RESPONSIVENESS TO CULTURE
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

by

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Abstract

Traditional administrative approaches to conflict in schools tend to be punitive, dominated by Western cultural assumptions, and to disregard students’ cultures. Cultural responsiveness attends to different worldviews while appreciating the impact of one’s own cultural lens. This thesis applies a cultural proficiency framework to analysis of the conflict management practices of administrators in secondary schools in a south-central Ontario school board. Analysis of data from interviews with secondary school administrators, students, school board cultural community liaisons, and school board documents indicate that culturally proficient cross-cultural interactions between administrators and students tended to include relationship-building efforts aimed at learning from and about disputants. In contrast to typical punitive and uncommunicative approaches, cultural proficiency was evident in some elements of alternative participatory or restorative approaches. In combining cultural proficiency with conflict management, this thesis helps to fill a gap in research relevant to equitably serving diverse student populations in southern Ontario schools.
Dedicated to my loving husband, Craig.
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Chapter 1 Literature Review

Current conflict management practice in public schools seldom reflects the varied worldviews and backgrounds of disputants, nor does it often address the causes of conflicts. In increasingly diverse North American communities, this often results in disproportionate numbers of marginalized students being suspended and expelled. The cultural proficiency framework being proposed in this thesis provides language to describe what respectful attention to cultural diversity might look and sound like in the management of student conflicts at school. Interaction between individuals of different cultures and ethnicities is enhanced when individuals (such as school administrators) are able and willing to learn and to appreciate cultures different from their own. This thesis examines administrators' conflict management practices in secondary schools in south-central Ontario. Specifically, it examines how and whether their practices attended to student cultural differences, through demonstrating efforts to better understand disputants' behaviour or to involve them in the conflict management process. Data include interviews with secondary school administrators, students, and cultural liaison workers, and analysis of school board documents. Findings demonstrate a range of conflict management strategies, including both traditional punitive actions and relatively culturally responsive actions in which the conflict managers demonstrated relationship-building attributes such as care and compassion, creating space dialogues that allow for the sharing of stories, and/or employing effective communication skills. Cultural responsiveness of administrators was often impeded by their lack of cultural knowledge,
their reluctance to engage cooperatively with students’ parents, their misconceptions of current Safe Schools policies, and sometimes overt prejudice and misuse of power.

Conflicts represent a clash between multiple realities or points of view (Bucher, 2008). In this research I use the term “conflict management approaches” to refer to the processes or actions taken by an administrator to bring about harmony. Literature regarding conflict management processes, such as that of Fisher and Ury (1981/1991) provide step-by-step methods for negotiating conflicts. Louis Rosen (2005), a former high school principal committed to the improvement of fair discipline practices in schools, compiled a summary of common and successful practices across 18 American states as a resource for secondary school administrators. In Canada, Leithwood and Steibach (1995) outline a strategic process of problem-solving for school administrators. Conflict management manuals, such as that of Guenther, Hall and Robertson (1998), are also designed for school administrators. However, most of the research that forms the basis for conflict management theory embedded in these resources for school leaders is conducted in non-school settings and it is not clear how applicable these conceptualizations are to school settings (Fris, 1992). Additionally, the authors of most widely used conflict management resources represent a narrow spectrum of social backgrounds and worldviews, namely white, Anglophone, and upper middle class, which may not be applicable to less-privileged or culturally diverse populations (Avruch, 1998; Cunningham, 2003; Lederach, 1995). Despite the available resources on conflict management, Vey (2004) reported that school administrators in Canada do not usually consciously adhere to any specific model. As an administrator in a secondary school, I would concur with Vey’s conclusions. Administrators tend to approach any conflict as a
problem to be solved (Fris, 1992). Information is gathered, administrators adjudicate, and consequences are dispensed in accordance with school Codes of Behaviour, generally aimed at a cessation of the inappropriate behaviour. Joe Fris (1992) investigated Canadian principals’ conflict management styles and found not only that their management styles did not align with typologies found in research, but that most principals demonstrated a tendency to change their management styles as the circumstances of the conflict changed. Thus, the conflict management practice of secondary school principals is characterized by complexity, diversification and non-conformity to typology.

This study examines the attention paid to student disputants’ cultures in the complex conflict management practice of particular secondary school administrators. The following questions guided my investigation:

1) According to the perspectives of students, cultural liaisons and administrators themselves, in what range of ways did certain administrators in one school board handle student conflicts?  
2) How were these conflict management actions responsive (and unresponsive) to cultural differences?

The foundational assumption of this thesis research is that attention to culture is a necessary component of effective conflict management in school settings. The findings of this study will support the conflict management practice of administrators by providing school board personnel and education stakeholders with a clearer picture of culturally sensitive, conflict management practice, and responding to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s request for more equitable and inclusive practice in their increasingly diverse school communities.
It is important to this research that I acknowledge my personal and professional bias. I am an administrator in a secondary school setting in which I am daily confronted with the challenges of addressing conflicts within my school community. In my 5 years as an administrator, I have received training in alternative dispute resolution and restorative practices. I am critical of my own conflict management practice and question how my personal worldview impacts my conflict management actions. My school community is comprised of students whose backgrounds and lived realities are very different from my own. This investigation is motivated by my desire to be more culturally responsive in my own conflict management practice. There are occasions throughout the analysis where I share my insights based on my personal experience.

“Culture” Defined

Extending well beyond typical food and dress of any given group, “culture” is “systems of shared understandings and symbols that connect people to each other, providing them with unwritten messages about how to express themselves and how to make meaning of their lives” (LeBaron, 2003). Culture provides the framework for making decisions in our everyday lives (Lynch and Hanson, 1998).

Cultural groups center around a wide variety of shared identities, including race, ethnicity, age, nationality, geographical setting, socioeconomic class, able-bodiedness or disability, sexual orientation, language, religion, profession or job role and gender. It is thus inaccurate to ask which culture someone belongs to, because everyone belongs to multiple cultures. Cultures are living, changing systems that influence our interpretations of the past, starting points, and currencies or values. It is therefore inescapable that they also influence our conflicts (LeBaron 2003, p10).

Culture is an aspect of who individuals are and what they do, including when and how they engage in conflict. LeBaron explains that many variables influence one’s cultures. As an individual’s context changes, their culture also changes. For this reason, culture is
fluid (McCready and Soloway, 2010; Leigh, 1998) or constantly changing and emerging. Due to the fluidity of culture, one cannot claim to have a complete knowledge of any culture. Culture varies and changes as individuals move from one context to another. As a result of this fluidity, the understanding of how culture impacts an individual’s experience is context-based and cannot be reduced to the application of previously held constructs of who individuals are and how they behave. Making sense of any secondary student’s cultures requires that conflict managers attempt to understand the cultural lens (worldview) through which students perceive themselves within the given context. Conflict managers must also consider that school environments possess their own unique cultures, and that not all students may identify with the predominant school culture. How students perceive themselves and behave in the school context may be very different from the way they perceive themselves in another context, for example, at home. A student’s culture within the context of school is therefore an individualized, context-specific phenomenon.

**Culture as a Component of Conflict Management in Schools**

Culture is an essential element of conflicts and conflict management: when conflict managers understand the cultural lenses through which the disputants perceive themselves and their experiences, conflict managers better understand participants’ beliefs, behaviour and actions (Ross, 1993). Essentially, culture shapes how individuals perceive, interpret and respond to conflicts. Culture shapes what people consider valuable and worth fighting over. As well, culture explains and shapes how individuals behave when in conflict because it embodies belief systems that sanction certain behaviours and
disapprove of others. Culture may help to explain why people have conflicts and why various individuals respond differently to similar events.

Culture affects conflict behaviour, and conflict can also be understood as cultural behaviour. All conflict occurs in a cultural context which shapes its course in important ways. Culture frames people’s understanding of their social worlds, how they classify people, how they evaluate possible actions, and it sanctions certain responses. Conflict reflects cultural priorities, but it also can be used to alter them. Culture is political because control over the definition of actors and actions favour certain people and groups over others. (Ross 1993, p.21)

Thus, culture provides a critical framework not only for understanding any given conflict, but also for making sense of the actions of those in conflict. It assists in understanding diverse values and differences in perception and the consequences of particular patterns of conflict management for particular social groups.

Cultural proficiency is about understanding the ‘dynamics of difference’ (Cunningham 2003). When the dynamics of differences are not understood, there are likely to be tensions created as a result of misinterpretations of verbal and non-verbal cues. These tensions can be the source of conflict among individuals and groups. A lack of cultural understanding often leads to misunderstanding and prejudice (Weinstein et al, 2004). Referring to culture, Cunningham states, ”Crisis management systems can no longer neglect this important variable in understanding and resolving conflict” (p91).

Relative to the management of student behaviour in classrooms, McCready and Soloway (2010) recommended professional development that would facilitate development of context-specific solutions to challenging student behaviours. Likewise, administrators engaging in cross-cultural interactions with students and staff should seek to understand the cultural lenses through which individual students view the school context and how, through those lenses, they interpret and bring meaning to their experiences within it.
Cultural responsiveness is required in all aspects of conflict management, including suspensions and expulsions. Noguera (1995) illustrates this problem by describing an expulsion hearing of a young black male that he had witnessed.

All five board members judging this student, as well as the principal who presented the evidence against him were white and middle class. ...it seemed evident that they were unable to identify with the student and the situation that he was in. The gulf of experience between the board members and the student seemed to be compounded by the obvious difference of face, class and age. However, I sensed no indication that the board regarded this as a problem, nor did I sense any effort on their part to understand the student’s actions from his point of view. (p.200)

I concur with Noguera’s view that this situation was lacking in cultural responsiveness. The clear consensus presented in the literature on culture and conflict is that conflict managers must but often do not attend to disputants’ culture when responding to conflicts in schools. Although some professional literature explicitly links culture and conflict management (Cunningham, 2003), the topic remains an area that is lacking in empirical data.

‘Cultural Proficiency’ as a Conceptual Framework for Understanding Educators’ Behaviour

School leaders’ capacity and commitment to attend to culture may be termed ‘cultural proficiency’ (LeBaron, 2003; Lindsay, Robins and Terrel, 2003), ‘cultural competence’ (Leigh, 1988; Lynch, 1998; Magala, 2005), cultural responsiveness (Spencer and Vavra, 2009; Weinstein et al, 2004) or ‘cultural intelligence’ (Bucher, 2008). The terms, ‘cultural competence’ and ‘cultural intelligence’ suggest an assumption of concrete, stable knowledge and skills, which is at variance with the fluid nature of culture. In contrast, culturally responsive mindfulness is a frame of mind that enables educators to draw on students’ cultural and social identities in a more flexible
manner (McCready and Soloway, 2010). As previously suggested, one cannot claim to have complete knowledge of someone’s culture. Lindsay et al (2003) describe cultural proficiency as the contemporized language for what was historically a discourse on multiculturalism, equity and diversity. The terms cultural proficiency and responsiveness used in this thesis reflect the need for individuals to learn, acquire skills, and communicate in a manner that provides for effective cross-cultural interaction with others.

Although various sources frame the knowledge components of cultural proficiency and cultural responsiveness somewhat differently, certain components recur fairly consistently across the literature. The knowledge of a culturally proficient individual includes an understanding of their own culture (Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Lynch, 1998; McCready and Soloway, 2010); an understanding of how one’s own cultural lens filters one’s perceptions of others; an understanding of effective communication skills; and the understanding of cultural responsiveness as an ongoing learning process (Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Lynch, 1998). Seeking knowledge of the culture of others forms an important part of this ongoing learning.

*Understanding One’s Own Cultural Positioning and its Impact*

Important to administrators’ responsiveness to students’ cultures in disputes is their understanding of their own cultures. Cultural proficiency and cultural responsiveness include educators’ recognition that their own cultures or worldviews are products of their own backgrounds and experiences. Administrators’ worldviews impact how they interpret disputes. Each cultural lens filters and makes sense of conflict from a viewpoint that may be very different from the viewpoints of others in the dispute. Anthropologist
Kevin Avruch is a major contributor to the field of culture and equity in conflict resolution. In the introduction to his book with Black and Scimecca (1991), he reflects on ways he had previously failed to consider different worldviews in conflict resolution. He speaks of the necessity to place conflict and conflict resolution processes in a larger socio-ethnic context, and not isolate them from the encompassing worlds-of-meaning in which, in ongoing ways, they remain embedded (Avruch, 1998). Similarly, conflict resolution trainer and facilitator, John Paul Lederach (1995) recognized that he had been unintentionally imposing his Western lens on individuals from other countries. As an alternative to the erroneous Western cookie-cutter approach to conflict management, he developed what he refers to as the ‘elicitive’ approach to training. In this training, the third party trainer must first learn about the culture of the conflict management leaders in a given community and then facilitate their identification of their own implicit cultural knowledge as a basis for developing their own process to fit the context. Avruch and Lederach help us to recognize that our cultural lenses are products of our contextual experience, and that recognition of this cultural knowledge has ramifications for cross-group equity.

Briggs (2003) draws on Michel Foucault’s theory of power and self, to explain how prevailing perceptions and approaches to conflict are framed by Western notions and do not recognize non-Western orientations. This concept, when applied to the school setting, may infer that educators and facilitators, such as school administrators typically operate from a biased, Western orientation. This idea is supported by the four-year study of Michelle Duryea (1994) on conflict resolution processes in our Canadian system of education. Her study concluded that the prevailing school conflict management processes
she had observed were inherently biased. In other words, at that time, the dominant methods of resolving conflicts in schools reflected values and attitudes that were not necessarily shared by all in the school communities. In our North American communities, diversity of school populations will naturally bring together varying worldviews. This diversity is further complicated by the fluidity of culture, as individuals move through different social contexts in individual experiences. In school settings, administrators’ own cultural lenses impact their understanding and management of the conflicts they must address.

Bucher (2008) states, “Being aware of our multiple and changing identities provides us with greater insight into how others define themselves” (p32). Self awareness and learning of new information relative to culture and its impact is an essential aspect of intercultural interaction (Bucher, 2008; Lynch, 1998). The culturally proficient administrator recognizes that disputants may not necessarily see things the way they see them and that another’s cultural perception is no less valid than their own (Lindsey et al., 2008).

The way conflict managers understand a dispute influences how they manage it. As discussed earlier, school administrators can be presumed to have learned culturally dominant patterns for responding to conflict. They tend to use these frameworks to judge the actions of disputants and to dispense consequences as they deem appropriate. Cultural proficiency, applied, would cause administrators to recognize that disputants and their parents may filter conflict through different lenses causing them not only to understand the conflict differently than the administrator, but also to have different ideas as to how it should be managed. McCready and Soloway (2010) argue that teachers should learn
about the cultures of their students if they are to effectively respond to inappropriate behaviours in the classroom. Noguera, similarly suggests that exceptional teachers are characterized by a willingness to “cross borders” and negotiate difference in race, class or experience in order to establish rapport with their students (1995, p.205). McCready and Soloway (2010) refer to this openness to attend to culture as culturally responsive mindfulness—a way of thinking about culture and student behaviour that recognizes fluidity, agency and dynamic interaction and the importance of attentiveness (p.120). Thus, for an administrator to effectively respond to conflict, and to know how to interact with others of different backgrounds to their own, the administrator’s actions should be guided by a frame of mind that filters their decision-making relative to cross-cultural interaction. This principle, understanding one’s own cultural lens and its impact, is an important aspect of cultural proficiency.

**Characteristics that support learning and appreciating the divergent lenses of disputants**

In addition to an awareness of one’s own cultural lenses, cultural proficiency theories recommend that conflict managers attend to the cultural lenses of disputants. In school settings, this requires that administrators seek to understand how students perceive themselves, how they perceive others, what they value, and how they make sense of the school context and their experience within it. In order to gain this understanding, conflict managers need to interact with the individuals they are seeking to learn about. In this participatory approach, culturally responsive conflict managers approach conflict as learners, recognizing that the knowledge and understanding of the disputants that they bring to the management of the conflict is limited. Whatever knowledge conflict managers may have is ‘unfinished knowledge’ (Davies, 2004). It therefore becomes
necessary for administrators to partner with disputants in an effort to learn with and from them.

Culturally proficient educators may not know all there is to know about others who are different from them, but they know how to take advantage of teachable moments, how to ask questions without offending, and how to create an environment that is welcoming to diversity. (Lindsey et al, 2009, p.111)

The culturally responsive conflict manager as learner is willing to engage disputants in dialogue in an effort to learn about them. Culturally responsive dialogue is characterized by participants who are both rooted in their own experiences and empathetic to the differential positioning of their partners in the dialogue (Davies, 2004; Leigh 1988). Empathy appears frequently in literature as a characteristic of a culturally proficient individual.

…empathy, the ability to understand another person’s perspective, feelings and beliefs, is one the most important skills we can develop. In order to develop and show this skill, we need to alter how we look at people, events, and our way of life. We do this by constantly shifting perspectives, meaning we examine the world from different vantage points. (Bucher, 2008, p.104)

An empathetic individual is able to relate to the needs and concerns of others, even when they perceive situations differently. The conflict manager’s willingness to learn, and ability to shift cultural perspectives, reflects openness and sensitivity to what it feels like to be the other person (Cunningham, 2003). To facilitate such learning, culturally responsive administrators work through conflicts in their schools in participatory ways: they partner with disputants, recognizing and appreciating them as critical sources of information relative to their own cultures.

Thus, exercising cultural proficiency in conflict management processes requires an interpretive mindset that combines understandings, affective attributes and skills (Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Lindsay, Robbins & Terrel, 2003; Lynch, 1998; Ross, 1993).
Effective cross-cultural communication skills that underpin these informed interactions include active listening, and verbal and non-verbal communication. For example, leaning toward the speaker, focusing and nodding one’s head are amongst some of the non-verbal body language techniques that can be used to demonstrate the listener’s desire to understand. As administrators demonstrate a sincere interest in learning with and from students of diverse backgrounds, affective qualities such as empathy, sensitivity and respect for others open up lines of communication, build trust, and strengthen relationships (Bucher, 2008). Thus, in a school setting, culturally proficient administrators demonstrate effective communication skills, sensitivity, empathy and respect allowing for more effective cross-cultural interaction.

As trust is developed in effective cross-cultural interaction, positive relationships are built (Bondy et al, 2007; Gladden 2002). Development of positive relationships permits for deeper dialogue and disclosure of self in the conflict management process and sets the foundation for the sharing of stories that unearth closely-held values and beliefs that may have been threatened in the conflict. Values and beliefs are a product of an individual’s culture and cultural experiences. The conflict manager’s attention to disputants’ stories and personal narratives grants them opportunity to understand through different cultural lenses, and provides them insight into the cultural identities and concerns of disputants. In their examination of conflict on a global level, Funk and Said (2004) explain that underlying any conflict there exist multiple, conflicting stories that symbolize and explain each group’s ways of seeing and being in the world. Analysis of these contrasting narratives and their potential areas of commonality can provide considerable insight into conflict situations. Similarly, in a school context, culturally
responsive conflict managers recognize the significance of any individual’s cultural narratives and how these bring deeply embedded meanings to a dispute. The challenge for the administrator is to elicit these stories from the disputants. Eliciting these narratives from student disputants is a main focus of the efforts of a culturally proficient administrator.

Culturally proficient conflict managers create opportunities for disputants to hear each other’s stories. The opportunity to learn about each other through uncovering narratives may result in indentifying shared values, improving mutual understanding and cooperation, and support the development of empathy (Bodine, 1988; Funk and Said, 2004).

…listeners look at the work through the speaker’s eyes, if only for a moment. The effort to do this may be substantial because of built-in resistance born of defensiveness and negative images of others. Yet, when done genuinely, mutual listening to stories encourages emotional intimacy that can help shift even the most stuck conflict dynamics. (LeBaron, 2003, p.277)

Bringing disputants and other stakeholders together in a participatory approach to conflict management grants opportunity for human connection through learning with and from each other.

This participatory aspect of culturally responsive conflict management is one that is in direct contrast to traditional practices, such as suspensions and expulsions, which exclude students. In those approaches, victims, perpetrators and parents are not active participants in the process: “The formality of the expulsion hearing often contains all the drama and suspense associated with a courtroom trial.” (Noguera 1995, p.198). Rosen (2005) describes the response of parents to typical discipline practices of administrators:

Except in the cases of suspensions and expulsions, parents are usually quite helpful. They want to help discipline their children and will usually cooperate
with whatever the administrator is calling for out of concern that the problem should not become more serious. In the cases of suspensions and expulsions, the call or parent conference may not be as pleasant. A parent who had not been notified of a forthcoming problem may become quite belligerent and angry. (p29)

The administrators’ exclusion of disputants and their parents from having a voice in the management process may result in unpleasant cross-cultural interaction. Punitive actions are not inclusive, as compared to culturally responsive actions which invite disputants and parents into the management process in an effort to learn and understand the students’ behaviour and cultural contexts.

Incorporating an understanding of the dynamics that cultural differences bring to bear on conflicts enhances the opportunity for successful conflict management outcomes (Cunningham, 2003). However, these insights also can bring to the surface marked differences in firmly-held beliefs and values, in which one’s own cultural position may impede understanding and appreciation for different perspectives. Cross-cultural diversity may, but need not inevitably, intensify conflict (Bucher, 2008; Funk and Said, 2004). Culturally proficient administrators recognize and anticipate the challenge of competing narratives and worldviews, and act to safeguard against exacerbating conflicts by preparing disputants for one another’s cultural differences and encouraging them to remain open to learning about these differences. In these cross-cultural interactions, culturally proficient conflict managers model respect, sensitivity and an openness to learning about others. In contrast, when administrators do not anticipate cultural differences and prepare disputants for them, the end result can be the deepening of biased positions, impediments to cultural understanding and empathy, and consequently, the strengthening of disputants’ resolve to maintain their positions without compromise.
In summary, a culturally responsive administrator is characterized by an understanding of their own cultural disposition and its impact on their perceptions and actions in particular conflict situations. As well, they are willing learners who interact with disputants in an effort to learn with and from them. For these reasons, culturally proficient conflict management seeks to invite disputants to participate in the conflict management process.

**Challenges to Culturally Proficient Conflict Management in Schools**

There are various challenges and institutional barriers to the implementation of cultural proficiency in schools. A primary barrier is administrators’ lack of awareness of the need to adapt. In the school environment, those in authority often function within a culture of privilege and entitlement: “the systemic privilege that accrues to members of the dominant culture in such a way that (a) they don’t realize they have additional privileges, and (b) they become resentful and angry when invited to relinquish them” ((Lindsay et al 2003, p245). Whether or not they are white, north-American males, administrators in Canada and the US are educated in a system that has institutionalized oppression of dominated cultural groups by its very structure and operation:

Although white men are particularly needful of gaining awareness, all successful public school educators have been indoctrinated in a system that perpetuates racism, sexism and other forms of oppression. All educators pass through this system as they prepare to transmit the values and the culture of the dominant society to public school children…. In reality, through this system, educators learn to prepare students to sustain the status quo. (Lindsey et al 2008, p267)

Educators in Canadian schools may not recognize the need to make personal or school changes in response to the diversity of the people with whom they interact. Privileged individuals generally feel that it is the responsibility of newcomers to adapt to the public school setting (rather than vice versa), and for this reason may not commit to cultural
responsiveness. Where such ‘white privilege’ characterizes a school, a culturally proficient administrator is situated in an unsupportive school context. For example, a culturally proficient administrator’s efforts may be impeded by a faculty that may not share the same ideals. However, when the staff of a school as a whole affirms the importance of this cross-cultural openness and responsiveness, and as a community takes action to better embrace diversity, their school is, in essence, becoming more culturally proficient. Organizational systems and individual school communities, as well as individuals, can become culturally proficient. When they do not, individuals and environments impede the development of culturally responsive approaches to conflict in school settings.

Related to the concept of ‘white privilege,’ power structures hinder the development of relationships in schools. Schools are hierarchal organizations with students at the bottom of the power structure and administrators at the top. This means that power defines how participants relate to each other.

Power is ‘a personal ability to control or influence others’. How individuals relate to each other may very well be impacted by how much power each has or how they view the unequal distribution of power….power can affect whether an open and honest discussion of conflict or differences is even possible (Bucher 2008, p 157). A student may perceive an administrator as a powerful individual relative to their own powerless position. This may cause students to become frightened into telling administrators what they believe the administrators want to hear, which may not be the truth (Rosen 2005, p.59). This imbalance of power created by the administrator’s title, role and often ethnicity may impede positive relationship-building and act as a barrier to implementation of culturally proficient conflict management practices.
School discipline is a means through which symbols of power and authority are perpetuated (Noguera, 1995). In their study of UK schools, McCluskey et al (2008) found that many staffpersons liked the power associated with punitive approaches to school conflict.

One headteacher expressed concern that some staff were ‘…very proud of their control. I haven’t heard a pin drop all day!’ Scottish schools abandoned the use of physical punishment, the ‘belt’, in the mid 1980s. However the notion of visible, public punishment as a viable deterrent still has widespread support in society (McCluskey et al 2008, p414).

School officials often believe they use discipline to ‘send a message’ to perpetrators and to the community. For some, relinquishing power over to others is difficult (Claassen and Claassen, 2008). Authority depends on fear, and including ‘‘meaningful consequences’’ for misbehaviour that are necessarily unpleasant and aversive (also Kohn, 2006). This authoritarian approach to conflict operates in opposition to the tenets of the cultural proficiency which in contrast grants voice and participation to students in the conflict management process.

Another institutional barrier to cultural proficiency is the lack of, or inadequate, training for administrators in this area. School districts may not acknowledge the importance of culturally proficient conflict management skills. Many or most training programs and resources are developed by white, privileged educators, who fail to recognize the need for cultural attentiveness. Many of their models of behavioural interventions are mistakenly assumed to be racially or culturally neutral (Cunningham, 2003; Weinstein et al, 2004). Thus, the training available to administrators may not incorporate cultural responsiveness as a necessary aspect of its conflict management model.
Training in cultural proficiency is impeded by ineffective training models. As Lindsey et al. (2009) argue, “Educators cannot be sent to training for two days and expected to return with solutions to all equity issues in their school” (p.24). Alternatively, because cultural knowledge is fluid, cultural proficiency frameworks need to be ongoing learning processes.

Another inhibitor to culturally proficient conflict management can be the size of the school. The larger the school, the less likely it is that administrators will get to know individual students (and the cultural groups in which they circulate) well enough to permit for the development of strong relationships. Low adult-student ratios, in contrast, provide environments where the adults are able to better get to know students. McCluskey et al (2008)’s research suggests that size and structure likely account for secondary schools’ slower progress with implementing participatory and restorative conflict management practices, as compared to elementary schools. When conflicts arise in smaller school populations, it is more likely that a relationship has already been established between the student(s) and administrator that would allow for deeper conversations between administrator and student. Additionally, the increased operational responsibilities of administrators in large schools may impede their ability to get out of their offices and into the school where they can interact with students on non-threatening terms.

Scarcity of time is another inhibitor to culturally responsive conflict management. Punitive, adjudicative practices offer quick solutions (at least in the short term), whereas more participatory practices require more time (Claassen and Claassen, 2008), and ideally also involve other stakeholders such as parents in an effort to better understand
disputants’ needs and cultural dispositions. For example, in an elementary school in South Dakota, USA, the staff had committed to dealing with conflicts in a more participatory manner. Rather than using punitive discipline, they had students participate in circles after school where they were able to voice their issues and draft agreements. Initially, teachers there volunteered their time for such circles, but they soon realized that this commitment required more extra time than they felt they were able to commit. In this situation, the staff resorted to paying teachers to participate in the conflict management (Asworth et al, 2008). In response to the challenge of time scarcity in school schedules, Morrison’s (2007) research suggests that in reality, responses to conflict that do not address the root causes of problems often end up perpetuating those problems: in not taking the time to properly address the issue initially, more time is often wasted in the long term. Participatory conflict management processes place a larger initial demand on time than traditional punitive practices, and the larger the school population or the higher the staff-student ratio, the more inhibiting these factors are to the implementation of culturally responsive practices.

School and board policies relative to discipline may be the most inhibiting factor to culturally responsive conflict management. For example, in a comprehensive American study conducted by DeCecco and Richards almost twenty years ago, 8000 students and 500 faculty members in more than sixty junior and senior high schools reported that over 90 percent of the conflicts reported by students were perceived by the educators to have been either unresolved or resolved destructively (cited in Bodine and Crawford, 1988). Since the time of that study, the development of strictly punitive zero tolerance policies in US and Canada further exacerbated the problem. In the US, zero tolerance policies
entered the education realm in 1994. In Ontario, the move towards adoption of ‘zero tolerance’ type approaches to discipline in schools commenced in the mid-1990s and was reinforced by the Safe Schools Act in June 2000 (Trepanier, 2008). These policies prescribed mandatory suspensions and expulsions for specific actions, without allowing for any mitigating circumstances such as the student not having the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behavior and/or the student’s continuing presence in the school not creating an unacceptable risk to others’ safety. “Zero tolerance” type approaches have been inconsistently applied across schools (Gladden, 2002; Morrison, 2007; Rosen, 2005). A United States Civil Rights report (2000) showed that zero tolerance policies bred distrust in students towards adults, and nurtured an adversarial, confrontational attitude, thereby inhibiting administrators from using more constructive or restorative alternative practices in the US.

Zero tolerance laws and policies can prevent school administrators from applying creative and tailored responses to infractions by students. In Lyons v. Penn Hills School District, the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court, No. 1823 C.D. affirmed the trial court's decision that the school board had exceeded its authority by preventing the superintendent to exercise discretion in handling discipline (Lyons v. Penn Hills School District, 1999). School administrators should be allowed to arrive at different solutions based on circumstances surrounding an incident (Kajs 2006, p19).

Under similar punitive policy in Ontario, suspension and expulsion rates rose (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003). A great deal of statistical and qualitative evidence supports the conclusion that many children were being unfairly suspended and kicked out of school for problems that could have been more effectively and equitably handled by alternative methods (Civil Rights Project, 2000; Saenz, 2006; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Administrators tended to indiscriminately administer consequences for acts, without attending to students’ cultures or to the root causes of problems. A review of the Safe
Schools Act in Ontario was announced in December 2004, with the formation of a Safe School Action Team that was granted financial resources to review the impact of the policy through data collection and consultation with Ontarians. In July, 2005, The Ontario Human Rights Commission lodged a complaint alleging that the application of the "Safe Schools" sections of the Education Act and related discipline policies were having a disproportionate impact on racial minority and disabled students (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2005). In addition to being discriminatory, these policies weakened relationships between disputants and school personnel and communicated and proceeded as if (in particular), marginalized students’ voices and their circumstances did not matter (Gladden, 2002). Consistent with this theory and the Human Rights Commission finding, the Ontario Safe Schools Action Team reported that many Ontario education professionals and the public also believed, based on their experience, that some groups were more likely to be suspended or expelled than others. Suspension is an abused and too-often used consequence for student behavior: “It has become an automatic response for too many of our school administrators (Rosen 2005, p.29).

Recognizing the fact that zero tolerance-type strict discipline policies were not achieving their intended results, the Safe School Action Team presented recommendations that included revisions to the Safe School Act (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Under a settlement reached between the Ontario Human Rights Commission and the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008), amendments were made to the Ontario Safe School Regulation (PPM 147). In relation to cultural responsiveness, there were key changes to the Safe School Regulation:

When inappropriate behavior occurs, disciplinary measures should be applied within a framework that shifts the focus from one that is solely punitive to one
that is both corrective and supportive. Schools should utilize a range of interventions, supports, and consequences that are developmentally appropriate and include learning opportunities for reinforcing positive behavior while helping students to make good choices. Both school boards and schools are expected to actively engage parents in the progressive discipline approach. Boards and schools should also recognize the diverse dimensions of their parent communities that must be addressed in order for schools and parents to engage together on these complex and challenging issues. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p5)

These recommendations are significant, as they mandate principals to consider mitigating and other factors in selecting disciplinary action. Additionally, the changes to the regulation propose that schools actively engage parents in the conflict management process thereby endorsing another key element of participatory practices. In response to the recommendation of the Safe Schools Action Team and PPM 145, the document, *Caring and Safe Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), was developed as a resource for school board employees. Parts of this document may be interpreted as a reflection of the Ministry’s attention to aspects of culture, and alternative participatory conflict management practices. For example, the document highlights the need of educators to: 1) understand student behavior as contextual, 2) consider not just the behavior itself, but also the underlying cause, and 3) understand that behavior can be understood differently from various perspectives and within a variety of contexts. The document goes further to highlight the impact of different perspectives and factors that influence those perspectives,

What is identified as inappropriate or challenging behavior may vary depending on who initiates the behavior, when and where it occurs, and the perspective from which it is viewed. Adults often interpret behavior from the perspective of their own life experiences and current circumstances. These perspectives affect the observer’s expectations for the student. Factors that may influence how a person perceives behavior include the following: personal childhood experiences, cultural background, school policies and the person’s relationship with the student. (Ontario Ministry of Education 2010, p.21)
Attention to these aspects of culture in school disciplinary practices reflects a movement in Ontario policies, away from prescriptive, traditional punitive practices towards alternative participatory practices that attend to student culture.

**Emergent, Participatory Conflict Management Practices**

Supported by new policies, conflict managers in many schools are moving away from punitive, adjudicative actions to practices that use collaborative problem-solving, in which stakeholders with ownership of the problem participate directly in crafting solutions to the problem (Bodine, 1988). In schools that report success with emergent, participatory conflict management practices, school leaders are generally characterized by culturally proficient attributes such as empathy, sensitivity and a sincere desire to know their students. One such school leader was a principal in a Palm Springs middle school who insisted that his school work with every student, including gang members:

Every morning Bonilla stood on the street corner where gang members gathered. He spoke to them, listened to their concerns, remained accessible and as a result, gained their respect and trust. To this day, Bonilla spends two hours of lunch period in the cafeteria, so that he can interact with students (Civil Rights Report 2000, p.24).

Consistent with attributes of cultural proficiency, in this example there is evidence of how this principal’s empathy and desire to know students assisted in fostering positive relationships as a foundation for constructive conflict management.

Research conducted by McCluskey et al (2008) in the UK shows that success with alternative approaches was more likely in those schools where there was greater buy-in on the part of the school’s faculty. Schools with effective conflict management practices tended to focus on relationship-building, and their school environments were often characterized by attributes that embodied cultural proficiency:
- School-wide shift in approach to discipline and modelled the school leadership
- Lower adult to student ratios
- Training
- Neutral conflict interveners
- Case by case approach to conflict management
- Caring environment
- Building of strong relationships
- Collaborative approach to discipline violations
- Involvement of parents
- Emphasis on involving stakeholders
- Explicit effort to show students that they are valued and respected members of the community
- School is a welcoming and friendly place (Civil rights report 2000, p.31-33, 35)

I infer that the factors that support participatory alternative approaches to conflict management would also support cultural proficiency in schools. However, the assumption should not be made that all participatory practices are necessarily culturally responsive.

**Restorative Practices in School Discipline**

Currently, some schools in Canada, United States, New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere have adopted conflict management practices such as restorative justice, to address conflicts in a participatory manner (Zehr, 2002). In restorative approaches, offenders, victims, parents/guardians, and others impacted by the harm done are brought face-to-face (Johnston and Ness, 2007). The formal use of this practice dates back to the 1970s and originates from First Nations communities in North America and New Zealand. Restorative justice stresses participation in an effort to allow offenders to effectively reintegrate into their communities. It has been adopted by the Canadian judicial system as a means of responding to criminal behaviour. A study conducted by Canada’s Department of Justice (2001) found that restorative justice programs were more effective in improving victim-offender satisfaction, increasing offender compliance with
restitution, and decreasing recidivism of offenders when compared to more traditional criminal justice responses. There are many models of restorative justice practices in schools (Morrison, 2007). Educator Roxanne Claassen and her husband, Ron Claassen, co-directors of the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies in Fresno, California, developed a “Discipline that Restores” model that combines Conflict Resolution Education, Peace Education and Restorative Justice practices for schools (Claassen & Claassen, 2008). Organizations such as the International Institute for Restorative Practice based in Pennsylvania, USA, also apply a related set of theories to school settings. The International Institute for Restorative Practice uses a graphic diagram called the social justice window (developed by Ted Watchtel, 1997), to illustrate the participatory aspect of this conflict management approach. In this model, traditional punitive practices are characterized by control by the conflict manager whose actions are done “to” the student; whereas, the restorative approach is characterized by a re-integrative, approach that works “with” students. Many school boards in Canada and elsewhere are turning to more peacebuilding practices such as restorative practice because research suggests that inflexible, punitive polices, such as zero tolerance, do not attend to root causes of conflict or its consequences for diverse communities (Bickmore, 2004; Human Rights Commission, 2005; King, 2006; Morrison, 2007). For example, in the example previously cited of Hawthorne Elementary in South Dakota, US, the staff had adopted restorative practice as an alternative to punitive conflict management practices. This meant that students who had been involved in particular conflicts came together (generally after school) to discuss the issues. Opportunity for all participants to hear each child’s story is an important aspect of the process.
An important part of the healing for students is knowing that their stories have been heard. It is not always easy to get students’ stories since they do not always have the skills to tell their stories in a neat package. They can misperceive, misrepresent and misstate what happened. With the right questions, support and interaction, however, young children learn how to articulate what happened. (Ashworth et al 2008, p20)

Restorative conferences are formal meetings that bring the participants—victims, perpetrators, and other members of the community who are involved and affected by the harmful behaviour—together to participate in a dialogue that builds understanding. This dialogue allows for the nurturing of empathy, caring and sensitivity as each person contributes her/his story (Morrison, 2007). The conference is conducted in a circle formation. In theory, everyone, including victims and perpetrators, is granted voice in the process, allowing others to listen, learn and understand in new ways. In the UK study identified above, the inclusive nature of this approach was welcomed by disputants.

For their part, pupils felt that RP [restorative practices] had led to teachers ‘not shouting,’ ‘listening to both sides’ and ‘[making] everyone feel equal’. Pupils were generally very clear about the effectiveness of restorative meetings, where these had taken place. One pupil commented, ‘That’s what happens when you are in a fight. She [the headteacher] doesn’t just call you in and shout at you. She brings the two of you in and tries to solve what happened’.

Another pupil explained, I like what Mr. [Name] does. He just takes what you say and gets the other one to say what happened and then he would bring us both together and we would speak about it.

When this pupil said the teacher ‘takes what you say’, she highlighted an important point made by many pupils keen to point out how much they value a fair hearing, one of the central tenets of a restorative approach (McCluskey et al, 2008, p412).

The decision of the restorative conference facilitator to include more participants is aimed at widening the circle of care around perpetrators, victims, witnesses and other stakeholders. Fundamental to this theory is that communication to perpetrators of the extent of the harm caused is best achieved when the victim is present (Morrison, 2007).

In student conflict such as fights, where a restorative conference is used, participants
might also include students who had perceived themselves as uninvolved in the actual fight. Morrison refers to these individuals as soft targets: “those students who fail to intervene before the bullying (or other acts of violence) gets out of hand” (p102).

Increasing numbers of studies are being conducted to assess the interpretation and impact of restorative practices as alternatives to traditional conflict management. Researcher Dorothy Vaandering noticed that by the time she was completing her study of restorative practice in three southern Ontario schools, “restorative justice had become an almost common term in Ontario education circles” (Vaandering, 2009). An article summarizing the results of such practices across the US, Canada and the UK reports that destructive conflict and violent incidents have declined and school climates are positively impacted (International Institute for Restorative Practice, 2009). The following are comments from principals in these schools:

Restorative practices changed the way I view discipline. As an assistant principal, my task was to assign blame and levy a penalty. That didn’t sit well anymore…. Now I see my task as helping them, and it is done through building relationships. (p11)
Restorative practices created a more positive relationship between staff and students. (p14)
When I see a kid acting up in the hallway, instead of pulling him into the discipline office, I pull him over, one-on-one, and try to understand where he is coming from. (p19)

Restorative practice (at least in theory) entails aspects that align with cultural proficiency, such as an emphasis on building relationships and involving the disputants in gaining an understanding and problem-solving. An important aspect of the restorative approach is that it operates to include victims, family, friends, and community (International Institute of Restorative Practice, 2009). The adoption of restorative justice is evident in Ontario school boards (Pandering, 2009) and generally reported by students and teachers to be
beneficial (Claassen and Claassen, 2008; McCluskey et al, 2008; Morrison, 2007).

Currently, this alternative approach is endorsed in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Progressive Discipline mandate (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

As I mentioned previously, although restorative practice in theory has elements that closely align with the tenets of culturally proficient practice, in my opinion as an administrator, the manner in which restorative justice is actually implemented could reduce it to a process that is not culturally responsive. The benefits of restorative practices are presumably minimized when they are ineffectively implemented in schools. McCluskey et al’s (2008) research indicates that restorative practice was implemented and used differently across schools. In some schools, “They also tended to offer RP to staff as ‘another tool in the tool box’” (p412), reducing it to merely another process, rather than an alternative approach to conflict management. Vaandering’s (2009) study revealed that educators were often uncertain, insecure and inconsistent in terms of their understanding and practice of restorative justice. The training they had received did not equip them to fully and consistently implement restorative justice into daily classroom or schoolwide practices. There was limited support provided beyond the initial training. Additionally, her research indicated that

there was a failure to address the structural and institutional influences acting on the school participants and restorative justice was reduced to a decontextualized skill-building exercise. There was little awareness of the need to reflect deeply on how personal professional actions and beliefs are enmeshed in broader systemic social and institutional contexts in which power relations are negotiated. As a result, participants are unaware of their own contribution to the proliferation of hegemonic practices that sit at the root of individualistic, rule-based institutional cultures” (Vaandering 2009, p289)

Restorative practice can be mistakenly framed and presented as merely another prescribed conflict resolution process that may operate without consideration of the
contextual situations and core values of participants. Morrison (2007) makes explicit her efforts to avoid prescription in the implementation of restorative practice in schools. She says that individuals and schools differ and for that reason “school communities must be self-reflective and engage with their own constituents”, as there is no one template that fits across place and time (p171). Consequently, restorative justice practice can perpetuate the same power relations that underlie the punitive rule-based cultures they are attempting to replace (Vaandering, 2009). Restorative models (such as that provided by International Institute for Restorative Practices) have been packaged as standardized step by step guidelines, reduced to prescribed questions and scripts that dictate conversations between facilitator, disputants and victims. Contrary to the tenets of cultural proficiency and responsiveness discussed earlier, these prescriptive measures may not provide for deep conversations, the disclosure of personal and collective values, the unearthing of root causes of conflict, and/or the development of healthy relationships.

Cultural responsiveness in conflict management is a framework of understandings and behaviours that are intended to result in the development of appropriate processes that fit each context and set of disputants. Although aspects of restorative practice align with elements of cultural proficiency, restorative practice is not synonymous with cultural proficiency. The term restorative practice, as used in southern Ontario schools, is a conflict management process that proponents frame as derived from a Native American participatory framework. However, restorative practice, like other conflict management practice, is filtered through administrators’ own cultural lenses and those of other authorities and participants. A culturally proficient administrator, in my view, would be able to take many of the concepts and strategies of restorative practice and use them with
sensitivity and flexibility in their repertoire of conflict management practices, recognizing that strategies such as restorative conferences may be applicable in some conflict cases. Ultimately, administrators and school systems need to be culturally proficient in their use of restorative practice, avoiding ineffective implementation and indiscriminate use. To reduce any conflict management process to a cookie-cutter process runs the risk of losing much of what restorative practice theoretically has to offer in conflict management practice.

**Summary and Conclusion**

In this review of literature I have established that attention to culture is necessary in school conflict management, as culture helps conflict managers to understand disputants and their behaviours in order to treat them fairly and effectively. Many conflict management resources used in schools are not designed specifically for school settings, and are authored by people from a very narrow spectrum of cultural backgrounds and worldviews. Thus, many commonly-prescribed conflict management practices are not applicable or adequate for diverse settings. It is well established that traditional, punitive conflict management in schools is generally ineffective and inequitable, with studies reporting disproportionate numbers of marginalized students being suspended and expelled.

The theoretical constructs of cultural proficiency provide a framework for examining the conflict management practices of administrators. This framework articulates necessary knowledges, attributes and skills. The culturally proficient administrator should acknowledge their own cultural lens and how it affects their perceptions and influences the manner in which they manage conflicts. The theory of
cultural proficiency suggests that administrators need to become able to juxtapose their own cultural lenses with awareness of the lenses of others, in an effort to understand how diverse participants might perceive a situation. The culturally proficient conflict manager is characterized by sensitivity, empathy and a willingness to learn from others. Working from the position of learner, the culturally proficient conflict manager uses effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills to build relationships with students based on trust. Once a relationship of trust and respect is established, administrators are better able to elicit the narratives of disputants in order to better understand the deeply embedded meanings that they bring to conflicts. Additionally, culturally proficient administrators provide opportunities for disputants to hear and appreciate each other’s stories, leading to development of empathy and appreciation of differences.

Across the globe, schools are now experimenting with alternative approaches to managing conflict that are participatory, that focus on building relationships, and that attempt to address root causes of conflict. In Ontario, these efforts are supported by recent amendments to provincial and school board Safe Schools policies and supporting resources. Efforts to adopt more participatory alternatives to traditional punitive approaches are impeded by factors such as systemic privilege, power structures, school size, time scarcity, and dominant traditional discipline polices. Restorative practice provides an example of an alternative approach that (theoretically) aligns with cultural proficiency in its effort to involve disputants and others impacted by the harm. However, restorative practice runs the risk of being reduced to yet another misapplied conflict management recipe when it is poorly implemented and indiscriminately used. In contrast to prescriptive practices, this thesis suggests that conflict management practice that
attends to culture would be fluid and transformative, allowing participants to grow personally and to take into account various contexts, knowledges, and worldviews.

This study uses the framework of cultural proficiency to examine the conflict management actions of administrators in secondary school settings in a south-central school board characterized by diversity. This examination also considers the factors that impede the efforts of administrators to be culturally proficient and responsive. Such factors include time, systemic privilege, power structures, fear of relinquishing control, lack of training, size of schools, and the continuing effect of former prescriptive, punitive School Board policies. These impediments, combined with the complexities and context-specific nature of culturally proficient conflict management, make this phenomenon very challenging to capture and describe. However, this research responds to the need to clearly articulate what culturally responsive actions look and sound like in practice, in an effort to harness their purported better outcomes, and yet to avoid standardization. The questions that guided this research are:

1) According to the perspectives of students, cultural liaisons and administrators themselves, in what range of ways did certain administrators in one school board handle student conflicts?
2) How were these conflict management actions responsive (and unresponsive) to cultural differences?

This thesis research is intended to propel further change in the conflict management practice of administrators, and to support school boards’ efforts around culturally responsive educational practices. This research provides empirical data to apply the theoretical claims and recommendations of cultural proficiency to school administrators’ conflict management practice. Much research around cultural responsiveness is devoted to classroom practice, but little exists that examines administrators’ conflict management
practice. Theorists have provided some description of what culturally responsive conflict management ‘could’ be, but current research literature has yet to yield substantive studies of how practitioners actually conduct culturally proficient conflict management in school settings in Canada. This research thus makes a theoretical and professional contribution to the improvement of educational practice, by connecting the concepts of cultural proficiency and conflict management to one another and to actual school practice. These findings will inform conflict management practice in schools and contribute to a much-needed area of research.
Chapter 2 Methodology

The research method used in this study is qualitative inquiry because the evidence being sought is human behaviour, knowledge and affective attributes. A qualitative method is needed to capture cultural proficiency as it cannot be done quantitatively. An effort has been made to ensure compliance with qualitative research practice (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006; Cohen et al, 2000; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The study examines the following questions:

1) According to the perspectives of students, cultural liaisons and administrators themselves, in what range of ways did administrators in one school board handle student conflicts?
2) How were these conflict management actions responsive or unresponsive to cultural differences?

Data was collected from 4 sources: secondary school administrators, students, cultural liaisons and school board documents. The school board in which this study was conducted is in south-central Ontario, and is characterized by growing diversity. The following chart outlines the participants and data collection strategies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School Administrators</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students –whose conflicts were managed by an administrator</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Individual Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Community Liaisons</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Focus Group Interview x 2 groups (one with 4 and another with 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Documents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Cultural and community liaisons brochure</td>
<td>1) Provided by coordination of Cultural and Community services department - Describes services, contact information and languages of cultural liaison worker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Cultural Proficiency PowerPoint presentations and handouts</td>
<td>2) Provided by superintendent Content – to build awareness, provide overview and engaged participants in activities and conversations about the impact cultural factors e.g. Race, sexual orientation, socioeconomics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Board Training and Workshop listings</td>
<td>3) Listing of available training opportunities for administrators – includes list of required and optional training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The six administrator participants were from four different secondary schools. The four students were from two secondary schools, different from those of the administrator participants, that is, the students interviewed described their interactions with different administrators than the administrator interviewees. In all instances, the participants were anonymous to each other. The cultural liaisons have a central office and work across a number of schools in the board. All of the administrator participants were asked to consider student conflict incidents of a serious nature that they had managed. The cultural liaisons and student participants were asked to consider conflicts that they had experienced that had required the intervention of an administrator. For example, these might have involved an individual student committing a serious breach of the schools’ behaviour code of conduct, such as loud disruptive outbursts using profanity, vandalism or truancy. Other relevant incidents might have been a dispute between two students or may have involved two or more parties, for example a fight, incident of bullying or a verbal altercation between a teacher and a student. See appendix for copies of interview protocols (Appendix E, F, and G).
As discussed in the literature review, school administrators often may not adhere to any specific process in their management of student conflicts. This study presents the range of ways that some administrators handled conflicts. I have used a cultural proficiency framework to organize my examination of these practices. Although this study links the concepts of cultural proficiency and conflict management, the cultural proficiency training provided in the school board where this study was conducted did not explicitly link these two goals. This research is based on the assumption that the characteristics of a culturally proficient administrator are likely to be evident in all aspects of their practice, including their conflict management. Some administrators may demonstrate elements of cultural proficiency without having had any formal or explicit training in it. According to the literature, the mindset of a culturally proficient administrator should guide their interaction with others, their ability to recognize and appreciate multiple perspectives, and their empathy, care, sensitivity and respect for others. These attributes enable them to develop relationships with diverse students that permit the sharing of stories, and the gaining of new knowledge that supports their understanding and ability to manage students’ disputes.

Taken collectively, the descriptions of various administrators’ conflict management practice, obtained from administrators themselves and from descriptions of other administrators by students and cultural community liaisons are the main data for this study. The data gained from documents and school board training information provided background insight as to the nature of cultural proficiency and/or conflict management training to which the administrators may (or may not) have been exposed. The school board documents and training information also demonstrated the extent to
which their theoretical frameworks aligned with those found in the professional and scholarly literature reviewed in this research. From the individual interviews and the focus group interviews, I gained various stakeholders’ interpretations and opinions of the meaning of administrators’ actions. As anticipated, the stakeholders’ attitudes, and institutional and cultural discourses seemed to influence administrators’ conflict management practice. From the data, I was able to extract characteristics of the conflict management practices of various administrators in culturally diverse, secondary school settings. Some of these practices were consistent with characteristics of cultural proficiency and others were not. As well, I was able to identify factors that appeared to impede or support the implementation of culturally responsive conflict management practices.

Research Participants

The population of interest in this particular research is vice-principals, cultural community liaisons, and newcomer and/or minority students who had been in conflicts handled by administrators in secondary schools in a south-central Ontario school board that serves a culturally diverse population. A very small sample of this population was used in this study. One school board superintendent was asked to recommend culturally diverse schools from which administrator and student participants (from separate schools) could be recruited. A list of schools was developed, and I then approached potential participants from these schools. The guidance counsellors in two of these schools assisted with the recruitment of student participants.
Administrators

In semi-structured interviews, six secondary school administrator participants were asked to describe and explain their actions in conflict management, their perceptions of their practices, their perceptions of current trends in conflict management (through the span of their careers), and their perceptions of the student disputants with whom they had interacted. Additionally, the administrators were asked to identify any personal experiences, training, or policies that they felt had impacted their approach to conflict management. I analyzed this data to identify the understandings, skills and attributes of cultural proficiency that were evident in their management of student disputes.

In various southern Ontario school boards with increasing student diversity, cultural proficiency initiatives have become prominent. In the central Ontario school board in which this study was conducted, cultural proficiency has been supported with professional development and training opportunities for board employees. These initiatives were described in the interview data and school board documents collected. Most administrators in the school board of interest had been trained in cultural proficiency although only one of the administrators mentioned the training in their interview. Although, the other 5 administrators may have received training, they did not mention this training or its relevance to their conflict management practice.

Students

Two schools were approached for student participants. It was extremely challenging to secure student participants as I was dependent on guidance secretaries to communicate information and retrieve consent forms prior to my contact with any of the students. The criteria given to the guidance counsellors for student participants were:
1) newcomers to North America and/or visible minorities
2) student aged sixteen or older
2) able to communicate fairly articulately in English
3) having been involved in one or more conflicts (involving school administrators) within the past year

Even though some additional students in these schools had voiced interest, their consent forms were not returned so they were not contacted. Eventually, consent forms were retrieved from 4 students. Due to this small number, all students who returned their forms were used as participants. After consent forms had been returned, it turned out that two students were fifteen years of age. Since parental permission had been obtained, these participants were used in the study. All of the students were visible minorities. Three of the four students were born outside North America. All students were English speaking. All had been involved in one or more conflicts requiring the intervention of their school’s principal or vice-principals. Each of the student participants were invited to bring a friend if they wished or to attend the interview alone. All chose to be interviewed alone.

From interviews with each of the four student participants, I gained descriptions of their experiences in two or three different conflicts. The two senior students spoke very freely, and the two younger students were not nearly as talkative. Students were asked explicitly to describe the administrators’ actions in the management of the conflicts, what types of questions they had asked, and so forth. The students shared their interpretations of these administrators’ actions. The students were asked to identify their ethnicities and their perceptions of the ethnicities of the administrators. It was important to the purpose of this study that I identify the ethnicity of the students and the students’ perception of the ethnicities of the intervening administrators to examine the possibility of differing worldviews or cultural dispositions between student and administrator. In the
instances where there was a perceived ethno-cultural difference, students were invited to
discuss this difference (e.g. Do you feel the administrator had a clear sense of who you
are, your values, beliefs etc.? Why?). Such questioning aimed to get students to discuss
the potential impact of cultural differences on the conflicts and on the conflict
management they had experienced.

*Cultural Community Liaisons*

Selected cultural community liaison workers were asked to describe various high
school administrators’ conflict management practices from their own perspectives. The
goal for including community cultural liaisons as participants was to gain another
perspective on administrators’ conflict management practices from a particular base of
expertise. Cultural community liaisons are board employees who work with parents and
students of specific ethnicities. Their roles involve them in student conflicts, and in
observing the ways administrators are or are not culturally sensitive in managing these
problems. An added benefit to including this set of research participants in the study was
that cultural community liaisons each work in numerous schools, observing practices in
varying school contexts.

*Data Collection*

*Interviews*

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrator and
student participants. A semi-structured interview was used with administrators and
students to get comparable data across subjects, and allow some latitude for participants
to share their stories in their own words (Bogden and Biklen, 2006). Interviews were
designed to avoid placing undue demands on the time of participants. Questions were
carefully constructed to avoid leading questions or assumptions. The interview questions were reviewed by the thesis supervisor and two colleagues, and the administrator interview questions were pilot tested. The pilot test resulted in the revision of some questions for greater clarity and a reduction in the number of questions to reduce the overall time required for the interviews.

I sent out the interview questions electronically to administrators prior to the actual interview. The intent was for an (optional) written phase, to reduce the time needed for the face-to-face interview. All interviews were conducted in person. The interview involved in-depth questions about the administrator’s experiences with specific conflict management episodes. The pre-planned questions (see Appendix E) were used as a guideline. The interview times ranged from fifty minutes to seventy five minutes.

All students were interviewed alone for thirty to forty minutes (see Appendix F). Prior to each interview, each student participant was asked to recall two or three conflicts in which administrators had become involved. Interviews were written and audio recorded with permission from participants.

Data from each research participant was kept anonymous and separate, such that no individual administrator’s work is directly identifiable. Student and administrator participants were recruited from different schools, to protect all participants’ confidentiality, and to better ensure that the experiences shared by students were not of the administrator participants in the study.

**Focus Group Interviews**

Focus group interviews were used with the cultural community liaisons to allow them to assist each other to articulate their views. Liaison workers were asked to
participate in a focus group interview session lasting approximately ninety minutes. Seven cultural liaisons agreed to attend, and two separate focus group interviews were scheduled to accommodate the availability of all the participants. The cultural liaison workers provided a critical perspective in that they had expertise in diverse student backgrounds and cultures that may not have been well-understood by many school personnel.

Each focus group interview session was introduced by establishing agreement upon norms of conduct that invited each participant to respect difference and allow for different perspectives and voices to be heard. The participants were asked to describe their observations and perceptions of various (unnamed) administrators’ actions in conflict management. In these open discussions, participants were able to recall specific observations and personal experiences, and explain to each other and assist each other in articulating the elements of culturally sensitive behaviour as they saw it. Cultural and community liaisons were also asked to share their observations of students’ and parents’ responses to administrators’ discipline practice. The findings from these focus group interviews provided an important perspective on administrators’ practice and its ramifications for diverse students.

Both focus group discussions concluded with open-ended questions (Cohen et al, 2000) inviting participants to provide suggestions for improving administrators’ culturally sensitive interaction in cross-cultural situations with students and parents in conflict management.
School Board Documents

I received permission to obtain from a superintendent certain school board documents to be used in this research, including conflict resolution training documents, cultural proficiency training documents and workshop information.

Ethics protocols were submitted to the University of Toronto and to the subject school board in south-central Ontario in order to complete data collection. After the proposal was approved, a meeting was convened with a superintendent with whom I shared my research plan. This superintendent provided recommendations on schools to be included as potential recruitment sites, based on his knowledge of the schools and their student demographics. Once the list of potential schools was identified, information and consent forms were forwarded to administrator participants. Administrators who agreed to participate were then called, and interviews were scheduled.

I met with the coordinator of the cultural and community services department prior to approaching the cultural liaisons. I suggested that I would be happy to present the research proposal at one of their department meetings. However, the next department meeting was not scheduled for some time, so he suggested that I approach them sooner. I initially spoke with one community liaison worker in person who spoke with other liaisons. I followed up with other liaisons who expressed interest and forwarded the research plan to them. Consent forms were signed at the commencement of the group interviews. The cultural liaisons seemed very much at ease and eager to talk. The discussion flowed freely, with evidence of their verbal and non-verbal agreement to opinions and interpretations offered by their colleagues.
To recruit the student participants, I first contacted the head of their school’s guidance department in person and explained the research plan. After they agreed to assist, I forwarded them the research plan, recruitment plan and consent forms, outlining expectations for participation. I regularly followed up to inquire and answer questions. It was important that the students would not perceive the request to participate in the research as coming from their administrator. Once each student agreed to participate and returned the consent form to the guidance department, I contacted the student and scheduled an interview time.

After conducting the interviews, I met with another superintendent to obtain board documents. With both superintendents, I discussed the research’s criteria and purpose, invited their input, and shared how the findings could support their equity initiatives. Both superintendents expressed their support and offered to assist further in any way they could.

**Discussion – Validity Issues**

Clearly, the data collected is comprised of subjective elements such as human understandings, descriptions of behaviour and perceptions. This raises the issue of descriptive validity, “the factual accuracy of the account, that it is not made up, selective or distorted” (Cohen et al, 2000, p 107). For example, administrators interviewed may have wished to present themselves in a manner (sensitive to research priorities) that was not consistent with their actual practice. Similarly, student participants disgruntled with conflict management outcomes could have used their interviews as opportunities to decry their treatment, including unfavourable descriptions of administrators’ practice. The research addresses the issue of descriptive validity by ensuring methodological
triangulation (p.113). Data on various administrators’ actions were gathered from three disconnected groups of participants. Administrators were asked to describe their own behaviours. Additionally, students and cultural community liaison participants were asked to describe the actions of other comparable administrators. Careful comparisons among these three viewpoints increase the data’s validity, while not compromising confidentiality.

Additionally, this study design uses methodological triangulation to improve validity by collecting evidence from a variety of instruments: individual interviews, focus group interviews, and analysis of school board documents.

After the interviews were conducted, transcripts were sent by e-mail to all participants, inviting them to respond with any clarification and to correct any misinterpretations. This was done to support the accurate and responsible portrayal of participant data and thereby improve interpretive validity (Cohen et al, 2000, p.107). As well, interviewees were given opportunity (not only to view and correct interview transcripts) to review and comment on initial summaries of findings.

Ethical Issues

This study was designed in compliance with ethical guidelines for qualitative research (Bogdan and Biklen, 2006). Every effort has been made to preserve the anonymity of participants, schools and the south-central Ontario school board site. No information about the selection of participants was shared with senior management, or with those individuals assisting in developing lists of potential participants. Participation of all interviewees remains confidential and anonymous. It was made clear to participants that they were free to say anything without fear of repercussion. Responses from the
participants have been aggregated in such a way that neither individual students nor individual administrators are identifiable. Real names of participants, or any other personally identifying details, have not been used. In preparing the data for analysis, identifying information was separated from the research data. The thesis and any research reports use pseudonyms. The plan to ensure confidentiality was explained to participants in the information and consent process, and again prior to the interviews and the focus group interview sessions. When sharing experiences, all participants were instructed to exclude the names of staff, schools, and students, by suggesting alternative ways to refer to people (e.g. administrator X or student A). No information transcribed from interviews contains names of schools, staff or students. Similarly, confidentiality applies to the school board, senior management, and schools.

This research reports, albeit anonymously, comments on the professional practice of particular administrators. Such external examination of anyone’s practice is not often welcomed by those ‘under the research microscope’. Additionally, the topic of conflict is a sensitive matter and therefore I treated the participants carefully. Participants were reminded that they were permitted to withdraw from participation (none did so). Despite the inherent challenges of dealing with such a sensitive topic, I believe that the findings and conclusions drawn from this research, analyzed in relation to literature review constructs, assist in the identification and description of cultural proficiency in school conflict management practice. These findings are not intended to judge individuals, but rather to responsibly present my interpretations that may contribute to both practice and research literature.
Analytical Method

The data were examined in light of the concepts and findings from the literature review. This examination involved transcribing recorded interviews and focus group discussions. For each interview and focus group discussion, coding was developed to classify, categorize and order recurring themes, ideas and words (Cohen et al, 2000), and a summary (narrative) was developed to reflect the themes and substance of each interview. First, I compared stakeholders’ experiences and perspectives to describe and categorize administrators’ responses to conflicts with students. Second, I analyzed these patterns of action in terms of responsiveness to cultural differences. Did the administrator involve the student in the process in an effort to learn more about the student and the meaning they brought to the conflict? What type of relationship did the administrator have with the student? What was the nature of communication in the interaction? What communication skills were evident? Was there evidence of the administrator being empathetic, caring and sensitive? Did the administrator create opportunities for disputants to hear each others’ stories? Next, through comparison across participants, themes were identified across interviews. On this basis, I developed a composite summary that captured the pertinent themes and contrasts relative to cultural proficiency and conflict management, comparing these results with the themes identified in the review of literature. As well, the data were examined to extract the inhibitors or barriers to the implementation of cultural proficiency. All findings, both consistent and inconsistent with the tenets in scholarly and professional literature are presented in the analysis.
Limitations and Strengths of Study

In looking at the data, a couple of things need to be acknowledged. First, I must indicate that the sample size is small and conclusions drawn are specific to the instances discussed and not generalizable to a larger population. Second, the students made comments about conflicts that they may still have had ill feelings about. These feelings were likely to have influenced their portrayal of events. A third limitation is that the community and cultural liaisons and students are speaking to the practice of different administrators’ actions and this does not allow for direct cross-referencing to the same administrator. That being said, I have contrasted and compared the experiences, opinions and perceptions of various students with those of administrators and with the observations of cultural community liaisons to examine consistencies and inconsistencies in these descriptions.

The strength of this research is that it provides some empirical data to illustrate and substantiate cultural responsiveness in the administrators’ conflict management practices. The literature reviewed supports the need to incorporate attention to culture as an aspect of conflict management. This research was designed to extract evidence to inform understandings of what culturally proficient conflict management practice looks like, and the factors that support and impede it. My presentation of these findings will inform individual practice and propel further examination of challenges to culturally responsive practice in schools. Research on culturally proficient conflict management will support the efforts of school boards in southern Ontario to make schools more equitable and inclusive for their increasingly diverse communities.
Chapter 3  Conflict Management Actions of Secondary School Administrators

The objective of this research is threefold:

1. to identify the range of ways that administrators manage conflict,

2. to consider the interpretations of selected students, administrators and cultural liaisons of the meaning of these actions, and

3. to examine how these actions reflect cultural proficiency.

This chapter describes the various conflict management approaches identified in the data, and presents the perspectives of participants relative to each approach. In the next chapter, I present my analysis of how these approaches to conflict did or didn’t reflect cultural proficiency, and I describe the interviewees’ perspectives on supports and challenges to culturally responsive conflict management in secondary schools in this school board context.

In this chapter, I have categorized the administrators’ conflict management approaches described in the interview data as follows: questioning, facilitated meetings, restorative conferences, suspensions and expulsions. Each type of approach is examined separately, and the perspectives of administrators, students and cultural community liaisons on each one is summarized and interpreted. My research is intended to examine selected high school administrators’ attention to culture in conflict management approaches, as perceived by key participants in those conflict management processes. These participants include student disputants, administrators, and cultural community liaisons. Cultural community liaisons (board employees who support parents and students of various ethno-cultural communities) are responsible for assisting parents to better
understand the school system and to assist schools in understanding the needs of the respective communities they serve (information from school board brochure, 2010).

The administrator participants in this study were vice-principals from various high schools. The student participants were taken from two high schools, different ones from the administrators. The cultural liaisons worked out of a central department within the school board. Each travelled to various schools that had populations of students representative of the cultural communities they served consisting of both newcomer and settled families. The following chart summarizes the instances of conflicts described in interviews by the students, administrators and cultural community liaison participants in this research. The term “approaches” is used to describe the process or sequence of actions taken by the administrator. In most cases multiple actions are taken in the administrator’s management of the conflict. Administrator and cultural community liaison participants used various descriptors for students. These descriptors included countries of birth, religious affiliations, and race. I have changed most descriptors to geographic regions for consistency and to conceal student identities. Where geographic regions could not be determined from the data, I used descriptors provided by the participants. In the descriptions, when the word “accused” is used, the interviewee had questioned or disagreed with the allegation.

Table 3.1 Conflicts Described in Administrator Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator Pseudonym</th>
<th>Conflict Description</th>
<th>Administrators’ Conflict Management Approaches (Participants in addition to students and administrator are listed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator 1</td>
<td>Conflict 1 - Fight between south Asian, female student and east Asian student stemming from rumors.</td>
<td>Questioning Restorative Conference – community cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Conflict 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2      |               | Escalated tensions between a Jewish student and Arabic students over personal emails that Jewish student had shared with other friends. | Questioning  
Suspension  
Restorative Conference – Youth and Child Care Worker, guidance counselor  
Suspension  
Restorative Conference - students, Child and Youth Worker, guidance counselor, victim’s mother  
Suspension |
| 3      |               | Ongoing incidents in which a female, Caribbean student had been verbally aggressive with teachers and the administrator. | Questioning  
Suspensions  
Questioning  
Suspension |
| 4      |               | A student of African-Caribbean heritage was accused of spitting on the car of a teacher. | Facilitated Meeting – teacher, student’s mother |
| 5      |               | South Asian student was disruptive in class  
Eastern European student had stolen a cell phone.  
Parents were verbally aggressive with | Questioning  
Facilitated Meeting  
Suspensions  
Questioning |
| Administrator 6 | Conflict 1 - Jewish student had stolen photo paper belonging to South Asian student  
Conflict 2 – Argument between Jewish student and South American student that moved to MSN.  
Conflict 3 – South Asian student from conflict 1 fought with a Caucasian student. | Questioning  
Facilitated Meeting  
Questioning  
Expulsion |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Table 3.2 Conflicts Described in Student Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Student 1**  
South Asian | Conflict 1 – Had lied to protect a friend about bringing a knife to school.  
Conflict 2 – Had been accused by administrator of stealing a phone | Questioning  
Suspension  
Questioning |
| Student 2  
African | Conflict 1 – Had taken her lunch out of the cafeteria, and initially walked away when called back by administration.  
Conflict 2 – Had fought with a male student | Questioning  
Suspension  
Questioning |
| **Student 3**  
African-Canadian Heritage | Conflict 1 – Was accused by administration of stealing peer’s money from boys’ changeroom.  
Conflict 2 – Was accused by administration of stealing a phone of another student. | Questioning  
Removed from basketball team  
Questioning |
| **Student 4**  
Canadian born of south American and Caribbean heritage | Conflict 1 – Had gotten into a verbal argument with another student that progressed to a fight.  
Conflict 2 – Had arranged to fight another student at a nearby elementary school. | Questioning  
Suspension |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Discussion 1</th>
<th>Conflict 1 – Fight between an east Asian student and a Caucasian student.</th>
<th>Questioning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 cultural community liaisons</td>
<td>Conflict 2 – Fight between a West Asian student and an African-Canadian student.</td>
<td>Suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 3 – Conflict when 18 year old east Asian newcomer student had not been issued timetable by the school</td>
<td>Restorative Conference – board’s restorative conference facilitator, parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 4 – Parent of African-Canadian heritage had accused administrators of racism in their treatment of her son.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 5 – Various community members concerns about perceived unfair treatment of students in terms of placements in Special Education, Alternative Education and English Second Language programs.</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 6 – Male student of African-Canadian heritage had fought with another student who had picked on his disabled brother.</td>
<td>Suspension, Expulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 7 – Male student of East Asian heritage had brought a weapon to school.</td>
<td>Expulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 8 – Student of East Asian heritage got into a fight with another student.</td>
<td>Expulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Discussion 2</td>
<td>Conflict 1 – South Asian, female student had kicked another student who had harassed her.</td>
<td>(Administrator’s approach not described)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaisons present</td>
<td>Conflict 2 – Rivalry between two ethno-cultural groups had resulted in fatal fight.</td>
<td>Suspensions Expulsions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 3 – South Asian male student had brought a lighter to school that looked like a gun.</td>
<td>Suspension Expulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 4 – South Asian male student was involved in a fight with other student and accused of stealing administrator’s cell phone.</td>
<td>Suspension Expulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 5 – Various community members concern about the fairness of placement of students in Alternative Education, Special Education and English Second Language programs</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict 6 – Racial tensions between two groups resulting in fights.</td>
<td>(Administrator’s approach not described)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data collected in participant interviews described a range of conflict types. In total, there were thirty-four conflicts described and/or referenced in the interviews and focus group discussions. Fourteen of these conflicts were interpersonal conflicts between two students, some of which had escalated into physical fights. Four conflicts involved disagreements between groups of students. Seven conflicts were between a student and an adult employee of the school board (teacher or administrator). Another seven conflicts were situations in which a student was accused by the administrator of having contravened the school’s behaviour policies, although these conflicts involved no other acknowledged disputant, for example, a student brought a knife to school. Additionally, there were conflicts described as tensions between an ethno-cultural community group and the school or school system, as a result of perceived mistreatment of students from
certain ethno-cultural groups. In all conflicts described by the participants, there was interaction between the student(s) and administrator(s), in which the administrator acted as the conflict manager. In a few instances, the administrator(s) invited others to participate and support the conflict management process, such as parents, police, and/or board employees such as cultural community liaisons or restorative conferencing facilitators.

In the data, the only reference to parents by cultural community liaisons were to those representing communities that in one way or another were disenfranchised. Thus, there were no white Anglo-Saxon parents described in this thesis data. The administrators were asked to recall conflicts in which the background of the student(s) involved were different from their own, thereby increasing the likelihood that the administrator-student interaction described was cross-cultural. Descriptive information of participants is provided in the chart below.

**Table 3.4 Information about Research Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Participants</th>
<th>Birth Nationality</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Secondary School Administrators</td>
<td>Ukrainian&lt;br&gt;Portuguese - Canadian&lt;br&gt;Israeli&lt;br&gt;Afro-Caribbean&lt;br&gt;Argentinean&lt;br&gt;Sri Lankan</td>
<td>2 males, 4 females</td>
<td>1 – 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Students</td>
<td>African&lt;br&gt;Canadian-Jamaican Heritage&lt;br&gt;South American/African Heritage&lt;br&gt;Pakistani Heritage</td>
<td>1 female&lt;br&gt;3 males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Cultural Community Liaison</td>
<td>Ethno-cultural communities served by liaisons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The administrator-student interaction described was cross-cultural. Descriptive information of participants is provided in the chart below.
It was evident in the data that administrators utilized various approaches to dealing with student conflicts. These approaches included questioning, withdrawal of privileges, mediation, restorative conferencing, suspensions, and expulsions. Below, I describe these approaches, and discuss how each may enact culturally proficient conflict management practice as described in professional literature.

**Administrators’ most common Conflict Management Approach – Questioning**

All of the conflict management approaches described by the administrators and student participants in this study included an initial investigation in which individuals were questioned. Essentially, all participants in this study consistently reported administrator questioning of student disputants for the purpose of gathering information about the incident. Four of the six administrator participants described their questioning as being for the purpose of information gathering. Even though the other three administrator participants did not explicitly describe the purpose of their questioning, their descriptions also support this interpretation. This description of the purpose of the questioning is consistent with the research of Fris (1992) who reported school administrators generally approach conflicts as problems to be solved. As conflict managers, administrators most often questioned the disputants and witnesses to collect information, then adjudicated “fault” in the situation, and then dispensed consequences.

All four of the students interviewed (all of whom were visible minorities) held very negative perceptions of the way administrator(s) had questioned them in the
management of their conflicts. One of the students perceived the administrator to have used interrogative tactics. Three of the four student interviewees described the administrator’s questioning as being positioned from a presumption of guilt, and the same three students cited equity factors such as race and favoritism as problems in their interactions. I will review interviewee’s descriptions and perceptions of each conflict separately.

Student1 described his negative interaction with an administrator:

They pulled me out of class and he [administrator] said, ‘the first thing, I know you have the phone, pull it out. I know you have the phone, pull it out’. I said, ‘No I don’t have the phone’. So in the office, we are sitting there and there are three of us and the principal splits us up. And this is what he does, he would come to me and tell me ‘your friend told me you took it,’ even though he [the friend] never told him. I know this.

So, this is a classic, I know they use this all the time. They would lie to you and tell you that your other friends have ratted you out and told them that you did it. So then you end up confused and you’re like, what? Even if you didn’t do it. So you are thinking in your head, why are these guys [friends] ratting me out when I already know who did it? And I am expected to say who did it. So, what happened was he did that to me and I said, ‘Sir, listen, I know no one said that because no one is going to tell you who did it. You are lying to me’. And he realized that I knew. He went to the other guys and said the exact same thing. That kid, out of fear, he said I did it. So they have one guy that said I did it and that’s it. As soon as they have one guy that said I did it, that’s all they needed. So, they come to me and they said ‘alright I know you have it’.

I didn’t have it. I didn’t have it.

This student’s description of the administrator’s questioning as interrogative is consistent with Rosen (2005), a former high school principal who compiled a summary of administrators’ conflict management practices across 18 American states. He said, “they [students] are interrogated like criminals causing students to become frightened into telling administrators what they want to know, which may not be the truth” (p.59).

Student 1 described the administrator’s questioning as based on the presumption that the student was ‘guilty’ (that is, that he had the stolen phone). Further, this student believed
that the administrator had used lying and pressure to get him to “admit” guilt. In the first conflict shared by this student, he had described confessing to having a knife that he told me he did not have (he claimed to have lied to protect a friend). However, here the administrator had told him that he had been seen on camera with other students: this student claimed he knew this information to be inaccurate. In both conflicts, this student believed the administrator had used unfair and dehumanizing interrogative techniques such as applying pressure, raising his voice, and lying about other evidence that might point to the student’s guilt. Student 3 also described an administrator questioning him based on an assumption of guilt. In describing his experience, he said the administrator had asked him very few questions. The student described the situation as unfair and maintained that he was not guilty of any wrongdoing.

Student 2 described a conflict in which she was pursued by administrators after walking away from the principal when he had told her to eat in the cafeteria and not take her food out. This student also saw the administrator’s treatment as inequitable. She felt she did not get sufficient explanation as to why her actions --as compared to those of other students who were eating outside the cafeteria-- were perceived as wrong.

When I asked him why he was asking me only me, he could have given me a good reason. Or, just have said, ‘Okay well, you know that from now on that’s what going to happen’. Instead of just saying like well because you’re messy. That was what really bugged me…the fact that he came to me and not other people, is what bugged me.

What characterizes all of the descriptions provided by these three students is that they perceived the administrator’s questioning as being based on a premature presumption of guilt. Such actions would be inconsistent with cultural responsiveness attributes,
especially opening lines of communication, building trust and strengthening relationships (Bucher, 2008; Lynch, 1998).

In all the conflicts reported by student and administrator interviewees that involved multiple students, the administrators posed their questions to students individually. Students who were in the office at the same time were separated and questioned. This action is reflective of these administrators’ control. Conflict management was a process done “to” students, as opposed to “with” students (a problem addressed by the International Institute for Restorative Practice, 2009). This is a major difference between alternative participatory processes to conflict management and traditional punitive approaches. Participatory processes such as restorative conferences are intended to bring disputants and other stakeholders together, and grant them voice and opportunities to hear each others’ stories (Bodine, 1998; International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009; Johnston and Ness, 2007; Rundell, 2008; Zehr, 2002). This participatory approach also would characterize any culturally responsive conflict management approach.

Three of the six administrator participants described their own use of what they characterized as “restorative questions” in investigating conflicts:

1) What happened?
2) What were you thinking at the time?
3) Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
4) What do you think you need to do to make things right?

These questions are derived from the school board-sponsored restorative practice training that five of the administrator interviewees had attended. Administrator 1 indicated she used restorative type questions for the purpose of moving toward possibly using a
restorative conference to involve stakeholders in understanding and repairing the conflict.

Administrator 2 attested to using, “a lot of restorative questions”.

[We] Don't have to pretend that you've even memorized the questions, even though by now of course we all have done that. But I know that these are the types of questions that will help us to prepare for this conference and give me their thoughts.

In this instance, Administrator 1 suggests that all administrators know the restorative questions, suggesting that in her perception, their use is embedded in the conflict management practice of all administrators in this school board. The restorative practice conflict management training in the school board was based on the International Institute for Restorative practice model. Training had been provided to administrators, school teams, individual teachers and senior management that described this model’s pedagogical foundation, participatory intent and practice, in particular, the questions above, and an introduction to a conferencing process (information from School Board Training Documents).

These three administrators’ descriptions of their use of these ‘restorative’ questions is significant because this pattern is inconsistent with prior research findings (Fris, 1992, Vey, 2004) that suggests school administrators typically do not adhere to prescriptive management models. The restorative practice model used in this board is very prescriptive (Lederach, 1995), meaning that the conflict management process is not designed specific to the cultural context and disputants. For formal restorative conferences—a conflict management discerning dialogue that is supposed to bring perpetrators, victims and all affected by the harm together in a collaborative effort to address the harm (Johnston and Ness, 2007)— facilitators are provided with a script of questions that must be strictly followed.
My concern with this model of restorative practice is that it advocates a ‘one size fits all’ approach to dialogue. The four “restorative” questions administrators were instructed to ask disputants and possible witnesses in their initial questioning do not create openings for the administrators to learn about the students and their backgrounds in an effort to understand their cultural lenses and to better make sense of their behaviours. Thus, such rigid prescription is contradictory to culturally responsive conflict management, which should provide opportunity to share and listen to stories (Bodine, 1998; Funk and Said, 2004; LeBaron, 2003). Cross-cultural interaction is culturally responsive when it allows for participants to develop cultural awareness, empathy and mindfulness (Bondy et al, 2007). The use of a script and prescriptive questions would likely not permit or at least would not automatically facilitate dialogue characteristic of a culturally responsive approach.

Based on my ten interviews with administrators and students, I conclude that in the experiences of these particular research participants, the primary purpose of questioning by all the administrators in each conflict was focused on gathering basic information, rather than the gathering of personal background information on students to support the administrators’ knowledge and understanding of the behaviour being examined. This approach to conflict management was perceived by the minority student participants as non-inclusive and non-participatory and thus unresponsive to their personal attributes and cultural selves. Three of the six administrators included restorative questions, indicative of their application of some aspect of a restorative model. Although three of these administrators used elements of an alternative “restorative” approach to
conflicts, the rigidity of the prescribed restorative questions would likely not permit for the deep dialogue characteristic of culturally responsive cross-cultural interaction.

**Facilitated Meetings as a Conflict Management Approach**

After the initial investigation, the administrators described in interviews used different approaches in addressing the conflicts. One approach was to bring the disputants together. Although the term mediation was used by administrators to describe this approach, I have chosen to use the term ‘facilitated meeting’ in my discussion of this particular strategy, because the descriptions provided by the administrators vary and do not necessarily fit within a mediation model (Bickmore, 2002) because there was no mention by interviewees of their application of a specific process or skills received in mediation training. Mediation is defined as a “structured method of conflict resolution in which trained individuals (the mediators) assist people in dispute (the parties) by listening to their concerns and helping them negotiate (Morrison, 2007, p128). The instances described by some of the administrators were situations in which they had brought student disputants together to discuss the conflict. Restorative conferencing was one type of meeting described by the administrators, in which the disputants were brought together. I will address this type of meeting separately in the next section. In this section, we will consider meetings other than those described as restorative conferences.

Five of the six administrators provided examples of facilitated meetings in their descriptions of conflict scenarios. In eight of the twelve conflicts shared by the administrators, they had used some form of a meeting in the conflict management process. In these descriptions, administrators spoke favorably of this strategy, indicating that they believed that the disputants likewise had considered the outcomes positive.
These meetings took various forms, and professional judgments were made by each administrator as to who was to be included in each meeting. In the eight conflicts described, the interpretations of administrator, student and cultural liaison participants suggest that the act of bringing disputants together produced outcomes consistent with the tenets of participatory and culturally responsive practices. Stakeholders are brought together to learn with and from each other (Bodine, 1988; Funk and Said, 2004; Johnston and Ness, 2007; LeBaron, 2003; McCluskey et al, 2008).

In an incident managed by Administrator 4, in which a student allegedly spat on a teacher’s car, Administrator 4 had chosen to bring the student, the student’s mother, and the teacher together in a meeting. This administrator described what she perceived as the student’s positive response to this meeting:

I made the link between [the teacher] putting himself on the line to protect the kid, that's when you could see it. By the way he was sitting and the look and the expression on his face and sort of the tone, that's when you could see his tone changing. So, he could see, ‘yeah, you know, that maybe [the teacher] is a lot more supportive than I think’. That was evident by the language, the tone of voice, and the way in which he participated in the conversation afterwards.

Administrator 4 drew the conclusion that this student had started to attend to what was being said in the meeting. She perceived this as a positive sign. In another conflict between a student and teacher, administrator 5 also chose to bring the student and teacher together after speaking with them individually. Similarly, Administrator 6 chose to bring students together, in an incident where photo paper was stolen by one of the students. He said, “They came up with a reasonable agreement. They were the ones that came to the decision and easily agreed to do that. They were apologetic and there was no recurrence”.

In six of the eight conflicts described by administrators in which a meeting was held, a positive outcome was reported by the administrator. The reasons provided for the
perceived success were consistent with participatory and culturally responsive conflict management theories which suggest that bringing disputants together allows for the possible identification of shared values, mutual understanding and development of empathy (Bodine, 1988; Funk and Said, 2001). This perceived success presumably explains why these administrators choose to use facilitated meetings in their conflict resolution practices.

In the eight conflicts described by student research participants, only one student reported the use of a meeting in which he was brought together with the disputant.

I guess he [administrator] handled it in a good way; we resolved it and are friends. So there's no conflict between us now about anything. I didn't get suspended on my first day or anything. He gave me a chance. First he separated us and he talked to me and then he talk to him. And then he put us both in the same room, and he told us to explain it again together, and then to shake hands like, and then apologize.

In this instance, even though the resolution (being asked to apologize and shake hands) apparently was the suggestion of the administrator, it still resulted in the student speaking positively about the outcome. Thus, this one student’s interpretation of the consequence of bringing student disputants together in a facilitated meeting is consistent with the positive outcomes of such meetings reported by the administrators. At the same time, the discrepancy between students’ rare reports of the use of meetings to resolve conflicts, compared to the more frequent reported use by the administrators participating in this study, raises some questions. One might predict that students who regularly had been involved in conflicts in their school (true of three of the four student participants in this research) would have described management practices similar to those that administrators reported as forming a substantial part of their own management approach practices. However, this is not what happened in this study. Could it be that administrators were
biased in their selection of management approaches to describe in the interviews? Were some (or all) of them more likely to use a certain type of approach with some groups of students, compared to others? For example, were administrators quicker to suspend students who frequented their offices, than to use alternative approaches such as a facilitated meeting with those students? This discrepancy between students’ reports of facilitated meetings and administrators reports of the use of such meetings, may suggest that participatory approaches do not form as substantial a part of administrators’ conflict management approach as the number of descriptions might suggest. Due to the small scale of this research, this conclusion is neither robustly supported or generalizable, but the questions do suggest a possible area for further research.

In most of these conflicts, in which a meeting was held to bring the disputants together, the outcome was reported as being positive. This supports the claims of participatory conflict management literature (Bodine, 1988, Funk and Said, 2004; LeBaron, 2003; Johnston and Ness, 2007; McCluskey et al, 2008), and contrasts with the negative ways student participants perceived the outcomes of administrator’s interrogative approaches, in which students and other stakeholders were not brought together for dialogue in the conflict management process. This result supports the preference in scholarly and professional literature for alternative dialogic approaches over traditional punitive approaches (Ashworth, 2008; Claassen and Claassen, 2003; Kajs, 2006; Mirsky, 2007; Rundell, 2007).

In two of the eight instances in which a meeting was used by the administrator as a management approach, a parent was also included in the meeting. In all other instances in which an administrator communicated with a parent, it was to inform them of the
incident and of the punishment they had already administered to their child. In one of the two instances where a parent was involved, Administrator 4 had the following to say about why she chose to invite the student’s mother:

We asked her [mom] to come in because we know that mom wants him to choose a good path too. And the idea was that if he could see that everybody was on the same page with this, that we're not going to play, he said versus she said. She was supportive of [the teacher]. She was supportive of what I was saying. She was supportive of her son in that she wanted him to do well and make the right choice. It was a stern pep talk, basically. That was her role. She contributed incidents that might have happened outside of the school to give examples, because part of our discussion was that he's always looking to blame someone for his actions. So we talked about school examples and she talked about home examples.

In this situation, we see that the parent participated as part of the conflict management dialogue. Administrator 4 describes this parent as performing a dual role, as a support to both her son and the administration. Such a role would be consistent with participatory conflict management paradigms (Bodine, 1988), and with culturally responsive approaches, in that the mother was invited into the process and was able to provide insights into the student’s background and lived experience outside of school (Bucher, 2008; Davies, 2004; Leigh, 1988; Weinstein et al, 2004). In a culturally responsive conflict management paradigm, the administrator would enlist the support and involvement of parents in an effort to learn about and better understand the cultural contexts within which students were operating.

**Restorative Conferences as a Management Approach**

Another management approach, in which the disputants were brought together for dialogue, was restorative conferences. A ‘restorative conference’ is a formal meeting in which disputants are brought together to address harm done in conflict situations (Watchel, 1997; Zehr 2002). In this school board, training had been provided to
administrators on how to facilitate such conferences (Board Training Documents).

Interestingly, all six administrator participants spoke about restorative practices, although not explicitly prompted to do so (see interview questions in Appendices E, F, and G). The administrators invited to participate in this research study about cultural proficiency, seemed to believe restorative conferences to be a more culturally responsive approach to conflict than traditional punitive approaches. I have suggested already that the model of restorative practice adopted by this school board was very prescriptive, in that dialogue was restricted by the use of a script including pre-established questions. This rigidity in the dialogue process is inconsistent with a culturally responsive conflict management process that seeks to dig deep and to adjust to cultural differences. However, I analyzed the various reported actions of these administrators in their use of restorative conferences, to identify factors that were either consistent or inconsistent with cultural proficiency. The administrators’ use of the term “restorative conference” as discussed previously in the use of restorative questions, reflects their deliberate intention to implement this pedagogical approach in which they had been trained by school board personnel. Of the twelve conflicts described in the research by administrators, three scenarios were managed with the use of a restorative conference. An additional two restorative conferences were shared in the focus group interviews with cultural community liaison participants. I found that the opinions of the administrator participants about this approach differed from those of cultural liaison participants, as outlined below.

Administrator 1 described a conflict that involved a number of girls of different backgrounds (South Asian and East Asian) in a fight over a comment made by one of the girls to another female student. The conflict had progressed to an exchange of angry,
derogatory, aggressive comments on Facebook. The administrator clearly told me (in the interview) that her “intention was not to suspend anyone”. After using a restorative conference, Administrator 1 believed this conflict to have been resolved, because she believed the girls had wanted to resolve the conflict to avoid a more punitive consequence.

…the other group handled it very well because they knew it needed to be resolved. Otherwise there would be consequences that would be pretty severe. I wanted to take them restorative rather than punitive if at all possible.

In mentioning ‘other severe consequences’, Administrator 1 is alluding to the potential use of suspensions. In this situation, had the school board’s Safe School Policy been strictly applied, without consideration to mitigating factors or circumstances, the girls involved in this dispute would have been suspended for their actions. Note that, in this instance, it was girls that were involved in a physical fight. In all other instances of physical fights that were described in the research interviews, boys were involved and they were all either suspended or expelled. This raises the question as to whether the administrators interviewed and described in this study had a greater tendency towards leniency with girls compared with boys. Gender is a significant cultural factor that I mention here, but do not have the space to explore in this thesis research. In this particular conflict involving girls, the administrator’s opinion was that a restorative approach would lead to a better outcome than a punitive consequence. She described what happened at the end of the conference:

Well, it's funny, because basically what they came to was that they would acknowledge each other in the hall. So that there wasn't a sense of hostility or anything like that, so they wouldn't think that the other person was talking about them. Otherwise they would keep their distance and do their own thing. As soon as we had said and done all of that and everybody agreed that that was the way to go forward, the [South Asian] girl and the [East Asian] girl and the whole group
of girls came over and approached her and said, ‘You know, we are really sorry we just want this all to be over. Can't we just be friends?’ So it was this moment of wow when they're doing the whole eating thing at the end [of the conference].

In this conference, Administrator 1 had observed a demonstration of forgiveness on the part of the girls. To compare: Administrator 2 described two separate conflicts that each had also involved many students of different backgrounds. In the first conflict, Administrator 2 believed it to have been successful because the students had all committed to resolving the problem, similar to the situation described by Administrator 1. Administrator 6 had chosen to use a restorative conference for a situation involving cyber bullying. Administrators 1, 2 and 6 believed these conferences to have been successful because of 1) the observed desire of the student disputants to resolve the issues, 2) diverse students’ opportunity to share their stories, and 3) the desire of the students to avoid punitive consequences. The first reason—willingness to repair harm—is consistent with restorative conflict management theories. I am skeptical of these administrators’ perceptions of student “willingness” to resolve conflicts constructively as I think the students’ choices may be driven by their motivation to avoid punitive consequences. In Ontario, restorative practice is packaged as an ‘alternative approach’ to reduce suspensions and expulsions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Based on my own experience as a school administrator, restorative practices are presented to students as a means of avoiding punitive approaches. The study conducted by the Canadian Department of Justice (2001) highlights this factor as an impediment to measuring the effectiveness of restorative programs. That study concluded that when “an individual is forced to participate in the restorative justice program, most would argue that the program is no longer truly restorative” (p.17). Similarly, when a student is motivated
primarily by the desire to avoid punishment, then the culturally proficient administrator may be impeded in his or her goals to facilitate genuine sharing and unearthing of deep stories. Students not fully invested in the restorative process may say only what they think administrators want to hear, or what they think might maximize their likelihood of avoiding punitive actions.

The second reason identified in administrators’ interviews for the perceived success of the restorative conferences was the provision of time and space for sharing stories. This aspect of restorative conferencing is consistent with restorative practice theory and research (Ashworth et al, 2008; International Institute for Restorative Practice 2009; McCluskey, 2008; Zehr, 2002) and also with cultural responsiveness theory (Bodine, 1988; Bondy et al, 2007; LeBaron, 2003). The positive outcomes of the conferences presented in the administrators’ descriptions, such as student participants’ development of empathy, sensitivity to others’ stories, and re-building of relationships, are also consistent with both restorative justice (IIRP, 2009; Rundell, 2008) and cultural proficiency theories (Bodine, 1988; Bucher, 2008; Davies, 2004; Leigh, 1988; Lynch, 1998) and with restorative justice research (McCluskey, 2008; Canadian Department of Justice, 2001).

Of the three conflicts in which restorative conferences were described by administrators as a main conflict management approach, in only one instance did the administrator decide to involve a parent. When asked to explain why she thought it necessary to involve the mother of the victim, Administrator 2 explained that hearing from the mother of the victim and having to face her was important for the boys who had orchestrated the fight. Additionally, the victim of violence in this episode, even though
over 18, wanted his mother present. In this one instance, consistent with restorative approaches (Johnston and Ness, 2007; Zehr 2009), the mother was invited to participate.

In the focus group interviews, the community liaisons described two conferences in which parents were involved. In these instances, the conflicts were very serious in nature resulting in the involvement of board restorative conferencing experts who facilitated formal conferences which were more closely aligned with restorative practice as described in the school board’s training documents. I presume that the administrators generally did not include parents because the involvement of parents was not a traditional aspect of their conflict management practice. As McCluskey et al (2008) suggest, administrators are caught in the reconciliation of old punitive approaches with alternative participatory approaches. To involve parents would require, to some degree, a relinquishing of the administrator’s power and control of the management of conflicts.

Punitive discipline is the primary means through which school officials ‘send a message’ to the community that the authority invested in them is still secure (Noguero, 1995). Systemic privilege on the part of educators often results in a lack of willingness to relinquish power (Lindsay et al, 2003; McCluskey et al, 2008), and an entrenched preference for preferred punitive measures. In contrast, participatory approaches, in theory, value non-domination (Morrison, 2007).

In comparing the perceptions of administrators to those of cultural community liaisons, I noticed some interesting similarities and differences. In one of the two focus group discussions with cultural community liaison workers, two situations were shared that involved restorative conferencing. In one situation, the liaison worker perceived the outcome as positive, whereas an opposing opinion on a different conflict was described
by another liaison. The first restorative conference related to a conflict that had involved a fight between two boys. This cultural community liaison judged the conference as successful based on the “effective re-integration of the students back into the school community”. Her language is framed with language of equity and inclusivity. This was likely the same type of positive outcome that administrators described as a “repairing of relationships”. Additionally, this cultural liaison cited “my presence in the conference” as being another reason for the conference’s success. In her opinion, she had helped to bridge a cultural barrier between the parents, one of the male disputants, and school staff. The act of including the liaison in the conference itself reflected the administrator’s attention to the culture of the disputants.

In contrast, another cultural community liaison spoke about a restorative conference that she did not perceive as successful. The conflict involved a male accused of sexually assaulting a female on a soccer field.

There was an attempt to use restorative practice with this case. It sort of got out of the hands of the administrators in a way. So this restorative practice was attempted.
...the liaisons were not involved at all. Liaisons were not informed or anything. So the girl and her family, her mom, and an interpreter, and then the boy, his mother, his father, uncle and I think an aunt or somebody. ...the conference was terrible. I am for restorative practice. I attend a lot of the training and there are certain things that have to be premised. Both parties need to want to get along.

In contrast to the previous conflict described positively by another liaison, this liaison believes this conference did not go well. This cultural liaison had worked closely with the male student and his family. Because the cultural liaison had not been present at the conference, it is likely that her perception of the conference was gained from her own later communication with the male student and his mother. This liaison suggested that
this administrator’s restorative conferencing conflict resolution attempt had not been successful because: 1) the conference participants, who included the mother and boy, did not go to the conference having made a prior commitment to repair the harm done, and 2) she—the liaison—had not been invited to participate. Note that the liaison’s criticism cited here, “the unwillingness of the students to repair the harm” aligns with the observations of two administrator participants. In addition, this liaison explained that the mother of the victim did not speak English, and infers that this language barrier might have impeded communication of information throughout the management of the conflict. Ineffective communication, and the cultural liaison’s lack of participation in the conference to mitigate cultural barriers, reflects the administrator’s lack of attention to cultural aspects in the management of this conflict. The consensus in the focus group discussion was that the liaisons believed their presence in restorative conferences would support more culturally responsive conflict management.

My data on restorative conferencing shows that five of the six participating administrators and all community liaisons generally said they liked this approach to conflict management. The practice in this school board where the research was conducted is consistent with research literature about the increasing use of emergent, participatory approaches to conflict (Vaandering, 2009) in which disputants are more often being brought together in an effort to resolve conflicts constructively instead of punitively. These administrators’ perceived positive outcomes of such conferencing, such as ‘creating space’ for sharing of stories and development of empathy, are consistent with those outcomes claimed in professional and research literature on culturally proficient practice. Despite, these administrators’ apparent approval of restorative practices, they
failed to fully embrace the prescribed participatory element of this approach by not inviting parents into the management process. This may reflect a reluctance to relinquish power (Claassen and Claassen, 2008; Kohn, 2006; Noguera, 1995). This aspect, in addition to the narrowly prescriptive nature of the restorative conference approach used in this school board, are inconsistent with fluid and emergent characteristics of culturally responsive conflict management (Bucher, 2008; Weinstein et al, 2004).

**Use of Suspensions and Expulsions as Conflict Management Approaches**

Suspensions and expulsions are traditional punitive conflict management approaches used by high school administrations. In his compilation of administrators' conflict management approaches in secondary school across the U.S., Rosen (2005) says, “suspension is an abused and too-often used consequence for student misbehavior in our schools. It has become an automatic response for too many of our school administrators” (p59). Suspensions are punitive approaches in which the students are removed from the school for a period of time. In the incidents described in this research, (apart from questioning) suspension was the single most prevalent action used by administrators in their conflict management. In eight of the twelve conflicts described by the administrators, they issued suspensions. In seven of nine incidents described by the cultural liaisons, suspensions were issued. In three of the nine conflicts described by the four student participants, they had been suspended. Expulsion of students from their school or from any school in the board is the most severe punishment that can be administered to students in a conflict. Expulsions are generally preceded by suspensions. In the conflicts described by the administrator participants in which one or more students were expelled, two of the twelve situations ended in expulsion. Of the conflicts described
by the community liaisons, five of the eight instances ended in expulsions. The higher percentage of expulsion cases shared by the community liaisons may reflect more involvement of community liaisons with expulsions, as compared to other school discipline actions taken by these schools. These punitive approaches were prevalent in the descriptions provided by the administrators, students and community liaison participants interviewed in this research. Recall that I focused in my interview questions on conflict instances that involved cross-cultural interaction between administrators and disputants. Thus, the results of this research appear to reinforce previous findings that minority students are frequently suspended when alternative approaches might have been used (Civil Rights Project, 2000; Ontario Human Rights Commission 2005; Saenz, 2006; Skiba and Peterson, 1999).

Even though most administrators interviewed here acknowledged positive results from participatory approaches, their overall patterns of action present a conflicting message. In the particular conflict scenarios described by the research participants, in which at least one of the students was a visible minority, suspensions were more often used than participatory approaches. Two administrator participants provided rationales for their decisions to use suspension. Administrator 3 explained that one particular student had been frequently referred to her office for inappropriate behavior.

And she reacts in this aggressive way using language that is inappropriate against the teacher and getting herself into trouble. Sometimes, I obviously don't have a choice but to suspend her because she has used that type of language. I cannot accept her behavior towards another person here regardless, and of course, not a staff member. I don't think that she has had major things that she has had to be suspended for like drugs or none of those things. It's usually because of opposition to authority and her language. One of the last times was with one of the English teachers, an older gentleman that told her in the hallway that she was not supposed to be there. And she used that kind of language with him. ‘Get out of my face’, and with the F word in front of it. So of course she got suspended. I
administrator, and I do need to have consequences for that... I don't like conflict, but that doesn't mean that I will accept anything from her. I still need to do what's right.

Administrator 3 offered the following justifications for her repeated suspension of the student: 1) persistent opposition to authority, 2) disrespect to staff members, 3) inappropriate language used toward adults. This administrator clearly indicates that the suspensions had not effected change in the student’s behavior. This administrator also said that she believed she had no choice in suspending the student, an indicator of her perception of her role and the continuing prevalence of punitive responses.

Administrator 3’s pattern of continually suspending a student was also evident in the second conflict she described. She described this student as being frustrated by the fact that he was being repeatedly punished at school. However, she viewed the punitive approach as a necessary administrative response to persistent misbehaviors, even when this intervention did not appear to have any positive impact on the undesirable behavior. Persistent misbehavior was also the reason that Administrator 5 provided for his use of suspension with a student. Administrator 5 also viewed his suspension as a necessary step in an escalating response to the student’s behavior. I conclude that these administrators operated from the belief that suspensions were a necessary and required response to student misbehavior. According to the literature reviewed, the values that underpin the use of traditional punitive consequences act as impediments to culturally responsive pedagogies. These values include a presumption of entitlement (Claassen and Claassen, 2008; Cunningham, 2003; Lindsey et al, 2003); power imbalance (Bucher, 2008; Kohn, 2006; Noguera, 1995) and a mistaken belief that punishment works as a deterrent (Gladden, 2002; McCluskey, 2008).
The same sense of obligation possibly derived from an embedded tradition of administering punitive approaches is also evident in these administrators’ actions in expulsions. Administrator 1 expelled five south Asian boys for their involvement in a fight that had resulted in a broken nose. The administrator said, “If there hadn't been a broken nose, they would not have gone to expulsion. The chances are if there had been suspensions, they would have been short suspensions.” When I asked the administrators whether it was the Safe School’s Policy that influenced the consequence, the administrator replied, “Well actually, it dictates that if the student has to seek medical attention, then it's an automatic expulsion. “ Thus, Administrator 1 believes (incorrectly [Ontario Ministry of Education Amendment Act, 2007]), that administrators are without option in determining the consequence for certain actions. In this particular dispute, one victim had required medical attention, the five south Asian boys “had to be” expelled according to her understanding of the provincial and school board’s Safe School’s Policy. Administrator 6 shared a similar perception when he described his conflict involving a south Asian boy that got into a fight. He said, “I don’t think I am ever satisfied with an expulsion…It was inevitable.” In saying that an expulsion was inevitable, this administrator also is describing the prevalent administrator practice of expelling students for behaviors in which a victim is seriously injured. Despite new policies recommending consideration of mitigating factors and alternative approaches, these administrators’ actions were guided incorrectly by older provincial Safe Schools policies (Safe Schools Act, 2000).

Administrator 4 also alluded to the same theme of obligatory action, in her experience with expulsions.
I'm not a big believer in expulsion, although I know there are cases where it is important, but I think that’s the bottom line in terms of how I deal with conflict. These two kids and these kids are still learning. They don't know how to resolve conflicts. We have to help them to resolve conflicts in ways that you wouldn't want conflicts yourself.

Although she did not describe in what situations she felt expulsions were warranted, she indicated that this punitive consequence did not align with her personal philosophy of conflict resolution, yet she described herself as being placed in a position in which she “had to” administer an expulsion despite her beliefs. She shared the following experience, which she claims left her with a negative feeling about expulsions,

I remember early in my career it was a situation I went to expulsion over. And at that time I had a real personal issue with having to go to expulsion over something that I felt the kid didn't need to be expelled for. And the kid was expelled. I think what I sort of learned from that issue is that we want kids to be here. But kids make mistakes. So how much of a consequence do they actually need for them to learn from their mistake? I have a personal issue about expulsion and suspension generally. It went to expulsion because the superintendent went to the trustees and they made the decision that we should take it to expulsion. So we went to expulsion. It's kind of jaded me a little bit about expulsions. Really in my heart, did the kid need to be expelled? I was in the expulsion hearing and reading the report that I had written and reading my recommendation to expel even though I didn’t think it should have gone to expulsion. And that was really hard to handle because I didn't believe it.

Similar to the opinions of Administrators 1 and 6, there exists a clear disparity between Administrator 4’s actions and her personal beliefs. This problem—administrators’ actions and their mistaken beliefs about the requirement to use punitive approaches—seem to represent a possible residual effect of former rigid “zero tolerance” type Safe Schools Policy in Ontario. Document analysis and interviews suggest that in this school board, communications and training stemming from Regulation 145 were starting to change this apparent misunderstanding. Specific student behaviours perceived by school personnel to be in contravention of the School’s Code of Conduct no longer require mandatory
expulsions (Education Amendment Act, 2007). However, these administrators’ actions and opinions expressed in interviews suggest that their practice remained influenced by previous “zero tolerance” policies.

Another recurring theme in the data was that expelled students did not learn from this punitive consequence. Administrator 4 shared her opinion on an experience with an expulsion earlier in her career:

I went to expulsion this year for a student, and there was no real benefit to expelling. The kid had limited expulsion, and then came back here. There was no real benefit to the kid not being here. It didn't help. It created more havoc when he came back because there was another transition that he had to face. He was a kid that had some issues right? But I don't necessarily think that, you know, he learned a lesson from being expelled. He didn't.

Administrator 4 apparently believed that there was little learning gained in this situation. Administrator 6 said of a similar situation: it is “painful because I recognize in myself that you work with a student and then the result is they are expelled”. In this conflict, the student had denied his responsibility for the harm done, and thus in the opinion of Administrator 6, had robbed himself of the opportunity to learn and to benefit from supports. Thus, these administrators believed the effects of expulsion conflicted with their efforts to help students learn from incident, yet they went ahead and expelled students anyhow. Comparatively, some of the same administrators perceived participatory approaches to have had more positive learning outcomes for students.

It is interesting to note that in the three situations where the administrators used restorative conferencing, they also used traditional non-participatory approaches. They provided different reasons for their punitive actions. In the situation involving the derogatory Facebook comments by Arab and Jewish students, Administrator 2 explained that her use of suspensions supported her “restorative” efforts. She had issued in-school
suspensions, which allowed her to have the students accessible as she continued to
process the issue with them. She said, “When it was time for the conference, since they
were all on in-school suspensions anyway, they would have as much time as needed to do
the restorative conference.” The other conflict that Administrator 2 described involved a
boy who was encircled and beaten by peers for having previously broken up a fight
between his girlfriend and cousin. Administrator 2 issued suspension to the boys
responsible for the fight and the victim’s cousin and girlfriend. In the third situation,
Administrator 1 had decided to use restorative conferencing but felt she had to suspend
one of the disputants who, in her opinion, had escalated the conflict by not following her
instruction to refrain from engaging in the negative Facebook dialogue. Explaining her
choice to combine participatory and punitive responses, this administrator said, “Now
restorative does not always work on its own. Sometimes you need to have a punitive
measure or consequence with the restorative conference.” Another administrator shared a
similar opinion, and went further to suggest that she never used restorative conferencing
without a punitive response: “Like, I don't usually use just a restorative conference on its
own, because I don't feel that's enough. It doesn’t do the full job. Usually it's hand-in-
hand with some type of consequence.” This combination of conflicting conflict
management paradigms reflects the difficulty that administrators are having with
reconciling traditional punitive approaches with emergent, participatory alternatives
(Lindsay et al, 2003). This struggle between conflicting paradigms is evident in the
practice of at least these three administrators.

In contrast to her decision to expel in the past, Administrator 4 talked about why
in a recent conflict she chose not to suspend the student who was accused of spitting on
the teacher’s car. Her reflections offer insight into the struggle experienced by administrators in their efforts to reconcile traditional punitive actions with newer alternative, dialogic approaches to conflict management. She said, “I decided, no, that there was not a formal consequence needed.” She had opted to use a facilitated meeting. However, she indicates that her decision not to suspend likely cost her ground in her relationship with the offended teacher.

I don't know whether the teachers had an expectation that there would be some type of consequence. I think in the beginning, they both wanted justice. Do they like the fact that I didn't suspend the kid? I don't know. I will never know. But really, that wasn't really my point. I want to try and continue to build that relationship. I think that if in the end, despite the fact that I might have lost a little bit because the teachers didn't get the justice that they wanted initially, I think the bottom line for me is that I want [the teacher] to see that he can still have a positive influence on him.

In this administrator’s opinion, there was a social cost in the school institution to choosing not to suspend the student. This is an illustration of the phenomenon McCluskey et al (2008) also describe in their research, in which administrators implementing restorative practices felt they were forced to work against staff opinions that public, traditional, punitive discipline was necessary. However, this risk to her relationship with some adults in the school was a price that Administrator 4 was willing to pay for what she felt would be a better outcome for the student.

Of the four minority students interviewed, three of the four had experienced a suspension. Two of the three students described this outcome as unfair. Student 1 explained that, even when the administrators realized that he did not in fact have a knife, he was suspended anyway. He said, “…at the end they found out that the knife belonged to the other kid…they ended up suspending both of us”. As described earlier, Student 2 also suggested that she had been unfairly suspended when she had opposed an
administrator’s instruction to eat in the cafeteria. These two students described this punitive measure as unfair. The opinions of these students, combined with the prevalence of suspension by the interviewed administrators, appear to support findings (Civil Rights Reports 2000; Human Rights Commission 2008 Saenz, 2006; Skiba and Peterson, 1999) suggesting that minority students are disproportionately punished.

Of the three students interviewed who had been suspended, one student expressed the view that his suspension was warranted. In the opinion of this student, a suspension was the normal outcome of fighting, so he felt his suspension was justified. This contrasting viewpoint to that of the other two students, may be a result of normalized patterns of practice. This student, of south-American/African heritage, had come to perceive suspension as an expected consequence for certain actions. He failed to recognize that there might be alternative approaches to dealing with inappropriate behaviors. The use of suspension and expulsions by these administrators reflect the continued practice of punitive non-participatory conflict management approaches.

My findings suggest that parents were also usually excluded from punitive conflict management processes. The perceptions of these administrators relative to the role of parents in their conflict management are best summarized in the statements of Administrator 1:

We brought parents in after the fact. We brought them in for a meeting so that they would understand what was happening. So basically we did the investigation and then we spoke to parents at that time. When we realized that it was going to go to expulsion because we contacted our superintendent and so forth, we called the parents in for the ones that would be facing the expulsion. The others we didn't call them in, but we talked to them on the phone. We explained how long the suspension would be and so forth. The ones that were being expelled, we asked the parents to come in and we talked through the whole expulsion process: what they could expect and that they would be getting a letter that would outline what their son or daughter had
done by way of what had been uncovered through the investigation and so forth.

In this situation, parents were contacted once the conflict had been investigated and a decision had been made as to what the punishment would be, to inform the parents of what to expect in the expulsion process. This non-participatory role of parents was supported by the descriptions provided by the student participants. Student 1 said that his parents were called, informed of his suspension, and asked to pick him up from school. Student 2, although eighteen years of age (thus the administrators did not have to consult parents) chose to involve her father in the management of her conflicts. She contacted her father in the incident where she was punished for taking food out of the cafeteria. Of her father’s involvement, she said, “Well, I was already suspended by the time he got here”. Her effort to enlist the help of her father did not change the fact that she was suspended. She described another situation in which her father’s involvement did influence the management of the conflict: we will look at that in more detail in the next section. Similarly, student 4 said that his mother’s involvement had consisted of a telephone conversation in which the administrator explained his actions and the consequence he had applied. The descriptions of these students concur with descriptions provided by the administrator participants, in that parents were contacted primarily for the purpose of informing them of the incident and the consequences administered to their child. I conclude that in the perceptions of the administrators and student disputants interviewed, parents did not play an active role in administrators’ conflict management processes. This act of exclusion runs contrary to the tenets of participatory and cultural proficiency practices that are supposed to seek to engage disputants and parents in an effort to learn about their students.
What was clearly evident in the research data was that parents didn’t always respond positively to being placed in this peripheral role. In four conflicts shared by administrators, liaison workers and students, the parent response to hearing about the conflict and its management from the administrator, was anger. In one of the conflicts managed by Administrator 5, when he called the parents to inform them of the incident in which their son had attempted to steal a cell phone, the following interaction transpired,

So, I had mom in here and I said, ‘Here's what happened’. Here is what your son did and he has on two occasions asked other students to pick up property that didn't belong to him and take it out of the class. Mom was trying to understand. The father came in and the father just went off on me. He completely lambasted me for accusing his son of being a thief. He said, ‘Did he have the phone on him? So, why is he here? Where are the other children?’ It was ugly. He just berated me for a whole bunch of things. They were in here for a good 45 minutes to an hour and it was not pleasant at all…for the big chunk of that meeting, I was a punching bag for sure.

Administrator 6’s intention had been to inform the parents of the incident. However, he found himself on the receiving end of aggression by the student’s father. As seen in Rosen’s (2005) research as well as in the descriptions provided by the interviewed administrators, when left peripheral to the management process, parents may respond in anger.

Administrator 5 and Administrator 6 describe angry parents as dismantling all the work they had done in (they believed) repairing the harm caused in particular conflicts. Administrator 5 claimed that the boy who attempted to steal the phone took responsibility for this behaviour and started to demonstrate remorse. However, when the parents arrived and became angry with the administrator, the boy’s response changed. Administrator 5 attributed this change to a negative empowerment of the student by the angry parents. Administrator 6 had experienced a similar situation when, after the students had resolved
the issue in a facilitated meeting, a displeased mother intervened. In the opinion of Administrator 6, not only did this mother change the resolution of that conflict, but she disrupted the learning that the administrator had hoped to achieve with her son. I conclude that, in these instances, parents were angered by being left peripheral to the conflict management process, particularly in cases where those processes were punitive in their approach. Consequently, administrators often seemed to view parents as opposing forces. These perceived negative outcomes of parental involvement may help to explain why administrators were reluctant to engage parents in emergent participatory alternative approaches.

In contrast, in an earlier section of this chapter, I described a situation in which a student’s mother was invited into a ‘facilitated meeting by Administrator 4. Even though it would appear that the administrator had already decided the outcome, the parent was invited to form a part of the conflict management conversation. Administrator 4 described the parent as supportive both to her child and to the administrator. Based on my personal experience as an administrator, I would agree with Rosen (2005, p.28) who suggests that parents can be very supportive when invited to participate in conflict management approaches.

The cultural liaisons also provided interpretations of the actions of angry parents. One liaison worker explained:

…when we talk about conflicts, we’re talking about highly emotional conflicts, because we're dealing with people's children. And I think that is what is unique in a school. It is not like a work conflict. It's about the children, and because it's such a tense situation that becomes so emotional, that's when things are very quickly vulnerable to become racialized. And I deal with it daily, and they[parents] immediately jump to the conclusion it's because we don't speak English, it's because they think that they can talk down to us. All of that, all of those perceptions come through that racial lens. And because these are
disempowered groups, and in their daily lives these are people who constantly feel disempowered in their working lives, and then they come to the school, and it's about their most emotional topic, their own children.

In describing parents’ anger, this liaison was attempting to place angry parents’ behavior within a cultural context. Another liaison described the anger of the mother of an East Asian boy who had been suspended and recommended for expulsion due to a fight:

She [the mother] would be screaming and swearing at me. She said, ‘you think this is the only country that I can live in. I can live in any country that I want’. I let her go at it and she just screamed and screamed and she said, ‘I will never step in that school, I will never step into that school again. You think these white people...’ She was fierce.

In describing the mother’s rage, the liaison explained that she represented a cultural community that is typically perceived as quiet and passive. In this instance, the mother was infuriated by the perceived mistreatment of her son by the administrators. Parents left out of conflict management processes might perceive a lack of communication and consequently formulate their own (not necessarily correct) assumptions about how the conflict was managed.

In the first of two focus groups, one of the cultural community liaisons described the reaction of a mother who was angry with school administrators over their dealings with one of her sons. In the liaison worker’s description of his cell phone conversation with the mother, he said the mother had called these administrators ‘a wicked white man and woman’. The liaison worker described how the parent’s behavior was impacting the students:

Today I go over there and one of those students is not listening to the VP. Anything they say it’s like “who are you and why are you talking to me” Because mom is belittling and denouncing the administration at home. So he is hearing mom and his six brothers talking negatively about the school. And he’s in grade 9.

This liaison worker was suggesting that the student’s interaction with the administrator
was influenced by the parent’s negative cross-cultural interaction with the administrator. My interpretation of the negative impact of angry parents on student cross-cultural interaction with administrators is supported by perspectives in the interviews with three administrator participants and all the cultural liaison participants. Interestingly, the cultural liaisons’ interpretations of the behaviour of angry parents reflected an attempt to place the parents’ behaviour within a cultural context. In one focus group, there were two cultural liaisons familiar with one particular mother, and they both described the mother as a single, hardworking mother of several boys. One of these liaisons provided this explanation of why individuals like the single mother would lash out:

"It's coming from a place of pain. She's hurt, and the only way that she could hurt back is by saying that. Because she knows that's what will hurt him[administrator] and get him to listen to her. The issue is not between the administrators and parents; the issue is the kid’s behavior. Because the kid’s not performing. But once the administrator takes it on ‘as this is what she said to me, she has accused me’, the kid is now out of the picture. And now it's a personal conflict."

Here, the cultural liaison is attempting to understand by viewing the experience from the lens of the mother. As suggested in cultural proficiency literature, behaviour is better understood when we understand the cultural lenses through which disputants perceive themselves and their experiences (Bucher, 2008; Cunningham, 2003; LeBaron, 2003; Ross, 1993). The impact on me in the research interview as I listened to the description of this person described as a single, marginalized mother of several boys caused my own perception of that mother to slowly shift from my initial disapproving reaction when I had been presented with solely her behaviour. I began to feel sympathetic. Her hostility was now framed within the context of her lived experience. In contrast to the administrators’ descriptions of angry parents’ behavior, the cultural and community liaisons, in my opinion, attempted to frame all stakeholders’ behavior within a cultural
context. Hence, even though their interpretations of the negative impact of the parent’s behavior on their child is consistent with the interpretations of the administrators, there is a distinct difference in the interpretative lens of the cultural liaisons as compared to the interpretative lens of the three administrator participants who described parent interactions. The liaisons here provide an illustration of what is recommended of culturally proficient conflict managers.

The cultural liaisons shared their perceptions of administrators’ use of punitive conflict management approach. The following themes were identified from the focus group discussions with the cultural liaison workers: they described 1) a perceived lack of administrators’ thoroughness or mismanagement in investigations, 2) a perceived lack of administrators’ understanding of the cultural context, 3) administrators’ inadequate communication with parents, and 4) perceived bias or stereotypes on the part of the administrator.

In one instance a cultural community liaison had been invited by the school to participate in the conflict management process. The liaison’s observation was that the parents felt that the situation had been very poorly managed by the administrators. Two boys had gotten into a fight, and the boy causing injury to the other boy was recommended for expulsion. The liaison worker explained that the parents were called and the boy was sent home. At the request of the administrator managing the conflict, the cultural liaison was called and asked to call the parents, whose first language was not English. The cultural liaison described what she learned when she contacted the parents,

…they were very very very angry about the situation and the way the situation was handled. In particular, they were very very angry about the fact that the racial issue was not addressed. And not that it wasn't addressed. We don't know exactly what was addressed and what wasn't, but the parents were not informed; there was
a lack of communication. So the parents were in a situation where they were jumping to a lot of conclusions based on what their son had heard and based on the little information that they had received from the school. It was a very quick process, a process in which parents were very much in the dark.

In this situation, the parents were described as complaining about the way the administrator had managed the situation, and about the lack of information provided to them by the school’s administrators. This liaison worker believed that, as a consequence of the lack of effective communication, these parents had made assumptions about the incident that were not necessarily accurate, and the anger of the parents was fuelled by their perceptions of mismanagement.

In both cultural community liaison focus groups, the shared belief among the cultural liaisons was that in some of the conflicts that went to expulsion, administrators displayed a lack of understanding of the cultural contexts within which the students’ actions had occurred. For example, in one conflict, a boy had been scared for his safety and brought a baton to school, an action that in his country of birth would not have been unusual. The cultural liaison explained that in this instance, the administrator had taken the time to speak with the parents to learn and understand this cultural context, and had shared it in an expulsion hearing. In this situation, similar to those in which the administrators felt obligated to expel, the student had been recommended for expulsion as warranted at that time within the Safe School’s Policy (Safe School’s Act, 2000). However, in the perception of this liaison worker, the administrator who had managed this conflict had included in the report cultural factors that he felt had strong bearing on the situation. The same cultural liaison compared this situation to other conflicts in which she observed contrasting actions on the part of the administrators. In those other conflicts, she explained that it was left to the family to provide the cultural context in the expulsion
hearing, which in her opinion was often not done.

Another example of an administrator’s lack of understanding of a cultural context was shared by another cultural community liaison. She described a boy who had recently arrived from a South Asian country. In his attempt to demonstrate his appreciation to a boy who had assisted him in his transition to his new school, he purchased a gift for the student: the gift was a lighter that was designed as a gun. The cultural liaison explained that similar lighters were commonly used in the boy’s country of birth to light celebratory firecrackers. Furthermore this student had been identified as having a learning disability. The liaison described the actions that resulted in the boys’ expulsion.

So he buys this gun, which is a replica type of thing, and he takes it to school. And he was so excited about it, and he takes it out. And a girl sees him in the hall when he is showing it to another friend. And she goes and reports it to the vice-principal. The vice-principal says, ‘Oh he's got a gun’. That's it. The police come in and this boy is up for expulsion for possession of a replica.

The liaison felt that no leniency was shown. In her opinion, had the administrators considered the cultural context, there would not have been a recommendation to expel.

There were a number of cultural factors that were significant in this situation. The student was: 1) a newcomer, 2) from a country where using similar lighters was common, and 3) he was a special education student. All of these factors, if communicated, should have assisted in providing a different perspective on the young man’s actions and caused the administrators to consider whether he posed sufficient threat to warrant an expulsion.

These factors comprise aspects of this student’s cultural context. Theoretical literature on conflict and culture suggests that attention to such factors provides alternative lenses through which the administrator may be able to better understand the student’s actions (Cunningham, 2003; Noguera, 1995; Weinstein et al, 2004;).
A further example was provided by another cultural liaison, who spoke of the perceptions of a particular ethno-cultural community, in a past experience, when it had appeared that significant numbers of students within this community were being expelled from school. This liaison worker explained that these families were minorities in a predominantly white Anglo-Saxon community. The cultural tensions in the community had resulted in fights among students in the school. Tragically, a young male student was killed. The liaison worker describes the culturally biased perceptions of the administrators towards the minority boys, on the day that they were going to pay their respects to the deceased student.

The vice-principal said that they were a gang because they all had bandanas. …it was not a bandanna, it was a head covering. You have to wear that when you go into a faith place and you're going to see a dead body. They were going to a funeral visitation so the kids had to wear that. So they were going at lunch time. It was interesting when the police came and the questioning. When this particular individual [vice-principal] had made that comment, and I went to the principal and I said… ‘You need to tell the police’. Now the police was following them around because they were convinced there was going to be another altercation between these kids thinking that they were going to go after these kids because the boy was killed. It was not pleasant. That's when I said to the principal, ‘you know this is the culture. This is the faith’. And I provided the cultural information to the principal to then pass on to this vice-principal so that the police would understand.

This cultural community liaison described her efforts to provide cultural information to these administrators that she had hoped would have influenced what she perceives as a misjudgment of the boys by the administrator and police.

Another cultural community liaison shared her perceptions of administrators’ unfair dealings with students of particular ethno-cultural backgrounds,

We have situations with administrators in which we have kids coming from [another board] to here. These administrators, when there is a fight, say, ‘Its history from somewhere else’. And there are certain communities where there is rough play, like [ethno-cultural descriptor] communities. It's not a fight. So these
students are seen with friends in a car and they are rough playing. Somebody reported it.

…These two boys got expelled. First, the older boy got expelled, and then his younger brother got expelled. And at some point in the investigation, the administrator’s cell phones went missing. And they thought that the boy had taken it. Then the person found her cell phone, and they called to say that they had found it.

In the opinion of this liaison, there was misjudgment, mismanagement and a lack of cultural understanding on the part of the administrator. She felt that the background of the students influenced both the conflict and the way the administrator handled it. For example, she said the administrator, in error, had assumed a phone had been stolen by the student. Additionally, in her opinion, the administrator’s actions had fuelled the parents’ perception that the administrator was prejudiced against them.

The administrators' choice to suspend is a punitive conflict management approach in which administrators apply punishments “to” students as opposed to managing the conflict “with” students. In cases where alternative participatory approaches were used, the administrator participants described more positive outcomes. This is consistent with prior theory and research literature (Bodine, 1988, Funk and Said, 2004; Johnston and Ness, 2007; LeBaron, 2003; McCluskey et al, 2008). In contrast, in instances where parents were described as angry with the administrators’ approach, these cross-cultural interactions were characterized by a lack of constructive cross-cultural communication, a lack of inclusion of parents in the management process, and a lack of cultural understanding displayed by administrators. Thus, these actions were inconsistent with culturally responsive conflict management practices. In culturally responsive models of conflict management, the role of parents would not be peripheral; rather they would be invited into the management process as participants (Johnston and Ness, 2007; Rundell,
2008; Zehr, 2002) to not only provide support to their child, but to support the administrator’s role by assisting in the collective understanding of their child’s actions.

These descriptions by the cultural liaisons are of particular importance in our discussion of cultural responsiveness in the conflict management practice of secondary school administrators. As support persons for particular ethno-cultural communities, these liaisons provide critical lenses for understanding actions within a cultural context. They believed that cultural understanding in conflict incidents should be gained by the administrators through thorough investigations that would provide the administrator with the cultural context. They also believed that administrators should be responsible for gaining and sharing this cultural understanding with authorities, especially in potential expulsion incidents. The opinions of these liaisons are consistent with the recommendations of professional literature on conflict and culture (Cunningham 2003; LeBaron, 2003; Weinstein et al; 2004) and with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Safe School’s Action Team, which state that respectful attention to culture must form a part of conflict management. All conflict occurs in a cultural context, which shapes its course in important ways (Ross, 1993). I would conclude that the interpretations of these cultural liaisons suggest a lack of cultural responsiveness in most of the conflict management actions of the administrators in the instances described.

Summary

In this small thesis project, I have analyzed six administrator’s narratives, together with narratives of four students and seven cultural community liaisons. In the descriptions of all of the conflict incidents shared by these research participants, the initial interaction between administrators and student disputants was characterized by
questioning, primarily to gather basic information about the incidents. Participatory approaches, such as facilitated meetings and restorative conferences were used by some administrators, and positive outcomes from these approaches were reported.

Theoretically, participation is essential to alternative, restorative and non-punitive conflict management approaches, yet in the descriptions provided in these interviews, some administrators appeared reluctant to engage parents and other stakeholders in their conflict management process. Additionally, it appears that the model of restorative practice adopted in the school board where I conducted this study was very prescriptive in its application. In my view, this prescriptive element is inconsistent with culturally responsive conflict management practice that seeks deep flexible dialogue to unearth root causes of conflicts. In the descriptions provided of incidents involving suspensions and expulsions, suspensions were a prevalent management approach used by these administrators. Despite the fact that the Ministry and School Board policies had changed requiring consideration of alternative approaches to traditional punitive approaches, I conclude that embedded practice stemming from previous policies continued to characterize the conflict management approaches of at least some administrators in this school board. These administrators struggled to reconcile their preferences for including some non-punitive, participatory, culturally responsive approaches with the school board’s traditional rigid, punitive practices. There was some evidence in the data that some administrators were trying to adopt alternative, dialogic conflict management practices. The literature suggests that attending to culture in conflict management requires a mindset, knowledge and skills that would support successful cross-cultural interaction. In the next chapter, I explore the characteristics of cultural responsiveness in
administrators’ responses to conflict, as well as the challenges and supports to cultural responsiveness in administrators’ conflict management practice.
Chapter 4  Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Conflict Management and Challenges and Supports to Cultural Responsiveness

In the previous chapter I discussed the range of ways in which some secondary school administrators in one school board approached conflicts as interpreted by students, cultural community liaisons and some of these administrators themselves. In this chapter I consider how the various ways administrators approached conflicts with students could (and could not) be considered culturally responsive, and also look at the barriers and supports to cultural responsiveness in high school conflict management. I presented in the last chapter that some administrators in this south-Central Ontario school board had adopted some aspects of emergent participatory management practices such as restorative conferencing as alternatives to traditional punitive approaches. Aspects of restorative practice theory align with culturally responsive pedagogy theories. For example, both restorative justice and cultural responsiveness theories advocate inviting disputants into the management process. According to theory, culturally proficient conflict managers would seek to gain from the disputant cultural information that would increase the conflict managers’ understanding the disputants’ behaviour (Cunningham, 2003; Noguera, 1995, Weinstein et al, 2004). This learning is dependent on dialogue that would allow disputants to share personal stories. The administrator participants in this study seemed to believe that restorative conferencing was inherently culturally responsive. In the last chapter I addressed this misconception, explaining that conflict managers must be culturally proficient in their use of restorative practises. No one approach or schema can
fit all individuals and contexts (Morrison, 2007). As school communities in southern Ontario become increasingly diverse, secondary school administrators are engaging daily in cross-cultural interactions. Situations of conflict pose complex challenges. This investigation makes explicit what it may look and sound like for a high school administrator to be a culturally proficient conflict manager. Additionally, in this chapter, I consider some of the challenges to culturally responsive conflict management described by interviewees and the factors that appear to support the implementation of culturally responsive conflict management practices.

**Characteristics of Culturally Responsive Conflict Management**

In my analysis of administrators’ actions in this study, I categorized the attributes and actions of these administrators that appeared to support positive cross-cultural interaction as relationship-building. I first address this broader theme of relationship-building, and then examine the culturally responsive actions of administrators that support this relationship-building. The culturally responsive attributes that I identified in the data include 1) a willingness to learn, 2) establishing trust, 3) creating space for dialogue, 4) communication skills, and 5) demonstration of care and compassion. I describe the actions of administrators who demonstrated these attributes, and discuss how these attributes supported the cultural responsiveness of administrators in their conflict management practices.

**Relationships as foundational to effective cross-cultural interaction**

Relationship between disputant(s) and administrator(s) was a prevalent theme in the descriptions provided by students, cultural community liaisons and administrator participants in this study. In most instances, disputants appeared to engage more willingly
in the conflict management process when there was an existing positive relationship with
the administrator or when a positive relationship was nurtured by the administrator’s
actions throughout the conflict management process.

Administrator 1, describing her actions dealing with a dispute among several
females, indicated that prior to the fight she did not know the girls involved. One of the
students lied about engaging in Facebook conversations, and as a result was suspended by
Administrator 1. According to Administrator 1, the student did not trust the school
administrators to resolve her conflict, stating that, in her view, her conflicts had not been
effectively dealt with by the school’s administration in the past. Consequently, this
student chose not to follow Administrator 1’s instruction, resulting in her suspension.

In the second incident described by Administrator 3, the student who had brought
the mallet to school was very agitated and verbally aggressive when brought to the
school’s office. Administrator 1, who had a prior relationship with the student, was able
to effectively intervene, calming the student. I am not suggesting that in all situations
having a relationship with a student will ensure that they can be calmed in aggressive
outbursts. What I am suggesting is that the nature of the relationship between the
administrator and the disputants appears to influence the manner and degree to which
disputants respond to administrators in the conflict management process.

The theme of relationship was evident in the descriptions provided by the student
participants. When Student 3 was pursued by three administrators after she refused to eat
in the cafeteria, she decided to comply with one particular administrator because of an
existing friendship between this administrator and her father. Knowledge of this
relationship appeared to have had an impact on Student 3’s response to this administrator.
In the interview with Student 3, when I asked her who she felt she could speak to in the school, she mentioned the cultural community liaison for the African-Caribbean community. She said, “She's not quick to judge. She listens to the whole situation and then she would let you know what you did wrong and what was the right thing for you to do.” Even though the cultural community liaison told her that her actions were wrong, Student 3 perceived the liaison as effectively listening to her; an action she did not feel had been demonstrated by the administrators that managed her conflict. Student 3 felt that she did not have a positive relationship with any of the administrators at her school.

In the descriptions provided by some of the participants, the disputant’s truthfulness (or lack of truthfulness), appeared to have been influenced by the relationship that existed between them and the administrator. Administrator 1 described a conflict in which boys were expelled for fighting. Similar to her feelings about her relationship with the girls that fought, she felt she did not have a previous relationship with these boys. Administrator 1 believed a number of the boys lied about their involvement in the fight. Rosen (2005) suggests that students are likely to lie when they are questioned by administrators. In this conflict described by Administrator 1, the one boy that appeared to have been truthful with the administrator is the only student that the administrator felt she had gotten to know better through the management process. There appears to have been more interaction between this student and Administrator 1.

Similarly, Administrator 6 described the student that was suspended for fighting as “continually lying about his involvement”. Administrator 6’s rationale for this student’s lying was that the stakes were great; meaning that when presented with the prospect of expulsion, the student chose to lie in order to avoid the punishment.
Lying was discussed in two of the student interviews. To protect a friend, Student 1 described himself as lying to the administrator about possessing a knife that he did not actually have. Consistent with what Noguero (2005) claims, Student 1 suggested that students will lie to administrators in conflict situations.

Most kids are determined not to tell the truth because obviously they think it’s going to get them in trouble. There was one situation where I actually told the truth right away. I was like yea, I did it, that’s it, and I got suspended. Ever since, I realized that the truth is going to get me in trouble. What the kid has in his mind is that the truth is going to get me in trouble, so I got to lie. And when you put someone under pressure, they will lie in such a way that it will create a bigger web and cause the dilemma to expand further and unnecessary things happen.

Consistent with the suggestion of Administrator 6, Student 1 believed that students will lie if they think telling the truth will result in them being punished. Administrator 3 described one of her students as having said, “Well, if I am known as a snitch, then everybody will be against me and I won't have any friends”. This student suggested that he would lie to avoid peer pressure. Fear of consequences and pressure not to snitch are the reasons students in these descriptions provided for lying to their administrators.

Based on my experience, I would suggest that when administrators have a positive relationship with students, students are less likely to lie in conflict situations. Student 1 shared this opinion:

If you talk to a kid calmly, you know you give them options, and you know, you tell the truth, we can either do this for you or do this for you, so the kid knows. Because, in his head he already knows ‘I screwed up’. Whatever the situation, whether it is stealing or smoking something, you know, if you talk to the kid calmly, he’ll tell the truth, there is no problem.

Student 1 indicated that one of the school janitors, that he referred to by name, was someone he felt he could have talked to:

We talk and stuff, you know after school and stuff. He is a cool guy.

Interviewer - What makes him cool?
Just the way he talks. He is kind of more free. Like, I can see his other personality other than a custodian that you don’t really see. The way he cracks jokes in the halls and stuff. Like, just his personality, he is a fun guy, you know? Most of the time when I get in trouble, I would just go and have a chat with him, you know. And he would tell me about his high school days and what he used to do and why I shouldn’t do this and that.
He told me how he ended up being who he is today and what he could have been. He told me that I should get my high school and all this. Yea, he is a good guy. But, other than that, in the school I don’t have anyone else.

In addition, Student 1 commented on the positive relationship he had held with a night school teacher. The student suggested that if the relationship he possessed with the administrator had been similar to what he shared with the janitor and night school teacher, he would have been more inclined to be truthful during the conflict management process.

Student 4 said he was truthful in his interaction with his administrator. He felt he had a positive relationship with his administrator who he described as having taken every opportunity to speak with him when he saw him in the halls. Student 1 also mentioned that relationship building is enhanced when administrators speak to them in the hallways. In large schools it is difficult for administrators to form relationships with students (McCluskey et al, 2008). It may not be possible to know all students by name in a secondary setting, but a positive acknowledgement when passing in the hallway goes a long way. The principal may have nurtured a positive relationship with Student 1 by simply talking to the student when he saw him in the halls. This relationship likely contributed to the student’s truthfulness with the administrator in a subsequent conflict. Similar to Student 1’s interpretation of the administrator’s actions in the halls, the cultural liaisons felt that positive interaction outside the office contributed to positive relationship-building. I would conclude that students in the descriptions provided by the
student and administrator participants in this study were possibly more inclined to be truthful with the administrators in instances where the student felt they had a positive relationship with the administrator, and the opposite appears to be evident in instances where students felt they did not have a positive relationship with the administrator.

Relative to the impact of relationship on conflict management in high schools, the opinions of the cultural community liaison workers was best summarized in the following statement of one of the liaisons.

I am going to say relationship building is the most important thing for schools. It's a big term on the surface. Relationships with the students, the parents, with the community and with the staff; when they have built up a good relationship through good communication, good resources, things will turn out differently. Any conflict can be turned around in my opinion, by having a good relationship with all the parties involved. It's all about communication, but the relationship is based on communication. If the school administrator has a skill in building relationships, I think many conflicts can be resolved easily.

As suggested in this statement, the relationship between disputants and administrators as described by some of the students and administrator participants appears to be an influential factor in the conflict management. In the next section I illustrate how the relationship-building attributes seen in the selected administrators’ actions in this study align with cultural proficiency theories.

In my examination of the descriptions of administrators, students and cultural liaison participants I identified characteristics of the administrator’s actions that appeared to have supported positive cross-cultural interaction with student disputants and parents. In scholarly and professional literature, the components described as supporting effective cross-cultural interaction are also relationship building factors. These factors include a willingness to learn from others, creating space for dialogue, and a demonstration of empathy (Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Lindsay et al, 2003; Lynch, 1998; Ross, 1993). I
describe below how these attributes are similar to the attributes I identified in the descriptions of some administrators’ actions in this study.

Willingness to Learn

In the previous chapter, I presented in my analysis that all the administrators in these conflict situations performed some type of questioning. I concluded that the focus of the questioning was to gather information about the incident. The administrators’ “willingness to learn” with and from student disputants was a characteristic that appears to distinguish some administrators’ actions from that of other administrators. In five of the twelve conflicts described by the administrator interviewees, the administrators indicated that they knew nothing of the students prior to the incident. In this section, I discuss the descriptions of two of the six administrator participants that demonstrated their willingness and desire to gain knowledge of the students’ backgrounds.

Administrator 3 was new to her school at the time of her initial interaction with a female student. Administrator 3 suspended this student numerous times in various incidents. Over the course of numerous interactions between Administrator 3 and this student, the student began to open up, and the administrator described learning more about the student and her background.

…one of the things I realized was first of all there are issues at home. I don't think mom and dad are together anymore. And the dad left and went to his own country. And at one point she came and told me that she was not living with her mom anymore, but with an aunt.

Administrator 3 acknowledged that these factors were impacting this student’s behaviour. She said, “I do know where she is coming from. I do know there are other issues that she's going through.” As well, this administrator learned about the students’ ethnocultural background:
I think dad is from [Caribbean country], but I never met her mom. Her last name shows me that she's also [East Asian]. So I would say that she is mixed. When I see her she's not [racial descriptor]. She's not [East Asian] but I would say that she's mixed. But you know she is a lovely girl when she wants to be. ...she goes back to [Caribbean country]. There's some type of musical competition that she goes to once per year. She went in February. And she plays an instrument I don't remember which instrument it is. It's something that I am not familiar with. And she goes every year to the competition, and she did go this year as well.

Administrator 3 explained that getting the student to talk with her required considerable effort. Initially the student refused to speak with her:

…she was quite rude. She had developed some type of relationship with another VP so she would ignore me and say I'm not going to talk to you. I'm going to talk to [another vice-principal]

It is interesting to note that even though Administrator 3 was responsible for this student, the student expressed her desire to communicate with another administrator of Caribbean background. I would suggest that this student may have felt she better identified with the other administrator. Administrator 3 explained that she refused to accept the student’s refusal to communicate with her. She persevered with the student and gradually the relationship changed.

So I guess we have an opportunity to talk as two adults about what was going on and how she could deal with what was going on. And she felt more supported. And since then she has come many times with other issues. I'm not saying that she has changed or that I have anything to do with her changing, but at least she is able to comment and relate to me in a different way so that we can have a different type of relationship when the need comes. I think I have put a lot into that relationship because I just feel that it is just a façade that she is showing. She needs some support.

Administrator 3 demonstrated a willingness to learn despite the student’s initial resistance. She acquired knowledge of cultural factors impacting this student on a number of different levels, for example, the student’s perceived socio-economic status, single-parent home, and interest in music. Had Administrator 3 not been willing to engage the
student in deeper conversations, this students’ background information may not have been learned,

Administrator 2’s descriptions of her actions provided examples of how she was able to learn about her students in the management of conflicts. Compared to the descriptions of the other 5 administrators, Administrator 2 provided very detailed information about the disputants’ ethno-cultural identities.

There was a brother and sister who were [Arab], this student, his girlfriend, who is [West Asian], and another student who definitely caused a problem, he is [South Asian] of Jewish heritage and his friends who are [South Asian], and all of this comes into play.
So, what had happened was the Jewish student, the [West Asian] student and the [Arab] student all used to all be friends and they used to actually think it was funny that they were Arabs that were friends with Jews. They made jokes and he would call them terrorists and they would call him Jew. So this all comes into play in an issue that happened. The Jewish student ended up causing a conflict between the [West Asian] student and the [Arab] student. He made some comments about the [Arab] male student’s sister to the [West Asian] student which caused a whole horrible conflict to happen, where the [Arab] student wanted to defend his sister’s honor. It was very culturally informed, because one of our guidance counsellors who is Arab, she explained why it is such an insult and why he would have to defend his sister.

Administrator 2 knew the backgrounds of the students, described the significance of these backgrounds to the conflict. For example, she demonstrates her knowledge of the uniqueness of the students’ Arab-Jewish relationship, explaining that these students had previously joked about it. Administrator 2’s awareness of the offense caused to the Arab student’s sister was cultural insight that the administrator had gained from an Arab staff member. Similarly, in the second conflict managed by Administrator 2, where a boy was surrounded and beaten for intervening in a fight between his girlfriend and cousin, the administrator is able to describe, in detail, information about the students’ backgrounds and families. She said, “He had tried to prevent his girlfriend, who was East African, and
his cousin who was [South Asian], most of her family is in Calgary. His mom appears white, but some of the relatives are [South Asian]. His dad must have been black.” This administrator described the family dynamics in the female disputant’s home and the impact of the relationship in the home:

The mother did not like the girlfriend and the school problem was causing conflict in her own house.
The mother and girlfriend were not on the same page. And the cousin and the girlfriend were not on the same page as well.

As well, Administrator 2 shared what she had learned about the victim’s mother. She described the mother as “marginal” and provided her observations to explain how she had come to this conclusion:

…the mom herself was very marginal. She had had trouble with things like registration fees and was very apprehensive about things like course selection. She would come in a lot. She needed a lot of support. When he [son] came in, I registered him. That's how I got to know him and his mom and his younger brother. You can see once again the types of questions that she was asking. And from her own mannerisms she was a little intimidated by coming in. She had been through a lot in her life with her father, and it was an intercultural family as well. She was very needy. There were multiple calls. Multiple calls.

Using this new knowledge, Administrator 2 appears to make culturally responsive decisions in her management of this conflict. For example, because of her knowledge of the mother’s background and observations of her apprehensions about the police, Administrator 2 chose not to involve the police in the restorative conference. As well, she described having taken time and sensitivity in convincing this mother to agree to call the police. The actions of Administrators 2 and 3, provided by themselves, are consistent with opinions expressed in cultural proficiency theories that suggest conflict managers need to interact with the individuals they are seeking to learn about (Bucher, 2008; Davies, 2004; LeBaron, 2003; Leigh, 1998) and be willing to learn (Lynch, 1998;
Positioning oneself in the role of learner opens up the opportunity for learning from and about others, and demonstrates an awareness that the knowledge one brings to the conflict is limited (Davies 2004) because it is produced by one’s own contextual lens. I would conclude from these findings that the willingness of these administrators to learn from disputants and their families resulted in the acquisition of cultural knowledge that provided these administrators with a better understanding of the disputants and their behaviours. Additionally, some of the actions of Administrator 2 demonstrated her use of cultural knowledge in responding to the needs of the disputants and a parent in the management of her conflict.

Establishing Trust

In both conflicts described by Administrator 2, she appeared to effectively open up the lines of communication with the disputants. She described the students as having been comfortable talking with her. In the incident with the boys who organized the fight behind the portable, Administrator 2 indicated that the boys who set up the fight had not wanted to take any responsibility in the incident; however, Administrator 2 worked with them to help them understand how they contributed to the harm done. In preparing the boys for a restorative conference, Administrator 2 describes how she slowly increased the disputants’ level of comfort with the restorative process:

Many of them are skeptical. I showed them the script. I practiced. We had gone through all the restorative questions. I'd say that I'm going to say this, and then you're going to say that. This is how it's going to go and if at any point you feel uncomfortable, you can stop. And that type of thing, and just to refresh their memories of what's the point and purpose of getting together at all.

Administrator 2 worked to make the students familiar with the restorative conferencing process and ensured them there would be no surprises. She spoke explicitly of needing to
establish their trust and explained that gaining the boys’ trust was a deliberate intention in her actions.

The same trusting relationship had been established between Administrator 2 and the mother of the boy that had been beaten. Administrator 2 described having supported the student’s mother through her son’s high school experience suggesting that it was likely these acts of support provided to the mother over the years that allowed her to gain this mother’s trust. The mother’s trust in Administrator 2 was evidenced in her changing her mind about having her son participate in the restorative conference with the other boys. Administrator 2 explained that this mother was initially fearful of her son being brought together with the other boys in the conference and did not want her son to participate. Administrator 2 managed to get the mother to change her mind about her son’s participation in a participatory conflict management process. Developing trust is a component of culturally proficient relationship building in professional literature (Bucher 2008). When the conflict manager demonstrates a sincere interest in learning with and from culturally diverse students, lines of communication are opened up that build trust, and strengthen relationships.

Creating space for Dialogue

Another action of effective cross-cultural relationship building is the “creation of space for dialogue” in conflict management. Creating space for dialogue occurs when the administrator brings the disputants together in an effort to resolve the conflict. In the previous chapter, I showed that in situations where facilitated meetings and restorative conferences were held, the parents and students were generally more pleased with the outcomes. In the facilitated meeting held by Administrator 4, she mentioned that prior to
the meeting the music teacher had made the comment, “I don't feel safe walking to my car.” Administrator 4 appeared to have believed that the facilitated meeting dispelled this feeling. She said, “I think they now all feel safe around one another”. Administrator 6 felt that in his facilitated meeting the student disputants were able to craft a solution that they were happy with. Creating space for dialogue is culturally responsive because it grants opportunity for students to share their stories and hear the stories of others (Bodine, 1998; Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Lindsey et al, 2009). Therefore, the actions of these administrators in bringing the students together would be considered culturally responsive.

Administrator 2 provided her observations of the impact of bringing the boys together in a restorative conference:

They [other boys] recognized that they would not have wanted to be him in that situation. And they were able to demonstrate empathy, which is why we were able to even do that. But the main thing once again, the whole point to that was to make sure that they conveyed the message to him that they definitely have no more ill will and they wouldn't do that to him again. And hopefully, once they were able to basically take responsibility for their actions, he said that he was not going to do anything further, and nothing happened once they were able to talk it out.

According to Administrator 2, after being brought together, the boys are able to relate to the needs and concerns of the victim, despite initially not having taken any responsibility in the fight. The boys appeared to have developed empathy for the victim. Empathy is described as an outcome of culturally responsive dialogue. (Bodine, 1988; Bucher 2008; Leigh, 1988) As well, in this incident, Administrator 2 appeared to have safeguarded against the deepening of biased perspectives. She explained that the boys learned that the victim harbored no ill towards them. Prior to the conference, the administrator described herself as working deliberately to ensure that she got all of the participants to a point
where she was confident they would not use the conference to add to the hurt already caused. In this way, she was doing her best to safeguard against reinforcement of previously held beliefs and perceptions of each other. Consistent with the idea of Bucher (2008) and Funk and Said (2004), failure to anticipate cross-cultural diversity among stories can intensify the conflict. Administrator 2 demonstrates her attention to culture in having recognized that differences in perspectives could have had the negative effect of deepening biased positions of disputants.

Getting students to share their stories and appreciate differences in others is challenging. However, descriptions of the actions of Administrators 2 and 5, appear to indicate that in these situations where students were brought together, and guided with the right questions, support and actions of the administrator, the students were better able to articulate their experiences (Ashworth et al 2008, p20), and to hear and appreciate different perspectives (Bodine, 1988; Bucher, 2008; Cunningham, 2003; Davies, 2004; Leigh, 1998).

*Communication Skills*

Another characteristic that appeared to support effective cross-cultural conflict management was the administrators’ communication skills. Active listening skills--using body language, eye contact, paraphrasing etc.-- appear to have been demonstrated in the actions of Administrator 2. In contrast to the descriptions of other administrators, Administrator 2 described the emphasis she placed on effective communication.

I think you take the time to set up the environment, set up the tone and the invitational quality. So, using a lot of carefully constructed intakes we were able to get to what the real issues were…

When asked in the interview how she managed to get students to go deeper in
conversation, she said “it was over time. It was very sensitive.” Consistent with what Bucher describes as effective communication for building trust (2008), in her verbal and non-verbal communication, Administrator 2 made apparent to the students her interest in listening.

The opinion of Student 2 was that conflicts are better managed when the administrators listen. A cultural liaison commented on administrators who listened without bias, explaining that this behaviour was observed in student-administrator interactions where the administrator was not quick to voice her/his opinions, dispel words of wisdom or pass judgment. Effective communication is described in professional literature on cultural responsiveness as a necessary skill in effective cross-cultural interaction (Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Lynch, 1998). The active listening of Administrator 2 appears to have supported her ability to get students to share their stories and is therefore seen as being culturally responsive.

*Demonstration of Care and Compassion*

The administrators’ willingness to learn, taking time to listen and create space for dialogue in conflict management are also demonstrations of their care and compassion. In addition to these actions already described, there were other actions identified in the data that demonstrated the care of some of the administrators. Student 4 described the principal as having been lenient in not suspending him for fighting on the first day of school. Student 4 was told by the principal that he could have suspended him for his actions, but instead chose to facilitate a meeting with him and the other disputant. In the second discussion group, the cultural community liaisons suggested that when administrators made an effort to interact positively with students, knowledge of this
action would spread among the students and into communities. The cultural liaisons
shared the following about parents’ observations of administrators’ care for their kids. (I
have selected the following two statements as reflective of their shared opinion):

…they don't talk about how professional they are. They don't talk about how they
dress. They can see how they care about the kids. That's what they talk about.
They say, ‘Oh, I can feel that they care, they're nice’. It's all those soft skills that
are so important. That's what parents say, ‘Oh I like this school because the
principal is this way. He's so nice...’

These cultural community liaisons suggested that parents look for evidence of the
administrators’ care for their children. One liaison linked this observation to contrasting
types of school cultures.

Sometimes you kind of have two schools. There is the rigid protocol school. You
have to mold to us, and there is another where it's much softer much more
welcoming, much more supportive and the message is this is here to support you,
more so than 'this is here to support us'.

Here, the liaison speaks of what is described in professional literature as ‘white privilege’
that dominates some school cultures (Cunningham, 2003; Lindsay et al, 2003), and sends
the message that newcomers must adapt to us rather than us adapting to them. In contrast,
there are those schools that are inviting, supportive and seek to learn about the
newcomers in an effort to bridge cultural barriers. According to cultural community
liaisons who shared their perceptions as learned from their interactions and experiences
with parents, the actions of the administrators in the schools contributed to parents’
perceptions of whether the school was a caring and supportive environment for their
children.

I have showed in my analysis of the data that the administrators willingness to
learn, building of trust, effective communication, creating space for dialogue and
demonstration of care are attributes that are consistent with those suggested in cultural
proficiency theories. The application of these attributes appeared to have positively impacted the cross-cultural interaction between students and administrators in their conflict management by developing relationships. These relationships appeared to have provided for deeper conversations and allowed some of the administrators to acquire cultural knowledge that supported their understanding of the disputants’ behaviours. In the descriptions of Student 4 and the opinions of some of the cultural community liaisons, the administrators’ demonstrations of care and compassion appeared to contribute to positive relationship-building with students, parents and communities.

**Challenges and Supports to Cultural Responsiveness**

In this section I consider challenges to the implementation of culturally proficient conflict management as described by the students, administrators and cultural community liaisons and the responses of some administrators to these challenges. In addition to the administrators’ responses to these challenges, I identify other factors that appear to support culturally responsive conflict management practice of secondary school administrators in this school board.

All six administrator interviewees were asked to identify what they felt were barriers in their role as conflict managers. The most commonly-mentioned barriers were time, school board and Ministry policies, lack of training, and belief systems of disputants and other education stakeholders. These barriers were different from those found in the descriptions of the cultural community liaisons. They perceive stereotyping, prejudice, power and lack of knowledge of disputants’ backgrounds as impediments to effective conflict management. The differences in these perspectives in relation to cultural responsiveness theories is worthy of further discussion.
Administrators Cultural Knowledge in Cross-Cultural Interaction

In the descriptions that the six administrator participants provided of their own actions, I presented earlier that only one administrator seemed to attend to cultural information in the management of her conflict. A perceived lack of cultural knowledge on the part of administrators was explicitly voiced by the cultural community liaisons as a conflict management barrier. The role of the liaisons affords them the opportunity to observe these cross-cultural interactions from more informed cultural lenses relative to the communities they serve. I use one example provided by a liaison in the first focus group interview to illustrate this point. This cultural community liaison described an incident involving the young male that was accused of sexual assault. The liaison mentioned that the student had been walked handcuffed from the back field, through the school to the front office. “There wasn't any understanding in this situation of the cultures involved. You take a African-Caribbean guy and put him in handcuffs. There was no understanding of what the effect of that would be.” She described the effect of the experience on the young man and his family,

The boy was in jail there until about three in the morning. The parents were just devastated. This kid was affected. He was upset. For days he couldn't come to school. He had stomach problems because of the trauma of sitting in this place. And when he described it to me later he said, ‘they take away your belt, you have no belt in your pants, no shoelaces’. He was cold; when he got home he was just traumatized. He threw up for about two hours later. And mom and dad were just crushed; they felt totally helpless. So this is a [African-Caribbean] family, and of course something like this happened to someone else years ago, so it's all of that coming down. The church was supportive of them.

…the family was speaking with the church and the minister said ‘We got to get some legal counsel’
The first reaction when they [the school] heard the church was involved was like ‘oh my god, why did you have to tell the church?’ These people live in church. They go two to three times a week. That's their family. The church helps them to regain their voice.
A cultural factor that the liaison described as important in this incident was the family’s negative experience with the police. She suggested that there was likely someone in the family’s circle that had had a negative experience with the police thereby heightening their sensitivity to this negative experience. The liaison is seen to be shedding light on the cultural lenses of the family and their perception of the experience. As well, she indicated that many families of this ethnic community attend church regularly and that it would not have been unusual for the church family to lend support to the family and become involved in their personal affairs. In the opinion of this liaison, a lack of cultural knowledge was a factor in the administrators’ management of this conflict. This cultural insight may have supported the administrators’ understanding the family’s actions and reactions to the events, in addition to supporting the administrators’ decision-making in the management of the conflict. Culture helps us to understand people’s behavior and actions in conflict situations (Ross, 1993). Cultural proficiency theories suggest that cultural knowledge is critical to understanding conflict (Cunningham, 2003). I conclude that the descriptions provided by the six administrators of their own actions and the observations and perceptions of the cultural community liaisons presented little evidence of cultural knowledge used to inform decision-making in the actions of the selected administrators in this study.

Training

Training for administrators would be a means of supporting administrators’ culturally responsive conflict management. I remind the reader that based on the definition of culture used in this research, there is no such thing as complete cultural knowledge (Lindsey et al, 2003). Culture is fluid, and for this reason, training in Cultural
Proficiency must be an ongoing process (Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Leigh, 1998; Lynch and Hanson, 1988). The 6 administrators interviewed in this study were asked what formal training they felt had supported their practice. Their responses are listed in the following chart.

Table 4.1 Administrators’ Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Administrator Participants (6 in total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Training – 2.5 days workshop</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Coaching – 2.5 day workshop</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in Cognitive Behaviour</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits – 1 day workshop training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the school board where this study was conducted, Cultural Proficiency workshops are provided. At the time of this research, a one day workshop was required for all administrators in the school board. None of the administrators interviewed identified Cultural Proficiency training provided by the board as having impacted their conflict management practice. I would infer the reason to be that the Cultural Proficiency training offered is not explicitly linked with administrators’ conflict management practice. Were conflict management and cultural proficiency packaged together in the training, these administrators may have clearly seen how cultural proficiency operates as an aspect of their conflict management practice. At the time of this research, the school board in which this study was conducted offered a 3 day training session in Alternative Dispute Resolution training that included attention to culture as a component of the training. However, the training was not required to be taken by administrators and it cost
approximately $300.00. None of the administrators in this study indicated that they had taken this course.

Five of the six administrators identified having received training in restorative practice that they felt supported their conflict management practice. Their experience was an optional 2.5 day workshop focused on facilitating formal restorative conferences.

Administrator 2 felt that more training in restorative practice was necessary,

The next level of training hasn't happened. It’s still that basic [restorative] conference two day training that exists. But I think it was awesome. That definitely was a great start. So I was glad for that. But I am not feeling rich enough or free enough to go off to the high hierarchy of conference training.

Administrator 2 indicated that further training in restorative practices was available from the International Institute for Restorative Practice (IIRP), but it would come at personal financial cost to travel and cover workshop expenses.

Apart from training in restorative practice, no other formal training was commonly described by the administrator interviewees. Although five administrators had received training in restorative training, only two administrators described using elements of the pedagogy in their own conflict management practice. I explained in the previous chapter that the prescriptive nature of the restorative justice model adopted by this school board may have impeded cultural responsiveness in conflict management by not allowing for deep dialogue. However, some aspects of Restorative Justice theory (for example, its participatory aspect and creation of space for dialogue) appropriately implemented, support culturally responsive practice.

The following chart summarizes other experiences that administrators felt supported their conflict management practice.
Table 4.2 Other experiences of Administrators seen as supporting their Conflict Management Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional and other Experiences</th>
<th>Administrators (6 in total)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Education – teaching qualifications and teaching experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling – teacher qualifications and experience in guidance counselling</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education – teaching qualifications and teaching experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting – mother or father of children</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day to day experience in the role of secondary school administrator</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in a Penitentiary - personal work experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress line – counsellors</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Goldman’s Social and Emotional Intelligence – resources</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The administrator interviewees are seen here to have attributed their conflict management practice to various past or present experiences in working with students or adults. Based on these findings, I conclude that most of these administrators perceived their practice as being primarily supported by their personal experiences, and restorative practice training provided by the board. Additionally these administrators do not attribute their practice to any explicit culturally proficient, conflict management training likely because this training is not required in this school board or made easily accessible. Lack of adequate training is cited as a barrier to cultural proficient management practice (Cunningham, 2003). The absence of accessible training that explicitly addresses cultural responsiveness in conflict management may account for the lack of cultural responsiveness identified in the conflict management practices of the administrator participants in this study.
Engaging Participants as Supports in Conflict Management

I previously concluded that in culturally responsive conflict management, the administrators appeared to be willing to learn from the disputants. In demonstrating this relationship-building action, the administrators engaged with the disputants and parents in an effort to gain cultural knowledge and understanding. In this participatory approach to conflict management, parents and other stakeholders may be able to support the administrators learning in the conflict management process. The engagement of parents and other stakeholders is supported in restorative justice theories (Johnston and Ness, 2007; International Institute for Restorative Practice, 2009). Other stakeholders are invited into the conference to support the learning of disputants relative to the extent of the harm, and to work collectively in deciding what needs to be done to repair the harm.

In the previous chapter, I concluded from my findings that parents were generally not invited to participate in the conflict management processes according to the descriptions provided by most of the research participants. In general, they were contacted after the administrators had investigated and made a decision relative to the consequence to their child. I illustrated how this relegation to a peripheral role seemed to contribute to the angry response of some parents. In only two of the twelve conflicts shared by the administrator participants, was a parent invited to be a part of the process. In one of those two incidents, the victim’s mother was included in the conference and not the parents of the aggressors. Student 2, described her father as a source of support, yet he was never invited by administrators to participate in her conflicts. When her father chose to become involved, Student 2 described her father’s participation as being unwelcomed by the administrators. When disciplined for not eating in the cafeteria, she indicated that her
father told her it was wrong to disrespect the administrators, and he did not contest the
punishment they administered to his daughter. Despite her father having agreed with the
administrators about her behavior, Student 2 felt that her father understood her viewpoint.
Had the administrators invited Student 2’s father into conflict management process, he
may have supported the administrators’ efforts in getting her to recognize the harm done
by her actions. The current Safe Schools Policy [2009] includes consultation with parents
as a necessary action during the investigation process thereby lending support to the
involvement of parents in the conflict management processes.

In the school board in which this study was conducted, cultural community
liaisons assist schools in understanding the backgrounds of students from their respective
communities (School Board Pamphlet, 2010). The liaisons in both focus groups
repeatedly suggested that administrators should contact them in conflict situations,
making very clear their willingness to lend support in the management conflicts. They
felt they were able to bridge cultural barriers and provide support to families in ways that
administrators may not be able to do. Administrator 1 invited a cultural community
liaison in to assist her with overcoming language barriers in her restorative conference.
One liaison worker described the reaction she received from an administrator when she
went into the school to lend support,

We help the parent as well as the administrator, because we can give the
administrator insight. We support them. Sometimes, I sense when I go in to
schools that the administrators are suspicious. And that's why I never go without
the administrator calling. Because once I had a parent that called and I went to the
school,
And I gave her (administrator) my card, and I said to myself, ‘Hey, here I am
trying to sell myself here, and I am a board employee’.
She was suspicious because, number one, she didn't call me to come in. …she had
a suspicion that the parent was complaining to somebody. And here I was a
[visible minority]…so maybe there was some collusion going on, like a lawyer,
even though I said that I was a board employee. She was always suspicious. That was the principal, and any time after that when I went back I dealt with the VP.

The liaison felt that she was greeted with skepticism by the administrator. Collectively, the liaisons felt that more needed to be done relative to the school board’s communication to administrators about the role of cultural liaisons. They felt that they were often perceived by administrators as mere translators. In both discussion sessions, the cultural liaisons said that they were willing to support administrators’ in their conflict management practice thereby assisting with cultural barriers likely to be present in the cross-cultural interaction between administrators, disputants and their families. Participation of the liaisons would likely support administrators’ responsiveness to culture in their conflict management practice.

In addition to employing the assistance of cultural community liaisons, there were other ways that administrators appeared to support their own culturally proficient conflict management practice. Most of these strategies involved the recruitment of other participants. Administrator 1 brought in a number of individuals to assist her in the restorative conference held for the girls involved in the fight. A restorative practice expert was consulted for assistance with the conference, teachers were consulted for translation, another administrator assisted in the initial questioning of the girls, and a community person participated in the conference. This administrator did not elaborate on why she chose to bring in a community person. From my personal experience, and understanding of the restorative pedagogy, I would infer that the community person was invited to share their perception of how the girls’ actions impacted him/her as a member of the school’s community.
In support of her own conflict management practice, Administrator 2 was actively building a conflict management team in her school with a focus on restorative practices. She had the following to say about why and how she was creating a team.

So I'm trying to do that gradual release of responsibility, because these processes take time and I would say the most recent conflict, the intake I did with my child youth worker and one of my guidance counselors, and it was one of the best restorative conferences that I ever facilitated. I wanted to do the intake so that I knew that the intake was done well. Then the conversation is just a beautiful, beautiful thing.

Administrator 2 indicated that building a team will help to address the issue of time that was perceived as an impediment by most of the administrators to participatory conflict management. She also indicated that the assistance of the school’s Youth and Child Care Worker permitted for follow up support to the disputants after the conflict. Administrator 2 recognized that conflict management did not have to be solely her responsibility. She provided the staff with opportunities to be mentored in participatory conflict management practices.

I have shown in the descriptions of some administrators’ practice in this school board that other stakeholders such as parents, board experts, and cultural liaisons were invited into the management process and provided support to the administrator. However, it was suggested by the cultural liaisons, that most administrators did not fully appreciate the liaisons’ role in supporting culturally responsive conflict management practice, nor do most administrators avail themselves of this support. Additionally, I concluded in the previous chapter that most administrators in this study appeared reluctant to invite parents into their conflict management practice, and in doing so may not be availing themselves of the support parents may be able to lend in administrators’ acquisition of cultural knowledge. Additionally, parents are possibly being denied opportunity to learn about
differences and build relationships.

_Time as a Factor Shaping Conflict Management of Secondary School Administrators_

Of the barriers identified by the administrator participants, the most commonly-mentioned challenge to the use of participatory conflict management practices was time. In particular, the scarcity of time was perceived as a barrier to their use of restorative conferencing. Administrator 1 explains:

> The amount of time dedicated to a restorative conference is huge. There is so much involved with it and it makes it very difficult to put on. Unless you're really committed to doing it and feeling that is absolutely the right way to go, you won't, because there's so much that has to be invested. And administration now is deadly when it comes to expectations on us. We are no longer just the administrator, we are everything to everyone.

In restorative conferencing practice, after the initial investigation is completed and all participants have agreed to try to resolve the matter by coming together in a meeting, all participants must be formally prepared individually before the conference can take place. If the conference involves a large number of people, this takes considerably more time. Administrator 1 said, “...you have to really believe in restorative practise if you are going to commit the time to doing it properly.” Administrator 2 shared this opinion and further suggested that time taken to use this alternative approach negatively impacted colleagues.

> I think the pace of the day-to-day. If you as the administrator are trying to do all the restorative conferencing in the building, then people are going to get cheesed off because you're either going to have to postpone a conference because an even more pressing emergency has come up or people are going to find that you are unavailable because it all takes time. It really takes time.

Administrator 2’s opinion is that colleagues may not appreciate it when one administrator is shut up for lengthy periods dealing with one incident. Administrator 2 mentioned that her principal made the following statement about the time she spent managing conflicts:

> …the principal here always warns me that we need to deal with conflicts in a
timely manner. He said that we don't have weeks to do this. So, as we start to get more and more names into it, consequence the ones you have. I of course want to make sure that the consequences were for the right reasons and that the consequence is a natural consequence to the action.

The recommendation made by the principal was to consequence the disputants she already had and not seek out others that may have been involved. Two other administrator interviewees also highlighted the rigors of their role, suggesting that a lack of time influenced their choice of management approaches. The general consensus of the administrator participants was that scarcity of time was perceived as an impediment to the use of alternative participatory conflict management practices. This perceived impediment is consistent with McCluskey et al’s (2008) research findings in that the responsibilities of the administrators in UK schools, combined with the size of the school posed a barrier to the use of alternative participatory approaches to conflict management. Based on my personal experience, I would concur with this opinion and further suggest that this opinion is shared by most of my administrator colleagues. It may also help explain the disparity that appears to exist between administrators’ liking of alternative approaches and their continued use of traditional punitive, non-participatory actions. In the previous chapter, I illustrated that some of these administrators suspended and recommended expulsions even though they perceived a lack of effectiveness with punitive approaches. The fact is, it takes less time to suspend students than it does to implement alternative participatory approaches such as restorative conferencing, and this reality likely contributes to the administrators’ actions.

Administrator 2 responded to the scarcity of time by using a team approach in her conflict management. She explained that her team approach was intended to reduce the amount of time that she personally has to spend managing conflicts. Additionally, despite
the instruction from her principal to not spend too much time on conflict management, she shared this opinion on her use of time:

I know I've said it each time, but it's the thoroughness of the intake and you have to balance timeliness with that. Because at the same time you don't want conflicts to be just left there unexamined. So that's pretty hard because kids just don't say well this is how it is and tell the truth. Sometimes you have to probe a little bit.

In Administrator 2’s opinion, to have not taken the time with the incident would have compromised the thoroughness of her investigation. In this particular conflict, she felt that her time had been well spent. Similarly, Administrator 5 chose to take time with incidents.

I take the time because I think it needs the time. I told this to somebody yesterday, ‘We can be efficient with things, but we can’t be efficient with people’. And I believe that. If that means I take longer to work through a conflict, then I take longer.

In the opinion of Administrator 2 and 5, time was a resource to effective conflict management rather than an impediment. Morrison (2007) supports this idea suggesting that in reality, responses to conflict that do not address the root causes of problems, perpetuate the problem. Not taking the time to properly address the issue initially, results in more time being wasted in the long term.

Board and Ministry Policies as Factors in Conflict Management

Another factor perceived by the administrator interviewees as a barrier to conflict management practice was School Board and Ministry policies. As described in the previous chapter, some of these administrators perceived punitive consequences as obligatory. These perceptions were likely the residual affect of previous zero tolerance policies (Safe Schools Act, 2000) that mandated suspensions and expulsion for specific acts. In 2008, the Safe Schools Act changed (Education Amendment Act, 2007) to
require administrators and school board personnel to consider other factors when
deciding whether to suspend and/or expel. At the time of this research, disciplinary
measures are to be applied within a framework that shifts the focus from solely punitive
to both corrective and supportive (Ontario Ministry of Education, *Caring and Safe
Schools in Ontario*, 2010). The shift had been communicated to administrators in the
school board where this study was conducted, through presentations and on-line
mandatory training modules.

Even though current provincial policies recommend alternative approaches, two
administrator participants expressed the view that recent policies aimed at reducing
suspensions have caused administrators to feel pressured to not suspend or expel. The
opinions of these administrators are similar to those encountered in McCluskey’s et al.’s
(2008) research of UK schools. Despite the attempt to move to alternative approaches,
there remained widespread belief among administrators that public punishment as a
viable deterrent still held widespread support. Although in this study only two of the six
administrator interviewees expressed this view of the new Safe Schools policy,
suspensions were still seen to be prevalent in the conflict management approaches of the
selected administrators in this study, suggesting that the changes to the Safe School’s
Policy had not resulted in any large scale shift to alternative approaches in the practice of
these administrators.

*Student Perceptions of Prejudice on the part of administrators*

What student interviewees perceived as problematic in administrators’ conflict
management practice was very different from what the administrator interviewees
perceived. Students described perceived prejudice, lack of fairness, stereotyping and an
abuse of power in the conflict management practice of the administrators with whom they interacted.

All four student interviewees perceived prejudice in the actions of their administrator. Student 1 felt that he was prejudged by his administrator.

They [administrators] already know me as a… you know… a trouble making guy. So, if anything happens then, I’m automatically looked at. There have been times in school even when I knew nothing happened and they would call me down and ask me what’s up because they know I am probably affiliated, I know these people, but then I don’t know…

In the perception of Student 1, his interaction with the administration was shaped by the negative image he felt they had of him. The student further described what he perceived as the administrator’s racial prejudice against students of his ethno-cultural background.

…in the school system, especially in this school, most [ethno-cultural descriptor] kids are known to have a history of not doing so well. …So because of that and the fact that I am [ethno-cultural descriptor]; they are going to be looking at me. …there was another time when there was some people drinking at a school that was by here. And what happened, like every weekend there would be bottles from the drinking and stuff. And what happened was the principal came to this school automatically they called every single [ethno-cultural descriptor] kid that went to that school and they called them …they thought it was them, only the [South-Asian] kids. Every [South-Asian] kid, they called them down. Three of them don’t even drink.

Throughout his high school experience, Student 1 had operated within the belief that the administrator was prejudiced towards boys of his ethno-cultural background. Similarly, Student 2 felt that her past experience and reputation influenced the way the administration treated her. Student 4 held the same feeling about how he was seen by his administrator. He describes himself as being known by administration when he first arrived in grade 9. He felt that his older brother’s poor reputation caused the administrators to prejudice him. Student 3 suggested that administrators favored athletes and students they were familiar with and they took a greater interest in these students.
This student was accused of stealing a cell phone. Although not suspended, he was kicked off the basketball team. He was later reinstated. It is not clear as to whether he considers himself as having received preferential treatment because he was a basketball player. All four of the students interviewed felt they were prejudged, stereotyped or treated inequitably by their administrators.

The descriptions of administrators’ actions provided by administrators themselves and cultural liaisons seemed to substantiate the students’ perception of prejudice and stereotyping. As discussed in the previous chapter, the cultural liaisons felt that administrators brought culturally-bound assumptions to their management of conflicts. A perception shared by one liaison was that boys of certain backgrounds were perceived by an administrator as belonging to gangs. Another liaison described a situation in which boys who wore faith-based head coverings were unfairly judged by administrators and the police. Administrator 1 provided this description of the boys that were expelled for fighting:

…they tend to hang out in the rotunda and they hang out in a group and they kind of sit there and watch the events that happen within the school. So I could see them being one of those groups that the others would either want to be a part of or not want to mess with because of the way that they look.

Thus, this administrator seemed to perceive these students behaviour as gang-like, but stopped short of saying directly that this was her own perception. She described the students’ motivation in organizing the fight as being about power and controlling their grade, motivations characteristic of gang-style behavior. As suggested in cultural proficiency theories, the perceptions of these administrators are likely filtered through their cultural lenses and a failure to acknowledge this disposition and bias may result in misunderstanding and prejudice (Bucher, 2008; Weinstein et al, 2004).
The cultural community liaisons also said that some students with whom they had worked perceived some administrators’ treatment as unfair. In the conflict that involved an African-Caribbean boy accused by a Caucasian girl of sexual assault, one of the cultural liaisons shared her observations.

...the kids were saying, ‘No, that's not right’. ...And some kids got together who are not really his hangout buddies. They went to the vice-principal who was in the office at the time and said, ‘Sir, that's not right. He did not do anything to her.’ The kids were really upset. They went to the station. ...There were other students who were predominantly Caucasian said this is not right because this was a young man who never gets in trouble...

According to the liaison, the students’ perception of the boy’s treatment in this incident was unjust. The liaison made the point that the attitude of the African-Caribbean students in the school was fuelled by current media incidents impacting this community. She indicated that some of the African-Caribbean girls were voicing the opinion that the school’s administration was always picking on African-Caribbean boys. The cultural community liaison suggested that the cultural experiences of these students had an impact on this incident, heightening the cultural tensions within the school. In the first focus group interview, another liaison worker said that she was often contacted by students with claims of unfair treatment from administrators. Other liaisons appeared to concur with this statement:

But they are saying that the [another ethno-cultural group], the other kids, or of the [a different ethno cultural group] kids are also skipping class or are also late going to class, but the VP or the principal comes out and goes straight to them and the tone is different. They feel singled out. They feel like it's racially motivated. I'm not saying it doesn't exist. It could be there. It is their perception. When a large amount of students are saying that's how they feel maybe there's something to it.
These observations of the cultural community liaisons appear to substantiate the student interviewee’s perceptions of prejudice, stereotyping and inequity in the actions of some of the administrators in this study.

In addition to observing student perceptions, the cultural liaisons claimed to have themselves observed instances of culturally biased prejudgment on the part of administrators. One of the liaisons shared this experience:

...here and there I hear about prejudgment. Like if there is a small group fight and before you even listen to the students or investigate the situation there is already a prejudgment because the kid is from this background or that school. [As though to say,] ‘I know what happened there, I know these kids, they are all in gangs, so probably this is coming here, therefore, it must be a gang too’. Like we don't even know the family background and how the kids behave. But, the mindset is already there to say this must be a gang. Why are you wearing this? So you must be in a gang-- those types of prejudgments.

Interviewer - What makes that prejudgment evident?
Because of the things they say, like “you know all these [South-Asian] boys, and they group together. I know for sure they are gangs”.

Another liaison recalled a teacher’s phrase about a boy that she complained was falling asleep in class, ‘Education is not a priority in that culture’. A third liaison in the same focus group discussion also described an experience of prejudicial treatment:

…in one of our schools there was a sexual abuse in the [ethno-cultural descriptor] community
…there's a generalization and they [administrators] just paint the picture that all the [ethno-cultural descriptor] kids in the school do not know their limits and that they are after the girls. But this is the perception, and they just stereotype. And they think that the entire community is like that. And they come to that conclusion from one incident or two incidents.

Her comments were supported by another liaison who added that she had encountered a statement of prejudice that day. Her interpretation was that some administrators stereotyped communities attaching negative characteristics as “an expression of these people, Like, this is the way this culture is.” The observations shared by the cultural
community liaisons are very dangerous and potentially damaging attitudes. Such attitudes are labeled culturally destructive in cultural proficiency literature (Lindsey et al, 2009). When these attitudes play out in our interactions, they result in deep-rooted negative perceptions of students, parents and communities. It compromises the ability of these administrators to engage in effective cross-cultural interaction and be culturally responsive in conflict management practice.

Perceived Abuse of Power by Administrators in Relation to Marginalized Students and Communities

The abuse of power by administrators was perceived by some student interviewees and cultural community liaisons as a barrier to effective conflict management. The administrator’s abuse of power was described by two student interviewees. Student 1 made the comment, “you know… when a principal’s talking to you, you are sweating and stuff.” He indicated that another boy interrogated by the administrator was coerced into lying. Student 2 views power as being a factor in her interactions with the administrators in her school.

Like my dad is an educated man, the stupidness that they say to me they could never say to him, right. Because if he were born here, with the education that he has, he would be way above the other people in the office right now. Like, he has his PhD. He has all that stuff. He has gone to university… I feel they have to explain to him when he's there. …I feel like with students what they do is they tell you like this is the way it is, and done. Like you can't ask questions. But my dad was there and he asks questions.

The point made by this student is that the involvement of an articulate, confident parent can influence administrators to provide answers relative to conflicts, that they otherwise would not necessarily provide to students. Furthermore, the fact that she mentions her father’s education as a factor in the interaction, in her mind, further balances the
perceived power differential.

This balancing of power resulting in parent involvement in conflicts may help to explain why administrators are reluctant to engage parents in their conflict management processes. Parents may pose a perceived threat to administrators' ability to control the management process and outcome. Influenced by a tradition of systemic privilege, some school personnel may fear to relinquish control (McCluskey et al, 2008). There exists an entrenched belief system that stems from a presumption of entitlement. Discipline is a means through which symbols of power and authority are perpetuated (Noguera, 1995). Because Student 2 is a visible minority and the administrator is white, the power differential can be assumed to be greater than it might be for a white student in a similar interaction. Most students, perhaps especially those visible minority and poorer students who tend to be disproportionately punished, could not count on having a parent of equivalent social status and confidence to a school administrator. Sometimes cultural community liaisons or other advocates can help to bridge that inequity gap, but not always.

The cultural community liaison workers spoke of their communities as being negatively affected by their lack of power in a Canadian society. A number of comments were made in both discussion forums. I have selected the following three statements to illustrate this idea.

The [ethno cultural descriptor] community is a disempowered community. It is a community that will be quiet. A community that will be submissive and consequently a community that you sometimes take for granted that due diligence doesn't have to be completely to the ‘T’ because no one is going to stir anything up.
And the thing is, we're talking about a newcomer community where they obey the teachers. Whatever the teachers say, the parents won't say anything, they just obey. So when the paper comes home and the students say they need to sign the
paper. The parents will sign it. They can't read it, but they sign it because it's from their child's school so they have to sign it.
You have to be a strong articulate or Canadian raised parent to say anything. Many of these kids don't end up coming to us.

Comments such as these reflected the shared belief of the cultural community liaisons that the communities they served felt disempowered and as a result, the parents tended not to challenge perceived inequitable treatment by teachers or administration. “Power can affect whether an open and honest discussion of conflict or differences is even possible” (Bucher 2008 p.157). Prejudice and the abuse of power by administrators, as described in the perceptions of the student interviewees and the cultural community liaisons, likely impeded the cultural responsiveness of some of these administrators in their conflict management practice.

Summary

In my analysis of the selected administrators’ actions in this study, I have discussed characteristics of the administrators’ cross-cultural interaction with students and parents that appeared to assist or impede relationship building and effective cross-cultural interaction. I have concluded in this examination that the nature of the pre-existing relationship and/or the relationship building actions of the administrator during the conflict management, likely influenced the disputants’ willingness to participate and be truthful in the conflict management process. I have showed that when the administrators demonstrated their willingness to learn, actively listen, show care and compassion, and create space for dialogue, this seemed to support their effective cross-cultural interaction with students and their parents. As discussed in the previous chapter, the opinion of cultural community liaisons that aligns with recommendations in professional literature is that the administrators should acknowledge that the disputants
and their parents are coming to the conflict from a cultural context that the administrator may know very little about. Some student interviewees and cultural community liaisons perceived prejudice and inequities in the actions of administrators. Factors such as these form barriers to culturally responsive conflict management. In contrast, positive relationships, allocating time, appropriate training, and enlisting the support of other stakeholders were identified as possible responses to the perceived challenges of participatory conflict management approaches. Although this analysis does not exhaust the complexities of conflict management, I have sought to consider conflict management practices relative to the literature reviewed on conflict and culture. A limitation of this study was that the sample of participants was very small and I thus make no attempt to generalize. I simply seek to present what was seen in this investigation in hopes of connecting with personal experiences and practices of administrators and those in senior management that seek to support this aspect of a secondary school administrator’s role. In the next chapter I will conclude my findings relative to this investigation and discuss possible implications of this research.
Chapter 5 Conclusion

This thesis research has examined the conflict management approaches of a small number of secondary school administrators in one south-central Ontario school board whose communities have considerable cultural diversity. Scholars and professionals argue that current conflict management practice in Canadian schools needs to become less rigidly punitive and more culturally responsive. Ontario Ministry of Education and school board policies are moving away from strictly punishment-based zero-tolerance policies toward policies that grant greater flexibility to administrators and allow them to consider alternatives to traditional punitive approaches (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). Scholarly and professional literature in conflict management recommends that administrators’ approaches reflect the varied worldviews and backgrounds of diverse student disputants (Cunningham, 2003; LeBaron, 2003, Ross, 1993). Most of the conflict management literature available in North America reflects Western cultural assumptions and does not take into account other cultural lenses. This important claim is supported by the findings of research conducted by the UVic Institute for Dispute Resolution (Duryea 1994), which indicated that methods of conflict resolution in the Canadian system of education were inherently culturally biased. This claim is also supported by the more recent investigation conducted by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2000).

Currently in Ontario, disproportionate numbers of visible minorities and other marginalized students are suspended and expelled. Equity theories and policies are beginning to encourage educators to closely examine a range of pedagogical and discipline practices, in hopes of creating school environments that are more welcoming,
supportive, and that cater to the needs of all students. Conflict resolution practices must form part of that transformation towards more culturally responsive schooling. A substantial part of the high school administrator’s role involves discipline and managing student conflicts. This thesis research has examined a few administrators’ conflict management practices from multiple stakeholders’ perspectives, in hopes of providing insights and recommendations for improvement in this direction.

In the literature review chapter, I established that culture is a critical aspect of conflict and conflict management. Culture helps to explain how and why individuals respond to different situations (LeBaron, 2003). Culture includes norms for appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Culture is fluid as individuals move through various contexts in their day-to-day lives (Bucher, 2008; Duryea, 1994). For this reason, understanding the culture of any individual or group requires ongoing learning.

I have used cultural proficiency as a framework for analysis of the conflict management practices of high school administrators. Being culturally proficient requires the application of a particular set of knowledge, behavior attributes, and skills in cross-cultural interactions (Bucher, 2008; LeBaron, 2003; Lindsey et. al. 2008). An educator’s cultural proficiency is made up of an understanding of their own culture and cultural lenses, an appreciation of the cultural lenses of others, and an awareness of the various fluid cultures of others. The behaviours that characterize a culturally responsive individual are a willingness to learn, and a demonstration of empathy, sensitivity and respect for others. Culturally responsive skills include effective verbal and non-verbal communication with others. Based on the findings of this study, culturally proficient conflict managers seem to understand their own cultural lenses, biases and perceptions,
and are willing to learn from, with and about students from backgrounds different from
their own in an effort to appreciate and understand different cultural perspectives.
Learning from disputants is facilitated by the administrator’s use of participatory conflict
management approaches: allowing for the participation of disputants in the resolution
process grants them voice, and provides space for all parties to learn about each other.
This thesis has shown how some of these attributes were evident at times, in the conflict
management practice of some secondary school administrators described in this study
and thereby has made more explicit what culturally responsive conflict management can
look like in secondary schools.

The research was conducted in a south central Ontario school board with a diverse
student population. The research was designed to address the following questions,

1) According to the perspectives of students, cultural liaisons and administrators
themselves, in what range of ways did certain administrators in one school board
handle student conflicts?

2) How were these conflict management actions responsive (and unresponsive) to
cultural differences?

A qualitative method was used to conduct the inquiry. The participants included six
secondary school administrators, four students (who attended different schools from the
administrators interviewed), and seven cultural community liaison workers. The study
used semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews with this small sample
of participants. The questions used in the semi-structured interviews and focus group
interviews were designed to elicit descriptions of specific administrators’ behaviors in
managing conflicts with students, and personal understandings and experiences of the
participants. Six administrator participants were each asked to describe two student
conflicts that they had managed. They were asked to try to select conflicts in which the
backgrounds of the student disputants were different from their own backgrounds to
ensure the likelihood of cross-cultural interaction. Four semi-structured interviews with
students were conducted individually (none chose to bring a friend). Two focus group
interviews were held (on different dates to accommodate their schedules) with cultural
community liaison workers. Four cultural community liaison workers participated in the
first focus group and three in the second.

In response to my interview question on training and experiences that they felt
had influenced their conflict management practice, none of the six administrators
interviewed described having attended the school board’s cultural proficiency training,
although one of the board’s superintendents had indicated that this training was then
listed as mandatory for new administrators, and training had been recently provided to
select school administration teams. None of the administrator interviewees in this study
described themselves as having participated in that training.

Before conducting the study, I met with one of the school board’s superintendents
to vet the research plan. This superintendent assisted with the identification of potential
school sites with significant newcomer population and student diversity. Guidance
counselors from two different schools assisted with the recruitment of student
participants. Student interviewees were visible minorities and/or immigrants, age 15 and
over, who had been involved in at least one conflict at school that had been handled by
one or more administrators. The research plan was also vetted with the coordinator of the
school board’s cultural community services department before liaison participants were
recruited, and another superintendent provided me with copies of cultural proficiency training documents.

All individual and focus group interviews were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. The data were aggregated to ensure the confidentiality of participants and their schools.

Administrators described in this study used a variety of practices in managing conflicts with students. I categorized these practices as follows: questioning (about basic facts of the incidents), facilitated meetings, restorative conferences, suspensions and expulsions. I identified relationship-building as an important theme that distinguished culturally responsive actions from culturally unresponsive actions of administrators in conflict incidents. My research showed that, in conflicts where interviews offered more evidence of relationship-building actions on the part of the administrator, their interaction with disputants and their parents was generally more positive, whereas in interactions in which administrators, disputants, and/or cultural liaison workers described fewer or no relationship-building actions, stakeholders viewed those interactions as less positive and less culturally responsive. The relationship building actions of the administrators in this study were: 1) showing willingness to learn about the disputants, 2) attempting to establish trust, 3) creating opportunities for disputants’ stories to be shared and understood, 4) communicating effectively, and 5) demonstrating care and compassion. These relationship-building actions align with the key tenets of cultural proficiency theories. Therefore, the findings of this study support and illustrate the feasibility and usefulness of cultural responsiveness in school administrators’ management of conflict with students.
The six administrator interviewees said they knew student disputants to varying degrees, although the four student interviewees did not feel that the (different) administrators in their own experiences had known them well. The six administrator participants enacted elements of cultural responsiveness to varying degrees. Administrators 2 and 3 demonstrated willingness to learn about the students, by describing knowledge they had gained about them in the conflict management process. For example, despite a female student’s initial resistance, Administrator 3 remained persistent in her effort to communicate with this student who had struggled with adult relationships within the school setting. Administrator 3 demonstrated her ability to listen by reporting the additional information this student had disclosed about her background and experiences. Administrator 2 placed an emphasis on establishing the trust of her students and parents. In the scenarios they described in interviews, administrators 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 apparently created some space for dialogue by bringing disputants together.

Cultural liaison workers also described two similar patterns of action by administrators. Student 4 described evidence of care and compassion in the actions of an administrator, when his principal showed leniency by choosing not to suspend him for fighting on the first day of school. While the actions of Administrators 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6, described in the preceding chapters, provide some isolated examples of single characteristics of cultural proficiency, I would not describe these administrators’ conflict management practices in general as culturally proficient.

The actions of Administrator 2 provide the only exception to the above pattern. All of the characteristics of culturally responsive relationship-building were evidenced (to varying degrees) in the conflict management practices she described in the interview:
thus this administrator’s stories provide an illustration of cultural responsiveness in conflict management. Evident in the described actions of Administrator 2 was her willingness to learn. She described her attention to verbal and non-verbal communication and her efforts in creating a welcoming environment conducive to deeper conversations with the student disputants. As a learner in these conversations, she gained knowledge about disputants, parents and cultural contexts. Administrator 2 described taking time to thoroughly collect information and gain the trust of the students and their parents. She demonstrated her care for the students and parents through her willingness to learn and take time to listen and create opportunities for disputants to hear each other. In the context of the evidence collected in this study, Administrator 2’s actions provide the most consistent example of what cultural proficiency looks like in practice. I refer to this picture of cultural responsiveness, provided in the actions of Administrator 2, as a comparator to help to frame my conclusions about how and why the conflict management actions of the various administrators in this study were or were not culturally responsive.

**Questioning**

In most incidents described by student and administrator interviewees, questioning was used by administrators for the primary purpose of finding out basic details about the conflict incidents (who did what). One student interviewee described an administrator’s questioning as interrogatory, and the three other student interviewees also perceived administrators’ questioning as negative and non-inclusive. The four student interviewees described negative feelings about this treatment, such as fear, intimidation, or being made to feel inferior. In contrast, culturally responsive questioning extends beyond incident fact-finding. As described in the actions of Administrator 2, the
investigative process provided opportunities for her to learn with and from disputants. Questioning by a culturally responsive administrator is characterized by care, compassion, interest and a sincere desire to understand the context and reasons for disputants’ behaviour (Bucher, 2008). The administrator communicates this desire to learn from and about disputants, verbally and non-verbally, in their interactions with the students (and other stakeholders such as parents or teachers). Cultural liaison workers who participated in the focus group interviews perceived a lack of cultural knowledge on the part of most administrators, most of the time. Administrators’ desire to understand through diverse student disputants’ lenses would drive them to ask questions that dig deeper in search of cultural knowledge. This intent to understand would characterize their questioning and would also promote other culturally-responsive relationship-building attributes (respect, interest, desire to learn, active listening) in the interactions between the administrator and the parties to the conflicts. Therefore, the practice of questioning by a culturally proficient administrator looks and feels very different from a non-culturally responsive, criminal-like interrogation.

It is in the investigative stage of the conflict management process that administrators could (but often don’t) gain cultural knowledge to inform their subsequent actions in the conflict management. Administrator 2 used her knowledge of the victim’s mother’s history, and experience with police, to support her decision-making around police involvement in the incident. She was cognizant of the negative impact that police involvement may have had on this mother. Based on this knowledge, she worked to first gain the mother’s trust and then addressed her apprehensions, and finally, she supported the mother by assisting her to contact and communicate with the police. Additionally,
having learned of the relationship that had existed between the 18 year old victim and his mother, Administrator 2 encouraged the victim to allow his mother to participate in the resolution process, recognizing that the mother’s participation would have helped to alleviate the mother’s own fears for her son’s future safety in the school. The cultural knowledge that Administrator 2 appeared to have gained in her initial questioning of participants in this conflict seemed to facilitate subsequent culturally responsive actions, and to support positive relationship-building with and between the stakeholders in this conflict. One way to explain Administrator 2’s approach was that she shifted her cultural lens, in order to recognize and respond to the other parties’ perspectives.

...shifting perspectives helps us to empathize, communicate and connect…nourishes relationships, improves cross-cultural teamwork and communication…deepens our understanding of issues, improves decision-making ability, and allows us to adapt to cultural differences much more effectively. (Bucher, 2008, p.124)

Thus, the relationship-building and decision-making actions of Administrator 2 appeared to illustrate cultural responsiveness, and to support theoretical claims that culturally responsive approaches are more effective than traditional authoritarian approaches in handling conflict.

One limitation of this research is that the administrator interviews did not permit deeper investigation into important conflict management details, such as the type and wording of Administrator 2’s questions that assisted her in eliciting the disputants’ stories. Further, there is no corroborating evidence from other stakeholders, who might see administrators’ behaviour in each specific conflict somewhat differently than did the administrator her/himself. Future research, using a different methodological approach
such as case studies to collect such detailed and multi-perspective data, would be valuable.

**Facilitated Meetings**

Administrators facilitated meetings between disputants, for the purpose of conflict resolution, in ten of thirty four conflict incidents described in this study. In all except one of these instances where such a meeting was used, the administrators and cultural community liaisons described the participants as being pleased with the outcome. These meetings created space for disputants’ voices to be heard. Creating space for multiple stakeholders to share stories permits potential development of empathy and shared understanding among participants, including administrators and disputants (LeBaron, 2003). This action of creating dialogic space is characteristic of cultural responsiveness. In the instances described by the five administrator interviewees that used facilitated meetings and restorative conferences, they said that they had focused meetings on reaching mutual agreement between disputants and restoring relationships between the disputants. At the same time, these administrators’ described objectives in bringing students together stop short of recognizing the larger cross-cultural relationship-building potential of such meetings. In comparison, culturally proficient approaches are intended to facilitate understanding between disputants and an appreciation of difference (Cunningham, 2003, Lindsey et al, 2009). Further, a culturally responsive administrator models, by their actions, how to listen, communicate, and appreciate difference. According to cultural proficiency theory, facilitated meetings should be participatory, and provide opportunity for disputants, parents and administrators themselves to gain new
knowledge that would permit understanding of behaviours and strengthening of relationships among all involved.

**Restorative Conferencing**

A particular kind of facilitated problem-solving meeting, restorative conferencing, was used in five conflicts described by administrators or cultural liaison participants. Five of the administrator interviewees said they had recently received training in restorative conferencing, provided by the school board. One administrator said she did not use restorative approaches despite having been trained. This individual appeared to misunderstand the restorative conferencing approach and its purpose. In contrast, the administrators who did describe having used the conferencing practice felt that the outcomes for the participants had been positive, meaning that positive relationships between disputants appeared to have been restored. Similar to facilitated meetings, restorative conferencing potentially provides space for the sharing of stories and gaining of cultural knowledge. However, the conferencing model being used in this school board, adopted from the International Institute for Restorative Practices, provides scripts and specific, standardized questions with which facilitators are expected to guide the process. In this conferencing model, conversations that would allow for deeper investigation into the root causes of conflicts are likely impeded by the prescriptive nature of the questions and the framework for guiding the interactions of participants, thereby restricting opportunity for culturally responsive dialogue. A key recommendation based on this research is that school boards re-examine this restorative conferencing model, in light of the tenets of cultural responsiveness.
The shared perception of the cultural liaison participants in this research was that the success of particular restorative conferences generally depended on the efforts taken by administrators and/or other conference facilitators to address the cultural perspectives and needs of the conference participants. Collectively, the cultural community liaison workers interviewed appeared to believe that, when they were invited to participate in restorative conferences, they were able to bridge cultural differences and to facilitate better cross-cultural communication with disputants and their families. Administrators’ occasional decisions to include cultural community liaisons both reflected and supported cultural responsiveness. Another recommendation, based on this study, is for administrators to include cultural community liaisons in conflict management processes (including restorative conferences), to help to mitigate the perceived lack of cultural responsiveness in the actions of most administrators in this study.

An impediment frequently described by administrators to their use of restorative conferences was the scarcity of time. Supporting research in this area includes that of McCluskey et al (2008) in schools in the UK. Compared to traditional punitive approaches, restorative conferences usually require more of the administrator’s time (Claassen and Claassen, 2008). For example, administrators (or other school staff) need to prepare each participant individually for the dialogue process, and make preparations for convening a meeting at a time and place convenient for all. Two administrator interviewees suggested that it was important to take the time to properly address student conflicts with alternative participatory approaches (such as facilitated meetings or restorative conferences). As described in preceding chapters, Administrator 2 took time in her conflict management approach, despite the suggestion of her principal that she was
spending too much time in the management of at least one particular conflict. She responded to the scarcity of time by enlisting the support of other staff members. She described her efforts to build the capacity of staff members to assist her in managing conflicts in alternative participatory ways. She likely recognized that time taken (early in the process) to get to the root causes of conflicts would often result in less time being needed for addressing escalated, entrenched conflict problems later on (Morrison, 2007). Shifting the ways these administrators handle the scarcity of time requires a change in their perceptions of the time invested in conflict management in the long term. An implication of this research is that administrators might be more inclined to make greater use of alternative, participatory practices if they were supported to develop strategies to share the time burdens of conflict management, such as the team approach described by Administrator 2.

Although three administrators expressed in the interviews their liking for restorative practices and their perceptions of positive outcomes, two of these administrators actually had not invited parents or other stakeholders into the conflict management processes they described. In the conferences of Administrator 2, only the victim’s mother was present. Administrators’ frequent reluctance to involve parents (or at least, the parents of the ethno-cultural minority students whose conflicts were described in this study) may stem from a number of factors. One factor might be that participatory models have not traditionally formed a part of these administrators’ practice. Administrators may simply be unfamiliar with procedures (or reasons) for including parents as partners in the conflict management process. Another factor may stem from systemic privilege, causing administrators to be unwilling to relinquish control
Professionals and researchers argue that using punitive discipline is a symbol of (as well as reinforcement to) maintaining hierarchical authority (Noguera, 1995). These actions, stemming from Western-oriented belief systems and institutionalized systems of power in Ontario school systems, may impede cultural responsiveness in the conflict management practice of administrators. Without anti-discriminatory education, conflict managers may not recognize the impact of dominant culture on their perceptions and behaviour, thus not understanding the need to be more culturally responsive in their practice (Bucher, 2008; Cunningham, 2003; Lindsey et al, 2009).

Another impediment to administrators inviting parents into the conflict management process may be the negative experiences some administrators have encountered with angry parents, as in the instances described by cultural liaison workers and by Administrators 5 and 6. The anger of parents in these instances appeared to stem from their having learned of the administrator’s punitive actions only after decisions had already been made about consequences for their children. The anger of these parents reflected negative relationships with the respective administrators, possibly as a result of previous negative experiences. The findings of this research suggest that administrators may need to be encouraged and supported to take risks in including and partnering with parents and other stakeholders in their conflict management. Restorative practice, in theory, presents opportunities for mutual understanding and the building of relationships across cultural differences and across diverse stakeholder roles (Lindsey, 2009; McCluskey et al et al, 2008). By not having included parents and other stakeholders, these administrators may have denied both themselves and the other stakeholders the
opportunity to gain understanding and appreciation of differences in others, which could have supported the development of stronger relationships.

In this study, in the few instances in which administrators used restorative conferences as an alternative to traditional punitive practice, the cultural responsiveness of this approach was often apparently impeded by the prescriptive structure of their restorative model, by administrators’ perceptions of a lack of time, and by institutionalized systems of unequal power and privilege. However, the conflict management narratives of Administrator 2 provided examples of how, despite these challenges, one administrator was able to be culturally responsive (and participatory) in her approach to conflict management.

**Suspensions and Expulsions**

In the incidents described in this study, suspensions and expulsions comprised a substantial part of the administrators’ actions in conflict management. In nineteen of the twenty-one conflicts in which administrative conflict management action was described, students were suspended or expelled. Unlike facilitated meetings and restorative conferences, I do not judge administrators’ use of suspension and expulsion in any of the conflict management actions described in this study to be either participatory or culturally responsive. Among the four student interviewees, two of whom were senior students who had experienced numerous conflicts managed by administrators, only one described having been involved in a participatory conflict management approach. Students described themselves, and cultural community liaisons described students and parents, as generally dissatisfied with suspension and expulsion actions. In contrast to the perceived positive outcomes of alternative approaches described by administrators and cultural
liaisons, students described the actions of their administrators as unfair and as characterized by prejudice and abuse of power. Cultural liaisons generally supported students’ perceptions, naming poor communication and prejudice as impediments to administrators’ culturally proficient conflict management. In some instances, the cultural liaisons also described administrators’ lack of communication as fuelling parents’ perceptions of (administrator) prejudice and mismanagement.

Administrator interviewees 1, 3 and 6 provided justifications for suspension and expulsion, despite the reported better outcomes of participatory approaches provided by themselves and other administrator interviewees. In three of the five situations in which restorative conferences were used, administrators also issued suspensions. The reasons these three administrators provided for these actions were that punitive responses were “necessary” consequences for persistent student behaviours, that some behaviours required punitive responses, and that (they believed, incorrectly) the Safe Schools polices required that they suspend or expel in certain circumstances. The statements of three of the administrator interviewees presented a disparity between their acts of suspensions and expulsion and their own beliefs about these actions. Two administrator interviewees argued that students did not learn from these punitive consequences; in addition, Administrator 5 described having recommended an expulsion despite feeling that the student should not have been expelled. Even in the presence of conflicting personal beliefs, these three administrators described feeling obliged to suspend or expel. This reflects their misconception of current Ontario and school board Safe Schools polices: the current policy does not require mandatory suspensions of expulsions, but rather empowers administrators to consider mitigating circumstances and to implement
alternative approaches. These administrators’ misconceptions of Ministry and school board policies pose another barrier to adoption of participatory, culturally responsive approaches.

**Implications of this Research**

Despite the change in school policies to encourage alternatives to traditional punitive approaches to conflict management, the practice of most of the administrators described in this study did not demonstrate a discernable shift away from punitive practices. When alternative conflict management practices were used, they most often had been added to punitive practices, rather than replacing them. This suggests a need for information dissemination as well as training to support administrators in this transition.

Accessible training provided by this school board for administrators that would explicitly address how to be culturally responsive in conflict management, may help to address the lack of cultural responsiveness generally observed in the conflict management practices of the small sample of administrators in this study. Because culture is dynamic, overlapping and complex, training in culturally responsive conflict management should provide for flexible (rather than narrowly prescriptive) and ongoing learning. Developing the skills required for cultural responsiveness is a fluid, incremental and cumulative process that takes time, lots of work, and practice (Bucher, 2008). Training should allow administrators to constantly examine their cultural lenses, and to identify and examine systemic barriers such as power structures and belief systems in an effort to eliminate these barriers. Training should allow for the identification and utilization of resources, such as parents, cultural community liaison workers, and other partners from various ethno-cultural communities. A focus of the training should be on
facilitating administrators’ learning how to use such partnerships in support of their conflict management practice. As well, training and on-going consultative support should coach administrators in the necessary skills of cross-cultural interaction, and in understanding how openness to, and learning of, new knowledge about students and others in their schools could impact their decision-making in conflict management. Based on the findings of this research, I recommend that school boards consider developing and delivering such training to support their administrators’ culturally responsive conflict management practices.

One limitation of this research is the small size of its sample. The number of interviewees was limited to seventeen participants. At the same time, this research informs and opens the door for eventual larger studies in this area.

In this study, the conflict management practices of selected administrators in one south-central Ontario school board were generally found to be inconsistent with the constructs of cultural proficiency in research literature. With the exception of one administrator, most of the administrators interviewed, and described in other stakeholders’ interviews, did not appear to demonstrate evidence of consistent culturally responsive actions in their management of conflicts involving students. Challenges posed by institutionalized barriers such as misconceptions and adherence to traditional punitive practices and belief systems, and other factors such as scarcity of time and training, continue to impede the implementation of culturally responsive patterns in administrators’ conflict management. At the same time, the actions of Administrator 2 provide a picture of what attention to culture could look like in secondary school administrators’ conflict management. This image offers support and hope for a
proliferation of such patterns of action. When educators adopt a culturally responsive mindset, they filter their perceptions of actions, contexts, and stakeholders, to allow for greater understanding and more effective interaction with others different from themselves (Bucher, 2008; Cunningham, 2003; Lindsey et al 2009).

This research provides empirical data in an area where there had been a lack of such research. Although some research exists in the area of cultural responsiveness in classroom management, clearly, in light of the number of marginalized students who continue to be suspended and expelled, there is a need to closely examine the conflict management practices of administrators in order to address inequities and better attend to the diverse realities of Ontario students. The findings of this research thus provide guidance to inform individual administrators’ as well as school boards’ practices, and thereby propel efforts to address barriers to constructive cross-cultural interaction with students and parents in conflict situations. Based on the findings of this research, senior school board personnel might consider continuing to encourage (and refine) administrators’ use of alternative participatory conflict management approaches, by providing mandatory conflict management training programs with an explicit focus on cultural responsiveness. Inclusive schools are not those in which difference is merely tolerated; rather, they are environments in which school leaders and other stakeholders welcome and actively seek to learn about difference. Initiatives to develop and transform the conflict management practices of secondary school administrators will further this school board’s, and other educators’, efforts in making their schools more inclusive environments for their increasingly diverse communities.
Appendix A: Information Letter

Research Title: Attention to Culture: Participatory Conflict Management Practices of Secondary School Administrators

My name is Rose Walker and I am a graduate student completing my Masters with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I am inviting you to participate in my research and requesting that you please take time to read the summary provided and contact me should you have any questions.

Research Objectives
This thesis examines the conflict management practice of secondary school administrators in a south-central Ontario school board in an effort to answer the following questions:
1. a) In what range of ways are administrators handling student conflicts?
   b) How do these actions reflect and contradict cultural proficiency?
2) What are the interpretations and perspectives of selected students (who have participated in conflict management with an administrator), community liaisons, and administrators, of the meanings of these actions?

Research literature on conflict management recommends change to practice away from predominantly Western approaches to approaches that reflect the varied worldviews and backgrounds of disputants in increasingly diverse North America communities. Studies conducted in Canada report that traditional non-participatory management approaches use punitive measures that do not address root causes of the conflicts or attend to the cultures and backgrounds of students. The attention of educational stakeholders has been drawn to school practices due to the disproportionate numbers of marginalized students suspended and expelled. In Ontario, as numbers of immigrant students continue to grow, school boards are examining practices to ensure inclusivity and consideration of different ethnicities. This research study uses the theoretical framework of cultural proficiency to examine the conflict management practice of secondary school administrators, intending to make more explicit what culturally proficient conflict management practice looks like.

Rationale
This research will support school board initiatives around culturally sensitive practice. These findings will inform conflict resolution practice in schools, possibly propelling further change in the conflict management practice of administrators. In providing school board personnel and educational stakeholders with a clearer picture of culturally sensitive, conflict management practice, this study responds to their request for culturally sensitive educational practices.
Additionally, this research will provide the empirical data to support or contradict the theoretical claims of cultural proficiency. There is substantial theoretical literature on cultural proficiency, but no identified empirical data to support or refute these claims. This research may make a theoretical and professional contribution to educational practice by combining the concepts of cultural proficiency and conflict management in its investigation. Much research around cultural proficiency is devoted to classroom practice
but, little exists in the examination of administrators’ conflict management practice. Therefore, this study will contribute to an area of research that is lacking.

**Methodology**
The study uses interviews, a focus group, and document analysis to examine the conflict management practice of administrators (the range of ways they handle conflict, and how these actions reflect or contradict cultural proficiency), and the perspectives of students, cultural community liaisons, and the administrators themselves about the implications of those conflict management actions. It is hoped that participants will share these descriptions through semi-structured interviews or focus group interviews. Should you be interested in being a participant, please contact me at 904-773-0040 or by email,

**Consent to Participate**
I welcome and look forward to your involvement as a participant in my research, and have attached a consent form that must be signed should you wish to participate.
Appendix B: Consent Letter for Administrator Participants

Researcher: Rose Walker, Graduate Student, OISE, University of Toronto
Research Supervisor: Kathy Bickmore, Professor, OISE, University of Toronto
Email: k.bickmore@utoronto.ca

Dear Administrator,

This letter is to invite your participation in my Masters thesis research entitled ‘Attention to Culture: Participatory Conflict Management Practices of Secondary School Administrators’. This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. a) In what range of ways are administrators handling student conflicts?
   b) How do these actions reflect and contradict cultural proficiency?
   2) What are the interpretations and perspectives of selected students (who have participated in conflict management with an administrator), community liaisons, and administrators, of the meanings of these actions?

I am inviting you to share your reflections, descriptions and understandings of your own conflict management practice. In a semi-structured interview you will be asked to reflect on 2 to 3 personal conflicts. Questions will be asked that will encourage you to reflect on specific incidents, describe in detail actions, conversations, feelings and perceptions. The anticipated timeline for the interview is approximately 60 minutes. Questions will be forwarded to you in advance granting you time to consider them and document your thoughts in advance if you so choose.

Confidentiality
Every effort will be taken to ensure that your participation remains confidential and anonymous. You are free to say anything without fear of repercussion. In my report, I will endeavour to ensure that your responses are not identifiable. Your name or any other personally identifying details will not be used. Where necessary, pseudonyms will be used. No information transcribed from interviews will contain names of school, staff or students.

Conditions for participating
Please note that you are granted the right to withdraw at any point. During the interview, you may decline to answer any question.

Publication of Results
After your participation in the interview, you will have the opportunity to review information. A summary of the interview will be developed to reflect the themes and substance of our discussion. This summary will be shared with you so that you can see
whether the ideas were accurately and fully covered. You will have the opportunity to check and recommend revision to the data collected. Should you be interested in a complete summary of the research findings, they will be mailed to you.

All data gathered from the interview will be securely kept until the research report is completed at which time the data will be destroyed. As well, a copy of the consent form will be kept on locked storage to protect confidentiality.

Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, if you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project. Additionally, should you have any concerns, please contact me directly or my research supervisor.

Sincerely,

Rose Walker

Consent to participate in research conducted by Rose Walker, graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto:

I, ______________________________ agree to participate in this research.

Print name

Signature _________________________ Date ______________________
Appendix C: Consent Letter for Student Participants

Researcher: Rose Walker, Graduate Student, OISE, University of Toronto
Research Supervisor: Kathy Bickmore, Professor, OISE, University of Toronto
Email: k.bickmore@utoronto.ca

Dear Student,

This letter is to invite your participation in my research project entitled ‘Attention to Culture: Participatory Conflict Management Practices of Secondary School Administrators’. The intent of my research is to gather descriptions of secondary school administrators’ conflict management practices. Essentially the research seeks to gather information on how administrators manage student conflicts. As a student, your contribution is important to this research, as your experiences and insights are valuable because students are the ones most directly impacted by these actions. I am inviting your participation in an interview in which you will be asked to describe your understanding, experience and observations relative to the conflict management practice of the administrators in your school.

In a semi-structured interview you will be asked to reflect on 1 or 2 personal conflicts that required the intervention of a principal or vice-principal. Questions will be asked that will require you to reflect on these practices, describe in detail, actions, conversations, feelings and perceptions. The anticipated timeline for the interview is approximately 60 minutes.

In order to be considered as a participant, I am asking that you fulfill the following criteria:

1) Immigrant to Canada or visible minority
2) Senior student aged 16 or older
3) Able to communicate fairly articulately in English
4) Having been involved in one or more conflicts (involving school administrators) within the past year

You are invited to bring a friend to the interview or attend the interview alone. Should you choose to bring a friend, you and your friend will be interviewed as a pair. Your friend need only fulfill numbers 2 and 3 of the criteria. An additional consent form is attached for your friend.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be taken to ensure that your participation remains confidential and anonymous. You are free to say anything without fear of repercussion. In my report, I will endeavour to ensure that your responses are not identifiable. Your name or any other personally identifying details will not be used. No information transcribed from interviews will contain names of school, staff or students.
**Conditions for participating**
Please note that you are granted the right to withdraw at any point. During the interview, you may decline to answer any question. It is my intent to record the interview, however, if or any reason you are not comfortable with the interview being recording, I will not do so.

**Publication of Results**
After your participation in the interview, you will have the opportunity to review information. A summary of the interview will be developed to reflect the themes and substance of our discussion. This summary will be shared with you so that you can see whether the ideas were accurately and fully covered. You will have the opportunity to check and recommend revision to the data collected. Should you be interested in a complete summary of the research findings, they will be mailed to you.

All data gathered from the interview will be securely kept until the research report is completed at which time the data will be destroyed. As well, a copy of copy of the consent form will be kept on locked storage to protect confidentiality.

Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, if you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project. Additionally, should you have any concerns, please contact me directly or my research supervisor.

Please return the completed portion below to _____________________________ in your school’s Guidance Department.

☐ I meet the above 4 criteria.
Please complete Part A if you are 18 or older or Part B if you are under the age of 18.

**Part A**
I, ______________________________ agree to participate in this research.

   Print name

Signature ___________________________  Date ______________________

**Part B** (Parental consent is required if student is under the age of 18.)
I, ______________________________ grant permission for my daughter/son to participate in this research.

Signature ___________________________ Date ______________________
Appendix D: Consent Letter for Community Liaison Participants

Researcher: Rose Walker, Graduate Student, OISE, University of Toronto
Research Supervisor: Kathy Bickmore, Professor, OISE, University of Toronto
Email: k.bickmore@utoronto.ca

Dear Community Liaison,

This letter is to invite your participation in my Masters thesis research entitled ‘Attention to Culture: Participatory Conflict Management Practices of Secondary School Administrators’. This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. a) In what range of ways are administrators handling student conflicts?
   b) How do these actions reflect and contradict cultural proficiency?

2) What are the interpretations and perspectives of selected students (who have participated in conflict management with an administrator), community liaisons, and administrators, of the meanings of these actions?

I am inviting you to share your reflections, understandings and interpretations of conflict management practice of various administrators that you have observed in your schools. In a focus group interview including 4 to five other community liaisons, you will be asked to recall 2 to 3 conflicts with which you are familiar. Questions will be asked that will encourage you to reflect on these incidents, describe in detail, actions, conversations, feelings, perceptions and resulting outcomes. The anticipated timeline for the focus group interview is approximately 60 – 90 minutes.

Confidentiality
Every effort will be taken to ensure that your participation remains confidential and anonymous. You are free to say anything without fear of repercussion. In my report, I will endeavour to ensure that your responses are not identifiable. Your name or any other personally identifying details will not be used. Where necessary, pseudonyms will be used. No information transcribed from interviews will contain names of school, staff or students.

Conditions for participating
Please note that you are granted the right to withdraw at any point. During the interview, you may decline to answer any question.

It is my intent to record the interview, however, if for any reason you are not comfortable with the interview being recording, I will not do so.

Publication of Results
After your participation in the interview, you will have the opportunity to review information. A summary of the interview will be developed to reflect the themes and substance of our discussion. This summary will be shared with you so that you can see whether the ideas were accurately and fully covered. You will have the opportunity to check and recommend revision to the data collected. Should you be interested in a complete summary of the research findings, they will be mailed to you.
All data gathered from the interview will be securely kept until the research report is completed at which time the data will be destroyed. As well, a copy of the consent form will be kept in locked storage to protect confidentiality.

Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, if you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research project. Additionally, should you have any concerns, please contact me directly or my research supervisor.

Sincerely,

Rose Walker

Consent to participate in research conducted by Rose Walker, graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto:

I, __________________________ agree to participate in this research.

Print name

Signature ___________________________ Date ____________________
Appendix E: Administrator Interview Questions

The following questions pertain to your practice in managing student disputes. Please try to speak to 2 or 3 specific instances in which you managed a conflict involving one or more students. Please try to identify instances that vary in any of the following ways:

- time over the span of your career as an administrator
- ethnicity of students involved
- nature of the outcome
- management approach e.g. mediation, suspension,

Confidentiality is important: please do not give real names of students or others involved. Remember that you are welcome to skip any question you would prefer not to answer.

Questions:

1. How long have you been an administrator?

2. How many schools have you worked in as an administrator?

3. How would you describe your ethnicity? E.g. Native American, Canadian, Italian, French/Canadian…

4. Briefly describe two or three conflicts that you have facilitated over the course of your career. For each instance, please include:

   a. Approximately when the instance took place e.g. 3 months ago, 2 years, 5 years etc.

   b. Describe the ethnicity of the students (as you perceived it). Persian. Teacher – African.

   c. Outline your steps in dealing with the matter, such as:
      Questions asked and conversations had with disputants,
      Questions asked and conversations had with any others with whom information was shared or gleaned relative to the dispute. E.g. parents, other students etc.

   d. What information did you learn about students and the conflict from these conversations?

   e. What was the outcome of your intervention? How satisfied were you with this outcome? How satisfied do you believe the student(s) was/were?

What factors might have influenced the manner in which you managed this conflict? E.g. Time, mitigating factors, parents Explain.
5. What are your main objectives in handling conflict? What factors do you see as most important for administrators to consider in conflict management involving students? Why?

6. What trainings, literature, or personal experiences would you say have influenced your approach to conflict management? Describe how?

7. How would you describe your conflict management practice as having evolved over the course of your career as an administrator?

8. What institutional factors do you identify as supporting or impeding your conflict management efforts? (E.g. school or board structures, policies, logistical elements such as time) Explain.

Possible follow-up questions and probes for administrators may include the following;

1. How do you think the student disputants would describe your management style?

2. Probe for nature of interaction with others brought into case e.g. parents
   Sample: In your management of the conflict, you indicated that you contacted ____________. What was your purpose in contacting that individual? What information was gleaned that you felt was useful?

3. You mention that …(specific training or experience) influenced or changed your conflict management approach. How might you have managed a conflict prior to this experience?

4. What aspects, if any, of your practice are you trying to change? Why?
Appendix F: Student Interview Questions:

To student:
1. Think about 2 or 3 conflicts that you have had within about the past year at school, in which an administrator became involved. Briefly describe each conflict; who, what, when where and why?
Confidentiality is important: please do not give real names of administrators or others involved. Remember that you are welcome to skip any question you prefer not to answer.

2. Describe your actions in the conflict.

3. Describe the administrator’s actions, and your interaction with the administrator.

4. During the management of the conflict, what specific actions were taken by the administrator to try and understand your perspectives and the reasons for your behaviour? What questions were asked, and how did you respond?

To friend of student:
If you have been involved in any conflicts requiring intervention of an administrator, try to recall them. If you have not been involved in any conflicts, think of conflicts in which your friends have been involved and describe what they have shared of their experiences.

To the student:
5. How do you feel about how the administrator handled this situation? Why?

6. In your opinion, what actions might have been taken by the administrator in order to better manage your conflict?

To the friend of student:
In your opinion, what actions could be taken by the administrator in order to better manage conflicts?

To the student and the friend of the student:
7. Do you think it would have helped to have anyone else involved? Who and why?

8. Prior to this encounter with the administrator, do you feel the administrator had a clear understanding of who you are relative to your personal identity and cultural background? Please explain.
Appendix G: Focus Group Discussion Questions for Cultural Liaison Workers

Instructions:
- Please be cognizant of all voices in the room, ensuring that all have opportunity to speak.
- Please refrain from using the names of administrators or schools in order to maintain anonymity.
- Recommendation to assist with confidentiality – create code names and keep conflicts organized e.g. Conflict A, B etc.

Questions:
1. Reflect back on 2 to 3 conflicts in your high schools that involved one or more students and the intervention of an administrator.

2. For each incident, please describe what happened and how these conflicts were managed. What actions did you observe of the administrator in each situation?

3. In your opinion, what actions of the administrator contributed to the effective and/or ineffective management of these conflicts? Why?

4. For each incident, do you believe ethnicity, student background, or any other cultural factor played a role in any of the conflicts? How did the administrator address these cultural elements?

5. In your opinion, what are the necessary skills and attributes for attending to student culture in your schools? What advice would you offer to administrators, in their efforts to better attend to culture in student conflicts?

6. What factors do you think support or impede efforts to implement more culturally responsive conflict management practices in schools?

7. In your experience, what has been the perception of parents in the community relative to conflict management practice in their child’s school?
Appendix H: **Letter to Guidance Counsellor**

Date: March 2010

Dear Guidance Counselor,

**RE:** MA Thesis Title: Attention to Culture: Participatory Conflict Management Practices of Secondary Schools Administrators

Institution: OISE, UofT, CTL MA

Supervisor: Kathy Bickmore, Associate Professor (Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development program)

My name is Rose Walker and I am a graduate student completing my Masters with the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. I wish to share my research proposal with you in hopes of seeking your assistance with my recruitment of student participants.

**Research Objectives**

This thesis examines the conflict management practice of secondary school administrators in a south-central Ontario school board in an effort to answer the following questions:

1. a) In what range of ways are administrators handling student conflicts?
   
   b) How do these actions reflect and contradict cultural proficiency?

2) What are the interpretations and perspectives of selected students (who have participated in conflict management with an administrator), community liaisons, and administrators, of the meanings of these actions?

Research literature on conflict management recommends change to practice away from predominantly Western approaches to approaches that reflect the varied worldviews and backgrounds of disputants in increasingly diverse North America communities. Studies conducted in Canada report that traditional non-participatory management approaches use punitive measures that do not address root causes of the conflicts or attend to the cultures and backgrounds of students. The attention of educational stakeholders has been drawn to school practices due to the disproportionate numbers of marginalized students suspended and expelled. In Ontario, as numbers of immigrant students continue to grow, school boards are examining practices to ensure inclusivity and consideration of different ethnicities. This research study uses the theoretical framework of cultural proficiency to examine the conflict management practice of secondary school administrators, intending to make more explicit what culturally proficient conflict management practice looks like.

**Rationale**
This research will support school board initiatives around culturally responsive practice. These findings will inform conflict resolution practice in schools, possibly propelling further change in the conflict management practice of administrators. In providing school board personnel and educational stakeholders with a clearer picture of culturally sensitive, conflict management practice, this study responds to their request for culturally responsive educational practices in our increasingly diverse school communities.

**Role of Guidance Counselors**
In order to recruit student participants, I am asking that you assist me in identifying 2 - 3 students in your school that meet the following criteria:

1) immigrant to Canada
2) senior student aged 16 or older
3) able to communicate fairly articulately in English
4) having been involved in one or more conflicts (involving school administrators) within the past year

When you have identified students that indicate interest, I am asking that you briefly explain the research to them and provide them with consent letters.

I would like to meet with you to further discuss my research proposal and this recruitment plan for student participants. Should you care for more information about the research, please find attached a summary of the research proposal (Appendix B)

Sincerely,

Rose Walker
References


