. How many years have you been a school leader?
4. What led you to become a school leader?
5. Racially speaking, how do you self-identify?
6. How do you think your personal and professional background and prior lived experiences have influenced your attitudes and feelings about diversity and cultural responsiveness?
7. How does the racial diversity of teachers in your school community align with the racial diversity of students? In other words, do the students see themselves represented in the school staff? Has this changed in recent years?
8. What actions do you take to get to know your school's community?
9. When evaluating teachers, do you speak to the need of culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy?
10. When you reflect on professional development you have attended about social/racial justice and/or cultural responsiveness, what sessions or topics have been the most beneficial and why?
11. Have your personal beliefs and actions changed because of Professional Development regarding cultural responsiveness? If yes, how?
12. What types of professional development would you recommend for teachers, specifically in your school?

13. How often do you talk about race and racism with your staff? How do you begin these conversations?
14. Have you ever encountered obstacles/resistance/challenges toward culturally responsive or antiracist practices? If yes, please describe the situation.
15. Do you think culturally responsive school leaders and teachers must possess courage and willingness to examine/disrupt the educational structures that may contribute to the oppression (and silencing) of some groups of students, along with community members?
16. When you think about your school council, how representative are the parents of your school's racial diversity?
17. When you interview teacher candidates, do you ask about culturally responsive practices and training?
18. Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience as a school leader that you think influences your culturally responsive practices that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?

After the Interview:

Thank you for participating in this process. It means a great deal to me. Again, I would like to reiterate that your responses will be kept confidential.