Abstract

The underachievement of Black high school students in Canada has been well documented over the years. Previous studies have identified these students as lacking engagement in a wide spectrum of subjects. Scholars have proposed that Black teachers are the most effective users of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), which has been found to have a positive impact on the learning outcomes of Black students. This study examined the experiences and practices of Black culturally responsive educators in Toronto. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Toronto Black high school teachers who self-identify as intentionally using CRP when teaching Black students. Interview questions explored participants’ understandings of CRP in the context of Black student experiences of racism, how CRP is reportedly used in their classrooms, their perceptions of Black student engagement, and barriers to these teachers’ continued culturally responsive efforts. Findings revealed that educators characterized Black student engagement in ways that differed from general definitions of engagement, that participants used CRP as vehicle to educate students how to appropriately advocate for themselves around issues of racism, that the practices of teacher colleagues were a barrier to holding their Black students to a high standard, and that their experiences limited their access to resources offered by the TDSB. The implications of this study suggest a need for administrators, policy makers and the teachers of Black students to take specific action to better support the success of Black students.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, Black secondary educators, Black student engagement, Greater Toronto Area
Acknowledgments

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Research Context and Problem

Over the years, Canada has been identified as one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, as it has adopted images such as the “melting pot” signifying its extensive multiculturalism. A recent study conducted by Statistics Canada (Government of Canada, 2011) found that Blacks are the third largest visible minority group in Canada and are growing significantly faster than whites. Between the years 1996 and 2006 the Black population grew 37% while the white/European population merely grew 3% during this time. As of 2013, Canada’s Black population – comprised of both African- and Caribbean-Canadians – are concentrated in Ontario and Quebec, with 60% and 24% taking up residency in Ontario and Quebec, respectively (Government of Canada, 2011). With a substantial proportion of Blacks living in Ontario this population is significantly reflected within Ontario schools. Toronto District Schools Board’s (TDSB) 2011-2012 Student and Parent Census found that 12% of TDSB students identify as Black, ranging from junior kindergarten to grade 12 (Yau, Rosolen & Archer, 2013). This being the third largest ethnic minority group amongst TDSB students implicitly suggests the importance of educators concerning themselves with the respective academic outcomes of these students.

The underachievement of Black high school students in Canada and the United States has been well documented over the years (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000; Schreiber, 1970; Winks, 1997). In Canada, these students tend to struggle academically and lack engagement in a wide spectrum of subjects, which has drawn the interests of scholars who assess the basis for this persistent trend among Black students and other students of colour (Brathwaite, 1996; Dei, Mazzuca & McIsaac, 1997; Smith, Schneider & Ruck, 2005). Black Ontario students have been found to experience racial profiling from peers and educators alike (Daniel & Bondy, 2008). As
a part of the Safe Schools Act, in 2001 Ontario public schools adopted a ‘zero tolerance’
discipline policy, which has been proven to perpetuate discrimination against Black students who
are disproportionately reprimanded and disciplined for offenses such as ‘disrespect’ and
‘disruption’ (Daniel & Bondy, 2008; Safe Schools Act, 2000). As a result, the 2013 Caring and
Safe Schools Report (Caring and Safe Schools, 2013) made it evident that Black high school
students are being disproportionately impacted by suspensions and expulsions in Toronto
schools. The disproportionate relationship between Black adolescents and exclusionary
discipline is reinforced in American literature as well (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Skiba, Michael,
Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2008). A recent survey of
Ontario high school students found that students of all cultural backgrounds held the notion that
their Black peers were more likely to receive harsher punishment from teachers and
administration in comparison to white students who engage in the same behavior (Ruck &
Wortley, 2002). Although academic exclusion is presented as a correctional strategy is has been
shown to cause behavioral problems in the classroom, lower interest in school, lower student
achievement and an increase in dropout rates, which expectedly impacts some ethnic groups –
including Black youth – more than others (Osterman, 2000).

Black high school students in Toronto have expressed that the Canadian school system is
oppressive and one where they are left feeling alienated, which has resulted in increased lateness
and skipped classes among these students. Consequently, this leads to the school response with
suspensions and can ultimately accelerate their path to dropping out (Dei et al., 1997). In
Toronto, it has been found that Black high school students are the least likely ethnic group to
aspire to post-secondary education and commonly enter the work force directly after high school
(Cheng & Yau, 1999; Dei,1995). Labels such as “low-achievers”, “underachievers” and
“troublemakers” have remained associated with our Black youth, teachers have acquired low
expectations of their Black students which has only aided in the persistence of this epidemic (Dei, 1995). Furthermore, as a means of assimilation and camouflage, Black students in both America and Canada have reported that they are burdened with the need of “acting white” in order to rise above typical stereotypes of those of their race (Ogbu, 2004). This can lead to students being ostracized by fellow Black peers who view striving for good grades as a loss of “Blackness” (Ogbu, 2004).

Despite the Canadian school system failing Black students over many years, research has suggested that culturally responsive pedagogy\(^1\) and classroom management strategies can have a positive impact on Black student behavior which, in turn, can positively impact academic achievement, dropout rates and engagement (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally responsive teachers have been found to connect with their Black students well, while fostering a learning community versus a competitive achievement by empowering students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Ladson-Billings, 1994). While culturally responsive pedagogy can be used in a classroom of students from all backgrounds, its effective use with Black students requires teachers to be familiar with and appreciate Black culture and the barriers Black students face to an equitable educational experience (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). Black teachers who can identify with their Black students as result of similarities in cultural practices and familiarity with racism and discrimination have been found to be more successful users of CRP with Black students (Naman, 2009).

In previous years, the teacher demographic in Ontario was predominantly white, regardless of the increasing diverse student populations (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). In light of this, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2008)

\(^1\) It is important to note I will be exploring culturally responsive pedagogy as opposed to culturally relevant pedagogy. I will have differentiated the two in Chapter Two under the sub-heading 2.3 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.
concluded in their *Review of Roots of Youth Violence* report that creating a teaching workforce that reflects the student body is an “urgent priority” (p. 236), acknowledging the benefits of increased teachers of colour (McMurtry & Curling, 2008). Unsurprisingly, many Black teachers in Ontario have been found to maintain high expectations of their Black students naturally (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). However, there is little recent research on these teachers’ knowledge, experiences, challenges and purposeful use of culturally responsive teaching practices. In order to learn how Ontario Black teachers are working with Black students, researchers must seek out and hear from these teachers themselves.

1.2 **Purpose of the Study**

In the light of this problem, the goal of my study was to learn how Black Toronto secondary teachers who work with Black students are currently incorporating culturally responsive teaching in their classrooms and to gain insights into the experiences and challenges faced by these teachers. To explore this topic, I interviewed a sample of these teachers about: conceptualization of CRP, student engagement, advantages and disadvantages as a Black educator of Black students and barrier and supports around their culturally responsive effort. Through data analysis, I had hoped to also identify teacher reported impacts of CRP on the behavior and academic achievement of their Black students. I also hoped to identify theird intentions behind using this pedagogical approach with Black students. I chose to focus on Black educations given that they have been found to execute culturally responsive pedagogy well with Black students (Naman, 2009), and this has been a suggested solution to the lack of Black student engagement. I aim to share findings on best practices for working with Black students with the teaching and educational research communities so that educators – irrespective of ethnicity – may gain current insight into this topic in an Ontario context and to, more broadly, marginally improve the engagement, academic achievement, in-class behavior and graduation
rates of Black adolescents.

1.3 Research Questions

The central research question that directed this qualitative study was: what are the practices and experiences of Black high school teachers in Toronto who use culturally responsive teaching strategies with Black students? Sub-questions to further aid in guiding this inquiry were as follows:

- How do Black teachers conceptualize culturally responsive teaching in theory and in practice when working with Black students?
- What levels of engagement do Black teachers observe from their Black students when CRP is used? What indicators do they use to identify when these students become engaged?
- What barriers do teachers face as Black educators when teaching their Black students?
- What resources and supports do Black teachers have at their disposal to aid in their implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy for Black students?

This project also aspired to raise awareness of the importance of all teachers employing culturally responsive teaching strategies as a means to engage Black secondary students in Ontario.

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

As a Black Canadian female of Caribbean decent, I have been burdened with heartache due to the fact that, in my experience of my culture, it has become increasingly acceptable for adolescents to assume the role of low academic achiever and exclusionary discipline has become the norm within our households due to poor behavior outside the home and ill-advised parenting. As a sister to a Black high school student who has faced multiple suspensions and struggles
academically, it has become of great importance to me to learn how I can positively impact my future Black students and others who fall into similar categories regardless of race. It is essential for me to discover what pedagogical approaches and techniques can reduce or diminish disengagement and alienation and improve behavior and academic performance.

Becoming a mother of two Black boys has caused me to look at education, growth and development through an alternative lens. My greatest fear is having my boys mirror many of my Black high school peers who were perceived as “troublemakers” or “misfits” and subsequently went on to fail several classes and miss weeks of school at a time due to multiple suspensions. These students would openly express the sour taste school left in their mouths and eventually dropped out. On my path of becoming a Black teacher who will inevitably work with similar students, I would like to learn from present day Black teachers on how to help Black students achieve success and overcome the systemic barriers placed in front of them.

1.5 Overview

In order to address the research question, I conducted a qualitative research study using purposive and snowball sampling to interview four Black teachers about their efforts to incorporate culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. In Chapter Two, I review literature on Black teacher experiences and supports provided to these teachers in Ontario schools, Black culturally responsive teaching practices and culturally responsive pedagogy more broadly. Next, in Chapter Three, I describe my research design. In Chapter Four, I share my findings and discuss their relevance to the existing literature and problems surrounding this topic in an Ontario context, and in Chapter Five, I identify the implications of the research findings to my own teaching identity and teaching practice, and for the educational research community more broadly. Lastly, I elaborate on questions raised by the research findings and suggest areas for future research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will review the literature on Black teacher experiences working with Black students and their student-teacher relationships. These relationships are further explored through discussing the minimal support provided to Black teachers in pursuit of exercising a meaningful influence on racially-similar students, and the concept of ‘collegial racialization’ as a barrier to receiving support in their culturally responsive efforts and their fight for the diversity of their students to be acknowledged in their classroom. Additionally, this chapter will review research on the culturally relevant pedagogical approaches and classroom management strategies of Black educators. Finally, this chapter will explore standard culturally responsive teaching practices, and illustrating the practical form of this pedagogy in the classroom environment. It is important to note that the term “Black” will be used to address all individuals who identify as being of African or Afro-Caribbean descent.

2.1 Black Educators Working with Black Students

Black student-teacher relationships and Black teachers’ pedagogical and curricular practices have drawn the attention of many scholars keen on closing the achievement gap between Black and mainstream students (Ferguson, 2003; Gay, 2002; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015; Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002; Ware 2006). Similar themes are found in this literature, the most prevalent being the high academic and behavioral expectations set by Black educators (Dixon, 2003; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009). These teachers do not pity their students, but they do display empathy whilst demanding full effort (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). They are familiar with the history of Black people and expect students to rise above stereotypic societal expectations (Ontario Alliance of
Black School Educators, 2015; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). Additionally, Black educators tend to inherently respond to their Black students in a culturally familiar fashion (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Milner, 2002; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). They often converse with their Black students using culturally relevant words like “ain’t” and “gonna” (Johnson, Nyamekye, Chazan & Rosenthal, 2013), while acting as “other-mothers” or “other fathers” (Cooper, 2002; Foster, 1997; Henry, 1992). Ultimately, this approach may cultivate a classroom environment similar to that of Black households (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). In a qualitative study with two Caribbean teachers in Toronto, teachers acknowledged purposely using their knowledge of Black mannerisms to mimic the at-home setting of their Black students (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). They stressed the importance of this practice, being that as Black teachers working with Black students, their unique racial positioning allows students to be accepting of this approach. For example, one teacher recalls using phrases like “I want you to do this, do this now. I am not asking you” which is a similar phrase used in many Caribbean households (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010, p. 257).

These teachers are exceedingly aware of the Black community, and the expectations authority figures have of children and are said to act as an extended family to ensure these expectations are established in the school environment (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In doing so, they often push students to achieve their goals while demanding respect as authority figures (Cooper, 2002; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010). According to Henry (1996), many Black female educators assume the role of “other-mothers” who foster the academic, social and cultural well-being of their Black students. In Henry’s study, teachers were found to use their African-Caribbean identity as a deliberate strategy in the classroom as a means to elicit a particular response from Black students.
2.2.1 Black student-teacher relationships

Black students in Ontario tend to interact differently with teachers of the same ethnicity (Klassen & Carr, 1997; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). Some educators have noted that Black students, who have been identified as “troublemakers” by colleagues, have impeccable behavior in their classroom (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009). These students often confide in their Black teachers about academic concerns and high school social experiences (Klassen & Carr, 1997; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). Black teachers within the Toronto Board of Education have suggested that Black students are simply more comfortable with them (Klassen & Carr, 1997). This connection may be attributed to Black students and teachers sharing cultural backgrounds and the knowledge comes with it, Black student-teacher dynamics or likely a combination of the two.

2.2.2 Lack of support to improve the academic success of Black students

Most recent studies of the perceptions and experiences of Black educators in Ontario reviewed for this study do not acknowledge the resources provided directly from school boards to improve the academic success of Black students. Studies have found that Black teachers are not provided the supports to adequately address the achievement gap of Black students (Bascia, 1996; Henry 1992; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). This comes as a surprise given the potentially unique racial positioning of Black educators in relation to Black students. Due to a lack of resources, teachers can feel ill-equipped and uneducated (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015), and may seek out their community and alternative Black professional organizations to gain an awareness of best practices for engaging Black students (Bascia, 1996; Finlayson, 2011; Henry, 1996). Unfortunately, some Black Canadian teachers
have commented on their reservations about seeking support within their school and never seeing any action because of it (Finlayson, 2011; Howard, 2014). Ultimately, the lack of support Black teachers receive in order to improve the outcomes of their Black students may be indirectly related to the expectations of colleagues as they may be considered “experts” of Black youth. I briefly review this concept below.

2.2.3 Barriers to receiving support

In a school with predominantly white teachers, often Black teachers become the spokesperson for Black students (Bascia, 1996; Howard, 2014; Lynn, 2006; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009). As a reflexive response, many administrators and colleges approach these teachers when attending to Black students with undesirable behavior, as they are expected to be experts or to have received prior training on best practices for working with Black youth (Bascia, 1996). As a result, Black students are frequently assigned to Black educators (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Rezai-Rashti & Martino, 2009), who may be privately warned of a particular Black student’s behavior or reputation (Lynn, 2006; Howard, 2014; Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). These assumptions are presumably made solely based on perceived race. However, Black teachers themselves may require assistance when working with racially-similar students (Ferguson, 2003).

Overall the relationship Black teachers and Black students have is one that is truly unique. Over the years these teachers have been able to make culturally informed decisions in order to positively impact the learning environment of Black students, despite the lack of resources and barriers they encounter in their efforts to improve these students’ academic success. In the next section I will discuss the characteristics of culturally responsive pedagogy and commonalities between teachers who use it in a classroom setting before getting into how
this compares to culturally responsive Black teachers.

2.3 Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In her study of African American students, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) coined the term “culturally relevant pedagogy” as an effective pedagogy when working with Black students. She references to this pedagogical approach as one that “empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural and historical referents to convey knowledge, to impart skills, and to change attitudes” (p. 13). Since then, this pedagogical approach has been studied by leading scholars in the field which is often now referred to as multicultural education (Banks, 2004; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Gay, 2000). More importantly, Ganeva Gay (2000) expanded on the traditional views of culturally relevant pedagogy by proposing that a pedagogy sensitive to students’ cultural and social backgrounds as a medium in which they learn through can help to foster better student-teacher relationships and understanding of course material. It has been said that CRP has the potential to improve behavior and academic achievement amongst minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1997) and can be extended to all students (Gay, 2002).

2.3.1 Research on culturally responsive pedagogical practices

In practice, teachers who employ culturally responsive teaching in the classroom have been found to have a specific set of identifiable characteristics (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Educators who are culturally responsive focus on the academic achievement of individual students while remaining explicit in regards to goals and use multiple forms of assessment (Ladson-Billings, 2009). It has been found that culturally relevant teachers who set high expectations and genuinely believe in the ability of their students creating a classroom climate conducive to active learning in which high self-esteem is encouraged (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000;
Ladson-Billings, 1994). These teachers typically immerse themselves in the communities of their student, to gain awareness of students’ cultural customs, and encourage the development of individual cultural competency (Carrero & Lusk, 2014). An in-depth Canadian study with 10 teachers from diverse backgrounds in Vancouver employed semi-structured interviews and identified that these teachers placed significant emphasis on the importance of openly appreciating the cultural backgrounds of their students (Parhar & Sensoy, 2011). In this study, a teacher highlighted an experience where she attended a student’s out-of-school Sri Lankan dance concert. With this, she expressed feeling more connected to her student while obtaining first-hand insights into Sri Lankan culture. Interestingly, this example illustrates what Gay (2000) refers to as a valuing student cultural differences and social experiences and is a trait of culturally responsive teachers.

Culturally responsive teachers have been found to reshape the curriculum and their instructional presentation in a way that uses cultural referents to reflect the diversity of their students (Culp & Chepyator-Thomson, 2011; Gordon 2001). These teachers often instinctively become agents of change in the school system which may otherwise be slow in responding to the needs of non-white students (Culp & Chepyator-Thomson, 2011; Gordon 2001). In a study (Gay, 2002) exploring the possibility of internationally educated teachers being mediators of culture in the classroom and school environment, a teacher expressed his advocacy for anti-racist projects within his school. Within his second year of teaching at a high school in Manitoba, Canada, the teacher orchestrated and hosted the school’s first Diwali celebration, where students and families came together to publically celebrate their cultural heritage (Block, 2012). This strongly aligns with focusing on care, learning communities and establishing cross-cultural communications, which is an essential component of CRP (Gay, 2002).

One of the final vital elements of culturally responsive teachers is their engagement with
critical consciousness and self-reflection. The practice of these teachers has been found (Gay & Kirkland, 2003) to involve concrete situations, guided assistance, and specific contexts and catalysts. Culturally responsive teachers value the importance of inviting students to question, challenge and critically analyze inequalities in society, both locally and globally (Young, 2010). In Pahar and Sensoy’s (2011) study, a Canadian teacher recalled having her students assess their history textbook, not in regards to context, but rather the date in which it was written, and the background and gender of the authors. The teacher intended to empower students and encourage them to question texts as well as authority figures who are typically unquestioned by society.

It is evident that culturally responsive educators do not simply teach in a purposive way. They essentially fight for change at the school level as their intentions is for education to equitable and for all students, despite their cultural background, to see themselves in the curriculum and to be equally successful. In the section I will discuss how Black educators go about achieving the same thing and unique dynamic with students and parents they possess, along with the challenges they face as a result of systemic racism and white supremacy.

2.4 Culturally Responsive Practices of Black Teachers

The topic of “good teachers” of Black students has been widely studied (Hayland, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2005). Although ethnicity may not be directly related to what constitutes a good teacher of Black students, there are identifiable characteristics of many Black teachers’ pedagogy and presentation style, which has been said to be successful with these students, Gloria Ladson-Billings (2005) alludes to the similarities found among the presentation styles of Black teachers:

African American educators may bring a different teaching repertoire to the classroom.
They may be more direct in their questioning, more exact in their requirements, or more expressive in their presentation. This is not to suggest that there is a stereotypical Black teacher who exhibits a ‘Black teaching style’. Rather, I argue that some of the collective
experiences of Black life may find their way into the classroom, just as the home, community, and cultural experiences of white teachers influence their classrooms. (p. 17)

Below, I explore research on the similar teaching styles and classroom management strategies among teachers of color. It should also be noted that the interdisciplinary approach of Black culturally responsive teachers in Canada has scarcely been investigated; therefore, the majority of the findings reviewed here will be taken from an array of studies conducted in the United States.

2.4.1 Pedagogical approaches

In literature, Black teachers are commonly being referred to as ‘culturally relevant’ (Gay 2002; Ladson Billings, 1994). Despite the set of unique traits common amongst culturally responsive teachers, Black teachers tend to unintentionally fit many of these criteria. Scholars have suggested that this is mostly due to their experiences of anti-Black racism and their values as teachers being one of creating an equitable learning environment and celebrating all students and their cultures as they have first-hand experience with the absence of it in society and school culture (Lynn, 2006). Additionally, many Black teachers are deeply connected to their culture, which is reflected in their pedagogy and attitudes (Johnson et al., 2013; Lynn, 2006). As a result of a combination of their experiences with racialization, a strong connection to their culture and culturally relevant practices has been found to be a great equation when executing lessons and building relationships with students (Lynn, 2006). By maintaining high expectations and acting in roles of “other-fathers” and “other-mothers”, their cultural expertise is evident in their pedagogy.

As explained earlier, Black teachers maintain high expectations for Black students; this has ultimately been shown to extend to all pupils, as they offer both support and “tough love” to
encourage all students to exceed their expectations of themselves (Johnson et al., 2013; Lynn, 2006). In Lynn’s (2006) study, a Black elementary teacher was observed telling their students “Getting better. But not good enough! I told you about your D’s” and “Go start all your sentences with a capital and then you can come up here!” (p. 2506). He suggests that this form of “tough love” in combination with empathy is not only appreciated by students but is also an effective practice. In doing so, they are often specific in their questioning and directions (Ladson-Billings, 2005; Lynn, 2006).

Black teachers typically reshape the curriculum in which they teach to reflect students’ cultural and social identities while remaining sensitive to varying learning styles (Henry, 1996; Howard, 2014; Lynn, 2006; Ware, 2006). However, this has not been without its challenges. In Montreal, Black teachers who remodeled the curriculum were thought to have a biased agenda by their non-Black colleagues, as educators and parents complained about their less Eurocentric presentation of the core material (Howard, 2006). Without a reshaping of the curriculum, a core aspect of culturally responsive pedagogy may be lost (Culp & Chepyator-Thomson, 2011).

Black culturally responsive teachers use the classroom to connect students to their respective communities. They typically volunteer in the neighborhoods of their students more readily than white teachers (Uhlenberg & Brown, 2002). This is often accomplished by assuming roles as mentors (Howards, 2014). In doing so, they acquire more social and cultural capital, which can then be applied in the classroom. As above, Black teachers have been reported to use a communication style that students are familiar with from their own community (Cooper, 2002; Henry, 1996). Using this technique, these teachers welcome students to use their own language when critically assessing themes of freedom, justice and love from their personal, cultural and social lens (Henry, 1996; Lynn, 2006). By removing linguistic barriers, this enables students to use their language as a bridge to learning, which Ladson-Billings (1994) regards as a key aspect
of culturally responsive pedagogies.

2.4.2 Classroom management strategies

Black teachers’ styles of culturally responsive classroom management are often viewed as strict (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015) or demanding (Johnson et al., 2013; Rashti & Martino, 2009; Ware, 2006) and are perceived to impact the behavior of their students almost immediately (Lynn, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010; Ware, 2006). These teachers often assume an authoritarian role (Cooper, 2002; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010), while simultaneously being viewed as caring and sincere by students (Johnson et al., 2013; Ware, 2006). Black Students tend to be receptive to this form of classroom management (Cooper, 2002) as Dixon (2003) suggests “it is the fact that their students trust them and believe they care about them that makes their discipline and high expectations effective” (p. 228).

In the American literature, Black teachers are frequently referred to as “warm demanders”, a term first used by Vasquez (1989). Later, Irvine and Fraser (1998) went on to describe this concept as one where teachers of color “provide a tough-minded, no-nonsense, structured, and disciplined classroom environment for kids whom society has psychologically and physically abandoned” (p. 56). This no-nonsense approach has been readily used to describe culturally responsive teachers irrespective of ethnicity (Gay, 2000; Irvine & Fraser, 1998). These teachers reportedly create safe environments while challenging students to work harder (Lynn, 2006; Ware, 2006).

The expectations, classroom management styles and strategies of incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy are adopted by Black teachers almost instinctively. Their experiences and cultural ties play a huge role in the way they are able to interact with their students and learning
they expect to take place in their classrooms. As above, most of the research reviewed throughout this section is American; hopefully, this study along with the work of other Canadian education scholars others can be the beginning of a change in respect to this trend.

2.5 Conclusion

In this literature review I discussed the research pertaining to Black educators’ experiences of working with Black students, their methods of employing culturally responsive teaching and how this pedagogy is executed by all teachers. This review highlighted that the cultural competency of these teachers can have both a subconscious and deliberate impact on their speech, presentation style, pedagogical practices and classroom management practices. Being that the disengagement and low academic achievement are common amongst both Canadian and American Black youth, and given the high population of Black families in Toronto, this raises the question as to why the cultural responsiveness of Black teachers has been more widely studied in the United States.

By studying how Black teachers conceptualize culturally responsive teaching and their application of it as a direct means of impacting Black students in Toronto, I hope to contribute to the limited data on their specific culturally responsive strategies in Canada. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, this study explored how these teachers conceptualize culturally responsive pedagogy in theory, how this is employed in the classroom and how they determine the success of this approach with Black students. By learning more about how Black educators use CRP as a means to directly influence Black students and its perceived effectiveness, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of culturally responsive teaching with Black Canadian students in particular. I hope I can communicate these specific strategies to all teachers in the hope of significantly reducing rates of dropout, exclusionary discipline and disengagement faced by Black students in Toronto.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction (Chapter Overview)

In this chapter I outline the research methodology used in this study. I illustrate specific methodological decisions made while providing insights into justifications for these choices. I begin by discussing the research approach used in this study before describing the instruments used for data collection I then move onto outlining the criteria and procedure used for sampling, along with additional sampling procedures used in qualitative studies more broadly and the detailed demographic information of participants. Finally, I move onto discuss the various methods used to analyze qualitative data, ethical review procedures and broadly accepted strengths and limitations of qualitative research.

3.1 Research Approach & Procedures

A qualitative research method was adopted for this study. Qualitative research is regarded as a comprehensive, authentic research approach which places emphasis on creating understanding through careful documentation and thoughtful analysis of the words people choose to use as well as actions and records (Ejimabo, 2015). Qualitative research offers insight into patterns and meaning drawn from data while painting a holistic portrait of a phenomenon based on words, phrases and detailed viewpoints of participants (Jones, 1995).

Firestone (1987) suggests that neither qualitative and quantitative research is necessarily better than the other, and instead that the ideal research method would depend on the study being conducted the intentions of the data collected. Firestone explains that quantitative studies are based on positivist philosophy and are rooted in facts, which hopes to identify causes. On the other hand qualitative studies are based on phenomenological philosophy, which are concerned with understanding. Similarly, this study explored the experiences of Toronto-area Black teachers who work with Black students, as opposed to identifying the effects of their practices.
Multiple studies previously conducted used a qualitative approach when exploring the experiences of Black teachers (e.g., Atwater, Butler, Freeman & Carlton Parsons, 2013; Culp & Chepyator-Thomson, 2011; Lynn, 2006). These studies were successful in gathering meaningful data in order to portray the perspectives and practices of the participants in their study, which aligns with the intentions of this study.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The qualitative approach is heavily participant-focused; methods adopted can include but are not limited to observations, various interviewing styles, surveying, videotaping, photographing or the collection of relevant documents (Ejimabo, 2015). Unstructured interviews are most commonly used in ethnographies or anthropologies where investigators have a key idea as to what they are looking for and simply take jot notes on the responses provided, behaviors during the interview process and questions that emerge based on the direction of the conversation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In order to fulfill the purpose of this study I chose to utilize semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with four Black secondary teachers in the Greater Toronto Area. Research suggests that face-to-face interviews provide unique insight into participant experiences and perspectives via body language and intonation that is otherwise unattainable via other interview methods (Opdenakker, 2006). In this study, the participants and interviewer were of the same background; therefore, body language may have proved to be a good indication of comfort level, among other things.

Four in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted which lasted approximately an hour and a half. Similar to the study conducted by Culp and Chepyator-Thomson (2011), who explored the culturally responsive practices of secondary physical education teachers, before addressing the bulk of research questions my participants were initially asked a serious of demographic-related questions. The remaining three sections (Appendix B) included
conceptualization of culturally responsive teaching in urban schools, which identified participant’s views of this pedagogical approach in theory and in practice. The next section addressed the perceived impacts using culturally responsive teaching has on Black student engagement. Finally, the last section explored available resources provided or utilized as a Black teacher hoping to impact the behavior and academic performance of Black students. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed.

3.3 Participants

In this section I will describe my sampling criteria and procedures used to selectively identify teachers suited for this study. I also included a section where I provided the background of each participant to provide more context to the findings of the study. Each aspect of criteria outlined in this section is justified in detail.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria was applied to participating teachers in this study:

1. Teachers self-identify as Black.
2. Teachers teach in an intentionally culturally responsive way with Black students.
3. Teachers work in the Toronto District School Board.
4. Teachers work in schools with a high percentage of Black students.
5. Teachers have experience working in the field of education for a minimum of five years.

Qualitative research typically involves deep and thorough analysis taken from a small sample size a opposed to a large sample size generally used in quantitative studies for the purpose of generalizability (Firestone, 1987). The exact sample size ideal for a study is said to be

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2 Although the information is available in respect to the percentages of Black students at the schools of my participants in order to maintain their anonymity chose to exclude this information from my study.
highly dependent on the purpose of the study (Sandelowski, 1995). Given that majority of Ontario’s Black population resides in Toronto, the TDSB would serve as an ideal community where teachers would have significant, meaningful and daily interaction with Black students (Government of Canada, 2013). In order to increase my chances of successful sampling, I chose to select teachers from schools with the highest percentage of Black students in the TDSB by first identifying these schools using publicly available demographic data. The importance of a high Black student population was also significant in a previous study focusing on the culturally responsive teaching strategies of Black teachers who worked with a large percentage of Black students (Lynn, 2006). This premise – that teachers not only work in an intentionally culturally responsive way with Black students but that they teach in a schools with a high percentage of Black students as well – will prove to be equally significant in the data collected in this study as well. The final requirement of a minimum of five years teaching experience was implemented to ensure participants had sufficient experiences to draw on throughout the course of the interview.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

Sampling strategies can take different forms when conducting qualitative research. There are three broad techniques commonly used when selecting sample for a qualitative study. These are convenience, purposeful and theoretical sampling (Marshall, 1996). Convenience sampling involves selecting the most acceptable participants. This form of sampling may result in poor quality as it requires less thought than other methods (Marshall, 1996). Purposeful sampling is said to be the most commonly used sampling technique as it often produces quality results as researchers actively select the most productive sample in order to address the research question (Marshall, 1996). This sampling method is ideal for studies with relatively small sample sizes in order to ensure the participants involved will provide meaningful data to the study being
conducted (Sandelowski, 1995). As the name suggests, theoretical sampling is driven based on theories drawn from emerging data on the topic being studied. In this approach, samples are selected with the intent of elaborating on previously identified theories.

The technique used in this study was a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling. As previously mentioned this was to ensure the participants involved would produce the highest quality of data for analysis. Initially, the TDSB’s Equity and Inclusion Department was contacted in the hopes to identify the Black educators who were known to intentionally use culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms and schools with a high population of Black students. The Instructional Leads pinpointed key educators who fit the sampling criteria and they were subsequently contacted individually via e-mail; this proved helpful in identifying two research participants, one of whom recommended a list of Black colleagues who fit the research criteria. This yielded another participant. As mentioned prior, the act of participants recommending and providing other participants is referred to as snowball sampling. In my use of purposeful sampling, which worked very well, I e-mailed the principals of schools with large populations of Black students; as previously mentioned this information is easily accessible via online sources. From there, principals forwarded a mass e-mail to all Black staff members and teachers who self-identified as being suitable candidates followed up with available times in their schedule to allow for interviews to be conducted.

### 3.3.3 Participant bios.

In this section I hope to paint a picture of the participants involved in this study. I chose to provide insights into their community involvement among other key pieces of information that typically characterize culturally responsive educators, given that teachers self-identified as culturally responsive rather than being qualified as such by others. In order to protect the
identities of the participants, pseudonyms were used.

**Dwight** is a young high school English teacher, who came to Canada from a West African country as a child. Dwight has ten years of teaching experience in the GTA and defines the term Black as any individual of African descent. Dwight is the head of the English department but he and runs a after school program in the gym. Throughout Dwight’s interview, he offered insight into his Black students’ perspectives of him and him of himself, as a father figure and mentor. Dwight is a strong believer in culturally responsive pedagogy, educating Black youth on the history of Black people and developing their cultural competency.

Like Dwight, **Rose** is also a young high school English teacher who has been teaching for ten years in the GTA. She identifies Black as those who are of African descent and, unlike Dwight, she was born in Canada but her parents originated in a Caribbean country. Throughout Rose’s interview she referred to herself as a sister, mother and caregiver of her Black students, and articulated a sense of responsibility towards them. She shared multiple experiences of Black parents turning to her for advice or to vent even when she didn’t have their child as a student. She is extensively involved in her school community, working towards breaking the stereotypes associated with the community.

**Angela** was unique of the previous participants as she had over ten years of teaching experience that ranged from grade seven to grade twelve. Like Rose, Angela was born in Canada but her parents are from a Caribbean country. Although she mainly taught Phys. Ed and History at the high school level, her experience teaching in schools with a high population of Black students were drawn from the two high schools at which she taught in the past. A majority of Angela’s community involvement was from personal experiences of observing students in the community centers in the community and with organizations specifically for Black educators in Ontario. Angela constantly advocates for Black students to learn their history and to live up to
their potential as she shared experiences walking through halls passing out books such as *The Miseducation of the Negro* and *Willy Lynch Letter*.

**Jeffery** is the oldest of the four participants. He was born in Canada, had parents who immigrated from the Caribbean yet identified as African more than he did Caribbean. Jeffery has almost 20 years of teaching experience all at the high school level in the GTA teaching grade nine and ten Civics and Careers along with History. Jeffery unapologetically had a very strong connection to what he referred to as his “African heritage” and daily worked towards equitable education for Black students in his school. He shared his rather difficult experiences through his advocacy for Black youth but was adamant about never backing down.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis can take many forms. From interview transcripts to field notes, analysis methods are often highly particular to the main purpose of the study (Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Although there are many specific approaches to data analysis in qualitative studies, there are two broad fundamental approaches to qualitative data analysis: the inductive approach and the deductive approach (Burnard et al., 2008). The deductive approach requires the researcher to impose their own theirs on the data obtained. This approach can be useful when the researcher is knowledgeable in the area of study and is aware of the most probable causes of participant responses (Thorne, 2000). The deductive approach is often used when analyzing interview transcripts. While this analysis strategy is relatively quick it has the potential to be heavily biased which can distort findings (Burnard et al., 2008). Unlike the deductive approach where ideas are imposed on data, the inductive approach reads the data for identify ideas, themes and communities (Thorne, 2000). This approach is significantly more comprehensive and time consuming than the deductive approach, yet it is more widely used (Burnard et al., 2008).
Similar to Lynn’s (2006) study, the interview transcripts in this study were analyzed using an inductive approach. Initially transcripts were coded based on common patterns throughout the responses of participants. These codes were then sorted into categories and being mindful of the research purpose and questions large categories were then refined into major themes. From these themes, significant findings were recognized given the context of the existing literature previously identified in Chapter Two.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Qualitative research in general can have many ethical implications the researcher needs to consider throughout the entire course of the study. There are specific codes of ethics that are required to be followed in areas such as participant dignity, privacy and confidentiality (Bresier, 1995). Data collection and analysis are left in the hands of the researcher and evidently shape the voice of participants. It is important for all individuals in the study to maintain anonymity. In order to protect participant identification researchers can assign pseudo names or numbers to individuals, while ensuring to use vague dialogue when discussing the geographical location or demographical information of participants (Creswell, 2007).

Another ethical concern worth noting is researchers sharing data which may have been conveyed “off the record” (Creswell, 2007). With audio-recorded interviews, this can be avoided by ensuring only to use transcribable data obtained from answers to interview questions as opposed to conversations before or after the recording. It is sometimes suitable to ask a participant if the recording can be turned on again if an incidental conversation after it was just turned off is deemed to be of use to the researcher.

This particular study may prove to pose unique risks due to the topic surrounds race, specifically Black ethnicity. Black people are among one of the highest groups to experience racism and racialization in this day and age. A lack of sensitivity to participants remaining
anonymous may result in collegial racialization and put a participant’s employment or position at risk. Therefore, immediately following each interview real names were replaced with pseudonyms and data was stored on a device with a password only known by the researcher.

### 3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Qualitative research is not without its risks to both the researcher and participants. Risks to participants range from their anonymity being compromised to discomfort or emotional vulnerability during the interview process when sensitive issues are covered (Seidman, 2013). Another is that their behavior and responses will be left to the interpretation of the researcher which may or may not be something they necessarily agree with. From the perspective of the researcher, the data being left to them to interpret is a risk in itself as there is the possibility of over or under analyzing data (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

On another note, face-to-face interviewing has both its advantages and disadvantages. A strength in this form of data collection tool is it affords for dialogue to be continuous. This typically produces the most organic responses as interviewees are less likely to over think or edit their response. A downside of this synchronous communication is it requires the interviewer to not only listen to participant responses but also to be mindful of time and off-topic conversation in order to complete a majority of prepared questions (Opdenakker, 2006).

A limitation to this study may lie in the chosen sampling procedure used being purposeful sampling. Although, many qualitative researchers believe this type of sampling will yield a high quality of results as a criterion is maintaining, this could also serve as a limitation. Individuals outside of the strict research criteria may possess meaning data that may provide alternative insight into the given research question which participants who fall within the criteria may be oblivious to (Sandelowski, 1995).
3.7 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I provided detailed insights into an array of methodological decisions made while supporting the reasons for these decisions. I started by outlining the research approach and procedures where I defined qualitative research highlighting key differences from quantitative research and when to choose either approach based on the purpose of the study. I then described the form of data collection used in the study, being face-to-face interviews; I also made reference to a similar study that adopted this method. I later defined the participants involved in the study including the sampling criteria used to select them. I describe various recruitment procedures which include convenience, purposeful and theoretical sampling. Purposeful sampling proved to result in the highest quality of data which is why this recruitment procedure was used. I moved onto briefly describing the demographics of the participants before discussing the two broad approaches to analyzing qualitative research data. I proceeded to describe the ethical concerns involved with qualitative research and more specifically, this study, making reference for ways these can be overcome. Lastly, I discussed the methodological limitations of this study while emphasizing a key strengths being continuous dialogue. In the next chapter, I report my findings.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In Chapter One, I outlined the context and focus of this study being to explore the use of culturally responsive pedagogy by Black teachers in Toronto, who specifically use this pedagogy as a means to support the engagement and academic success of Black students. In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature surrounding this topic and in Chapter Three, I provided a detailed overview of the research methodology employed in this qualitative study. Each participant met the outlined sampling criteria being: possessing five or more years of working experience with Black students, currently work in a school with a high percentage of Black students, being able to self-identify as Black, teach in an intentionally culturally responsive way with Black students and work in the Toronto District School Board. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings taken from the semi-structured, in-depth interviews of four Black Toronto high school teachers. The identified themes emerged through data analysis and are presented based on their relevance to the research question. The order in which the themes are presented is as follows:

1. Black educators conceptualize CRP as an opportunity to restore Black students’ self-confidence previously lost due to the Ontario education system

2. Black educators use various indicators to measure the improvement of Black student ‘engagement’

3. Black educators reportedly used CRP to demonstrate effective approaches to advocate for change around issues of racism

4. Culturally responsive Black educators are disadvantaged by the racism and practices of ‘other teachers’ with white privilege

5. The limited resources reportedly offered by the TDSB leave Black educators ill-equipped to adequately attend to the achievement gaps faced by Black students
Select themes have sub-themes to allow for greater depth of detail and clarity. I will identify and describe each theme, report the data, and finally discuss the significance of the data in the context of the existing literature. Lastly, I will summarize my findings and transition to the final chapter where I will make recommendations for future research.

4.1 Black Educators Conceptualize CRP as an Opportunity to Restore Black Students’ Self-Confidence previously Lost Due to the Ontario Education System

Although the interview protocol was used to guide the conversations with the educators, I found that the issue of low self-confidence identified in Black students and the apparent impact it had on their level of academic ambition, seemed to regularly make its way into my conversations with participants. I will first discuss what these educators perceived helped cause the low self-esteem in Black students and then, I will share their views on how their self-esteem can begin to be improved.

Among the group of Black educators, a shared perspective was that Black students possess low self-confidence, specifically in their academic capabilities. While participants stressed their faith in Black students’ competencies, they connected this trend to the Eurocentricity of the Ontario curriculum. As Jeffery described the role he plays for his Black students, he mentioned that “somewhere along the way in this Eurocentric education system, not in all cases but I see enough of it, their confidence is completely lost.” He felt students internalized the idea that only white people were meant to be successful and in turn, this caused them to tell themselves “oh I will only get a 50, 51 or 52.” This was similar to an experience Dwight had experienced where a student began to cry “because she was shocked” after receiving a token for her strong positional speech. Jeffery went onto say that “the challenge for Black educators [is] you bringing that out of them, so they can believe it for themselves.” Three of the four teachers shared similar experiences where they had worked with Black students who lacked
self-confidence. These teachers expressed sincere concern for the negative self-image their Black students possessed and their frustration with these students setting such a low bar for themselves as if though they were not meant to achieve otherwise. By making statements such as “in this Eurocentric education system” it leads be to believe these educators place the blamed on the Ontario curriculum and that in order to correct the experiences of Black students, there would be a need for curricular reform.

Unfortunately, this finding closely align with that of Dei et al. (1997) who conducted a series of interviews with Black parents, students and other concerned adults to get a better understanding of their experiences with the Ontario curriculum in order to shed light on the topic of the existing dropout rates from Toronto high schools. Dei set out to examine the cause for the significantly high proportion of Black students who fell into this category. One of the many findings from this in-depth, qualitative study was that Black high school students attending school in Toronto expressed that the Canadian school system is oppressive and one where they are left feeling alienated (Dei, et al. 1997). Although this study focused on the experiences and perceptions of Black teachers as opposed to students, these comparable results seem to indicate that this is still, very much so an issue in the Toronto.

The most significant factor influencing the decision of the Black educators in this study to use CRP in classrooms with a high proportion of Black students consistently went back to the idea of encouraging Black students to gain a sense of positive self-image. When asked what the importance was of using CRP with Black students, Angela responded “because…the harm that has been done by this education system would start to get undone. It has been a … system that tells you that you are not good enough from kindergarten until grade twelve.” This view was shared by Jeffery whose response to the same question was “I feel that CRP leads to the belief that they can excel in whatever pathway that they choose and they should never short change
themselves.” Furthermore, discussions with Dwight revealed that he prefers to teach former students in grade 11 and 12 and who were familiar with his culturally responsive approach to the curriculum. He believed that “in grade 11 and 12 is when they start to realize that… all that [he had] been working towards … the brainwashing [he’d thought] they [would] finally see that ‘ok! I am smart.’” It is clear though this series of quotes from participants they are not only hopeful, but speaks from experience, in regards to the positive impact CRP has had on the potential student see in themselves. The negative impact they perceive that is based on the curriculum seems to stem from a place where the various forms of institutionalized systemic oppression against Black student has won thus far, but it is not too late to change the outcome of these students by approaching the curriculum in this unique way.

The views of these teachers parallel the findings of many authors (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) who suggest culturally responsive teachers genuinely believe in the ability of their students and create a classroom climate conducive to active learning in which high self-esteem is encouraged. Conversely, the majority of research does not illustrate the viewpoints of these teachers being, that CRP can help to remedy the low self-confidence of Black students in particular, much less in the context of Ontario.

It is fair to say that the findings of this study do not support or refute the idea that CRP provides the opportunity to encourage the self-esteem of Black students, it is important to raise awareness that the teachers in this study had experiences with Black students with low self-confidence and the connections that were made to the current Ontario curriculum in order to begin a discussion on what can be done to change this. Further study is needed to identify the most appropriate measures needed in order to foster this change.
4.2 Black Educators use Various Indicators to Measure the Improvement of Black Student ‘Engagement’

This theme focuses on how the participants define engagement and the identifiable behaviours they observed when Black students were engaged as opposed to when they were disengaged. I will be comparing the indicators used to measure engagement by participants in their verbal definitions, to those used in their reported scenarios of when participants could identify an improved levels of engagement in Black students both during and subsequent to culturally responsive lessons.

4.2.1 Black educators use in-class behavior to measure Black student engagement

Interestingly, when participants provided their definitions of engagement, not specific to Black students, the most consistent identifiers used were levels of participation. Whereas, in-class behaviour other than participation was used when specifically defining Black student disengagement.

While defining student engagement, Dwight and Rose opted to describe it as various levels of participation. An example of this is when Rose described that engagement simply “looks like students engaged in the process of learning”. Angela on the other hand, added to her initial general description which, seemed to deviate from the rest. She described student engagement as “a combination of students who are excited, they are smiling, they are happy to come to my class, they actually come to class, they are on time, they are not asking to go to washroom every two seconds.” At first glance it was very unclear which of the behaviors listed by Angela and the other three teachers, were specific to Black students. Fortunately, that was no longer the case when all four teachers described Black student disengagement in a similar fashion. An example of this is Rose’s
response where she reports Black students having “behavioral, or antisocial behaviors in class like, name calling, disruptive behaviour [or] talking to each other about something that is off topic.” Another example is Jeffery’s response, where he described Black student disengagement as “inappropriate laughter, throwing things around the class, getting up and running around in the classroom, moving around, making inappropriate jokes.” These observable behaviors are drastically different from the more general definition that teachers used to define engagement. Like much of the literature suggests, these teachers described their classroom management strategies as using phrases and tones commonly used in Afro-Caribbean homes. Although I chose not to dedicate an entire theme to this finding, it is important to acknowledge the strategies employed to cope with such in-class behavior. Interestingly enough, both Jeffery and Rose suggested that CRP also helps to reduce these behaviours but they chose not to provide specific examples of times when it had been observed.

It is important to acknowledge that here, I am comparing the excerpts from transcripts around engagement and disengagement and analyzing the data in a way that strictly regards these terms and their meanings, in an oppositional way. Therefore, when participants defined engagement as “they are not asking to go to washroom every two seconds”, I am making the assumption that student disengagement would mean that students are asking to go to washroom every two seconds. So, in reference to the data, it is quite telling that in definitions of engagement, not specific to Black students, descriptors like excitement, smiling and happiness to attend class, are used in comparison to those used such as name calling, disruptive behaviour, inappropriate laughter, throwing and running, when specifically discussing Black students. In the literature, currently there is no evidence that suggest this form of comparison. Moreover, this distinction indicated
that engagement may look very different for Black students than it does in non-Black
students.

4.2.1 Black educators use attendance and participation as a measure of improved
Black student engagement

When asked to describe an instance where he could identify a change in the engagement
of Black students, specifically when he was using CRP, Dwight recalled a series of lessons
where he had his grade nine English class read a play called *My Children My Africa*. As he
began to describe the play he mentioned that at the beginning, he would get his students to write
their names on the board, if they wanted to participate and read the line of a character in the play.
He described that when they first started, a particular student was reluctant, but when they went
on, he started to come into class really early just to write his name on the board and say “I want
to be Mr. M or I want to be Timmy” because he was eager to be involved. Dwight passionately
stressed that, his impression was that, this student, was hands down “not into what [they] were
doing at all.” Oddly enough, Dwight felt that using this culturally familiar play helped because
later on, when they started to read Twelfth Night, it carried over. Dwight recalls that “even
though Twelfth Night is a Shakespearian play, [this student] still wanted to get
involved…although, the two are totally different stories…he was completely engaged in it.”
Here, Dwight is sharing an example where using a non-traditional yet culturally relevant play not
only helped a Black to develop interest in what they were doing as a class but it had a role to
play in that student’s level of participation when they moved onto a more traditional play used by
English teachers in Ontario.

A similar change in a student’s level of participation was observed by Angela. A student
of hers had previously refrained from writing anything in her English class. Yet, as she continued
incorporating books and poems routed in African history she “got him to write something.” Angela also noted that this remained consistent, even when the material “was not culturally responsive.” Later, she described that she “noticed a change in [this student], he was a chronic skipper, he never went to class.” But, as the semester continued the student began to come to class more. Both Rose and Jeffery recalled similar experiences of improved attendance in students who they perceived to have previously been disengaged as a result of implementing CRP.

The existing body of literature does not present a distinct relationship between culturally responsive pedagogy and the level of participation or attendance. Instead, it has been suggested by authors (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994) that it can be expected that Black student behaviour, academic achievement, dropout rate and engagement can be influenced by its use. Although this has helped us to understand the potential of CRP, a direct relationship has yet to be found. Although, it cannot be assumed that improved levels of participation resulted in an improvement in academic achievement, specifically for these students. I feel that it is important to highlight the relationship identified by these teachers as they reshaped the curriculum to make it more relevant to their Black students and the improved levels of participation that carried forward to future in lessons, where more traditional materials were used. Similarly, it is also important to note the relationship between the employment of CRP and the reduction of classes skipped by students prior. This finding can prove to be very significant given that in Dei’s et al. (1997) study, Black students who skipped classes were shown to have a high association to those who ended up dropping out. Whether it is simply enough to add culturally similar representations into the curriculum in order to influence such a wide variety of behaviours is as uncertain in the literature as it is in the present study.
After analyzing both the verbal definitions of student engagement and the scenarios of both disengaged and engaged Black students, it is clear that the term engagement is not as concrete in a school setting, as I had initially thought. Going back to the initial general definitions of engagement, not once did most participants mention anything about student submission of work, not skipping class or various levels of disruptive behaviour used. It was only in Angela’s response where she said that engagement was when students “actually come to class, they are on time.” This leaves me to believe that, from the standpoint of Black teachers, ‘engagement’ is multifaceted, as it constituted for a wide variety of observable behaviours in Black students, such as those previously mentioned. Furthermore, it was unclear as to whether these behaviours were mutually exclusive or if they were interrelated. If a student’s attendance improved did other behaviors such as in-class participation also improve? Or, if a student often chose to skip, when they did attend class were they also disruptive, throwing things and running around? I believe that discrepancies in the identifiers used in scenarios versus those used in definitions by teachers only emphasizes the ambiguity of the word ‘engagement.’ Looking back at the research reviewed in Chapter Two (e.g., Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994), the inclusion of engagement in the theory that CRP can have an influence on various aspects of student profiles begs the question: what does engagement mean in its truest form and, in the context of CRP, how can it consistently be assessed by teachers and scholars alike?

4.3 Black Educators Reportedly used CRP to Demonstrate Effective Approaches to Advocate for Change Around Issues of Racism

Although participants are reportedly motivated to use CRP as a means to engage Black students and build their self-confidence, their intentions included equipping Black students with a critical race framework. The need for this framework appeared to be centered around the experiences of discrimination they perceived their students will inevitably have to face one day.
As Dwight recounts a culturally responsive lesson where he introduced his English class to a play called *Master Herold and the Boys*, he highlights a part in the play where Sam, a Black butler, experiences racism from Hallie, a white child who Sam has nurtured and essentially raised. He describes Sam’s reaction as one where he simply “let’s him know that things can never be the same between them, because there is a certain line you don’t cross.” It is at that point that Dwight’s face lit up as he provided the perspective of his students saying:

> [y]ou are seeing someone who is doing it in a way where he is not swearing or cussing out teachers, or talking about burning down this building. He does it…in a dignified manner… so, to me, this is where students can see someone who looks like them in a positive manner.

It is apparent that Dwight believes that it is valuable for students not only to acknowledge positive ways to advocate for themselves in a classroom setting, but that Black people do not always have to be perceived as individuals who respond in a negative fashion. This not only will help to initiate discussions around appropriate responses to instances of racism but, by challenging the traditional images of Black people teachers may begin to deconstruct the ill perceptions Black students may have of themselves or other of them. When I asked Dwight what he wanted students to learn from this play, towards the end of his response, he explains:

> It makes zero sense for you to teach them a certain way, because in the real world, I can’t carry that over. So, part of that teaching is equipping these kids with the necessary tools, so when they get out into the real world, they know how to navigate themselves through it.

Here, Dwight displayed the belief that it is imperative for Black students to be taught these valuable lessons in schools, in order to face the reality that racism exists. Furthermore, students can be guided on ways to cope with racism, rather than leaving these conversations to be had
with parents at home. Angela shared a similar example of a lesson where she exposed her students to the story of Robert Nathaniel Dett, and his experiences of racism. Angel described Nathaniel Dett as a Black classical composer who was told it was impossible for him to make it in the industry and no one will take him seriously because that form of art was meant “for the refined, white cultured people.” As an assignment, she had students create poems to mirror protest songs advocating for change around the issue of racism. When asked the same question, similarly to Dwight, she identified that “[she] wanted them to gain a social justice lens. [She] wanted them to get a view from a different perspective and look at music as a platform for social justice and change.” For Angela, her intentions seem routed in not only guiding Black students on ways deal with actual situations of racism, but how to have their voices be heard in an effort to seek change. At various points in their interviews, all four educators emphasised the importance of discussing and incorporating the issue of racism in a class with Black students for two reasons; first, that they knew it would be a part of their student’s reality as Black people; and second, because of the recent prevalence of police shootings involving young Black people in the United States. Angela had even structured entire lessons around Black Lives Matter and various shooting events and comparing them to civil rights movements in the 70s while Dwight felt compelled to dedicate full classes to simply having an open discussion about emotional events happening across the U.S to Black youth or things taking place in their community. He reported that students had a hard time focusing otherwise due to similar situations of racism they had experienced. With Dwight giving students an opportunity to openly discuss their experiencing and ask questions, he is creating a sense of community in his classroom while molding student’s perspectives of racism, society, and government officials. At the same time, he is helping to develop their critical consciousness and cultural competency which are some of the key components of CRP.
Much of the literature speaks to Black teachers who reshape the curriculum in order for it to reflect their students’ cultural and social identities (Henry, 1996; Howard, 2014; Lynn, 2006; Ware, 2006). Specifically, in Howard’s (2014) study a series of interviews were conducted with two Black teachers in Montreal which aimed to explore the experiences of racism both educators and students face in Montreal schools. Within this study, one of the participants acknowledged her efforts to educate Black students on how to “negotiate a racist system” (p. 506). However, in this study, nor in other studies, does it discussed how CRP is being used as a vehicle to impart this wisdom. Where the teachers in Howard’s (2014) study parallel the participants in this study in terms of race, they also parallel their beliefs that Black students should be instructed on how to advocate for themselves in a way that will allow their voices to be heard. Given the data which reveals the disproportionate rates Black students are suspended and expelled from schools in the TDSB (Yau, Rosolen & Archer, 2013), it seems only logical to take a preventative approach for Black students to relay their opinions in a way that is perceived as less oppositional when interacting with people in authority at school and in the real world. It is important that I highlight that I am not suggesting that all Black students who are suspended are simply ‘misunderstood’ by authority figures, but instead, I am proposing we use the narratives of these educators and use CRP as a vehicle to teach strategies for advocacy given the current intersections of race and power.

4.4 Culturally Responsive Black Educators are Disadvantaged by the Racism and Practices of ‘Other Teachers’ with White Privilege

Culturally responsive Black teachers who were a part of this study have reported the positive impact of CRP on Black student engagement and academic achievement through the use of maintaining high expectations; however, in this theme I will address how their efforts have not been without obstacles and from where those obstacles originate. Furthermore, I will discuss
three prominent, yet interconnected patterns that emerged in the interviews. The first is the drawback culturally responsive teachers reportedly face when working with Black students. Next, I discuss the perceived cause of these drawbacks, and lastly, I discuss the key reason participants gave to explain why other teachers choose not to use CRP.

Throughout their interviews, each participant emphasized the importance of maintaining high standards in their classroom, and yet Rose shared that “[she thinks] what ends up happening in the end [is that] high standards are not maintained for students … including, but especially for Black students by other teachers.” She recalls a conversation with a student where she was told that “[her student] never had to do any work in high school, all the way through high school, until 12th grade English (her class), he just got away with doing nothing and still pass all of his classes.” Both Angela and Jeffery conveyed similar experiences with Black students. Jeffery suggested that this is “due to systemic forms of discriminating and them being passed on, and the large gaps in their learning… leads to behavioral issues.” Rose shared similar thoughts on low expectations, and the impact of those learning gaps on student engagement. Jeffery went onto say that, as

a culturally responsive teacher you need to expect the push back from students. They are not used to high expectations, they will resist and you will experience push back because the bar has been set so low by other teachers and the expectations have been set so low by other teachers, that they have been naturally conditioned to achieve or aspire to meet that low bar. So as soon as you come in with your high expectations there will be initial resistance.

What Jeffery speaks of here is a logical series of events. He passionately discusses he belief that because of the behavior issues Black student may display in class, white teachers grant them passing marks in order to avoid having them again for a following year. In doing so they leave
these students with large gaps in their learning making it even more challenging in upper year courses, which may be part of the root cause of Black student disengagement and poor academic achievement. This, at its root, is an example of system racism which leads me to believe that non-Black teachers may promote Black students in order to move them along. The resistance these students display towards culturally responsive educators is not aimed at them directly, but rather, may be the result of systemic forms of oppression which force them to believe they are only capable of doing so well academically. Angela experienced this first hand as Black students went so far as to drop her class because they were unwilling to even attempt to meet the expectations she set in her classroom towards the beginning of the semester.

As participants continued to refer to their colleagues as ‘other teachers,’ I began to question who they were referring to. Although Jeffery shed some light on who ‘other teachers’ were with his use of the phrase ‘systemic racism’ (i.e., white teachers). Rose was very clear in saying that “[she thinks] with culturally responsive pedagogy… why… teachers don’t support it is because they, themselves are benefited by…white privilege, or white skin privilege... So, there is no real… desire to battle the status quo.” Both Rose and Dwight had very similar thoughts as to why ‘other teachers’ chose not to use CRP in their classrooms.

Having high expectations has become a well-known trait of culturally responsive educators and, more specifically, of Black culturally responsive educators. In Lynn’s (2006) qualitative study, Black, male, elementary school teachers were overserved and interviewed in a naturalistic setting in order to paint a clear portrait of their culturally relevant practices in public urban schools. Lynn found that the teachers regularly offered students ‘tough love,’ while only accepting their best version of their work. Lynn’s study does a phenomenal job at showcasing the nature and practices of Black educators but, like other studies, it does not present the challenges these educators face as a result of their culturally responsive practices. The findings presented
here suggest that, rather than CRP being an approach a select few of teachers in a school employ, it may be more beneficial to have CRP adopted school-wide in order to reduce this resistance. More recently, in a study conducted by the Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators (2015), Black educators were found to recognize that the systemic racism experienced by Black students has led to their reduced rates in engagement we see today. Yet, the possible relationship among racism, learning gaps and teachers’ perceptions of student engagement is one may be unique to this study. That said, it may be important to consider ways to confirm the legitimacy of ‘just passing’ marks awarded to Black students for little or low quality work, and how CRP can be used to begin to fill existing learning gaps.

4.5 The Limited Resources Reportedly Offered by the TDSB leave Black Educators Ill-Equipped to Adequately Attend to the Achievement Gaps Faced by Black Students

The support extended to Black educators by the TDSB as means to address the learning outcomes of Black students were acknowledged by all research participants. Unfortunately, the teachers also expressed the failure of these supports, being inconsistency and inaccessibility. The resources presented in this theme are not specific to CRP; instead, I will disclose the two resources offered by the TDSB that participants acknowledged as purposed for the encouragement of Black student success and where they identified the resources as falling short.

When asked what resources Black educators had available to them to help support Black students, Rose and Dwight mention that their schools, along with many other schools with a high proportion of Black students, receive additional funding to specifically support Black student achievement. After simply speaking with administrators, Dwight reported that he is able to access this funding purposed for both inside and outside of the classroom. Rose on the other hand, did not share that experience; instead says she she had to
...approach … the committee that is in charge of that money, and make a request, based on my students being who my students are, so saying that my students are applying for funding to make graphic novels or to get 25 dollar gifts, specifically for Black male students in my grade 9 English class… but I have done that twice and I have not received money for that, it has not been granted.

Rose later admitted that funding is definitely needed in order to support her students in particular socioeconomic situations but, her inability to gain access has reportedly prevented her to from being able to do so.

On a brighter note, Rose, Angela and Jeffery reported that there is an array of professional development (PD) workshops they had been offered by the equity and inclusion department of the TDSB. These PD workshops were said to target both them as “racialized educators” as Jeffery put it, and/or the achievement of Black students. Angela recalls that the intentions of some the targeted workshops were to discuss “what was happening, and the race based data.” Unfortunately, Jeffery being a veteran teacher was able to acknowledge that the frustrating things is that it has fads and you have to end up doing your own work because what happens is they offer it for a little while and then it is onto the next big thing… in order to maintain the knowledge around these subjects that you are passionate about, you need to develop allies and join organizations like AHEN and NABSI and go to conferences and so on where, you can meet like-minded individuals.

Both Angela and Dwight stressed the importance of maintaining allies and being a part of organizations like AHEN (African Heritage Educators Network) in order to stay knowledgeable in the area of Black student achievement. Without these allies, however, these teachers feel they would continue to lose the battle of changing the outcomes of their Black students.
As I have previously acknowledged, the experiences of culturally responsive Black educators in Ontario has not been well documented thus far. Although, this theme did not focus on CRP explicitly, the findings here can prove to be essential to the body of literature surrounding education in Ontario. Overall, the TDSB’s efforts to improve the achievement gaps of Black students in the GTA should be commended. Unfortunately, with teachers being denied accessibility to additional funding, it may prevent Black students from benefiting from dedicated TDSB resources. It is important to mention the possible impact of the teacher’s positions which may evidently have played into their accessibility to additional funding. Dwight, being a department head, may possess more status and/or power when being granted access unlike Rose. If this were the case for all teachers who do not hold department head roles or other positions of power within a school, the improvement of Black student achievement may be more likely to be realized.

From listening to these teachers, it seems as though the TDSB must re-evaluate their approach to providing teachers with resources intended for Black students. Ultimately, despite their efforts, teachers are not consistently being offered tangible resources for best practices leaving them ill-prepared to address the learning gaps of their Black students. This particular experience parallels the opinions of Black educators in Ontario found in earlier studies (Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators, 2015). More importantly, the need for these teachers to seek out alternative community supports and Black professional organizations, aligns with the practices of Black educators from Nova Scotia interviewed in Finlayson’s (2011) study. In this study Black educators were found to attribute much of their success and knowledge of best teaching practices to the family and Black run community groups. The need for additional community supports from the Afro-Caribbean community is as evident in the literature as it is in this study. Otherwise teachers would be left without any guidance on how to improve the success
of Black students. Overall, there seems to be a need for the TDSB to re-evaluate their approach to supporting Black student success. Nonetheless, in order to balance the existing literature, future efforts should be made to research the successful resources offered to educators in order to offer insights to more effective strategies intended to improve Black student achievement in Ontario.

4.6 Conclusion

The analysis processes revealed five major themes. The participants of this study perceived an unsettling lack of self-confidence in Black students which they believed to have been caused by the Eurocentric education system in Ontario. Educators also believed this resulted in students only aspiring to low marks. Despite the confidence these Black teachers reportedly place in their students, they conceptualized CRP as the fitting tool needed to improve self-esteem and ultimately academic achievement. Given that Dei’s (1997) study, where students were found to regard the Ontario school system as one that is oppressive and alienating, is relatively outdated, I was shocked to hear that now, nearly 20 years later, students are perceived to feel the same way. For educators to look towards CRP in this way, leads me to believe that additional research is needed to identify the true impact CRP has on the mindsets of Black students, which may or may not be crucial for it to be widely adopted.

Secondly, I found that participation and attendance were key indicators used to identify the level of engagement in Black students, while poor in-class behaviour was used by participants to represent disengagement. Overall, these descriptors were very different from those used to identify engagement in a general student population. This contradiction only emphasised the ambiguity of the term engagement and suggests that it can represent different behaviours based on the context of the group being studied. That being said, in order for CRP to truly be labelled as a tool to engage Black students, a more concrete definition of Black student
engagement is required. This could allow scholars and teachers alike, to uniformly apply the term and adjust culturally responsive lessons based on a steady measurement of engagement. On the other hand, this raises a very important question in regards to how culturally responsive teachers weigh decisions such as maintaining high standards and expectations versus simply getting students to show up to class. With characteristics like attendance being used to identify Black student engagement future research needs to address this more thoroughly in order to truly begin to understand what CRP means and looks like for Black students.

Next, I found that given their culturally-informed perspectives, Black educators carefully selected representations of cultural figures who skillfully advocated for themselves, in order to teach Black students how to imitate this behaviour in the real world. Both Dwight and Angela stressed the importance of CRP being used as a vehicle to educate Black students how to navigate themselves outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, current anti-Black discrimination across North America has made this a priority for Black educators. Following this narrative, I cannot help but wonder how successful their preventative approach towards effective advocacy, and what other helpful lessons can be taught through CRP in order to positively influence the futures of Black youth more broadly.

In addition, I found that, despite the efforts of Black culturally responsive educators to maintain high expectations for students in order to improve academic achievement, they are disadvantaged by the practices of teachers who, blinded by white privilege, may set a considerably lower bar for Black students. Educators reported experiences of initial resistance from Black students who are less than familiar with high academic standards and being asked to achieve them. If schools continue to non-uniformly implement culturally responsive practices, teachers who newly adopted this approach may be easily be discouraged and revert to old standards in the face of opposition from students.
Finally, I found that although the TDSB reportedly offers a variety of professional development and learning opportunities targeted towards racially marginalized teachers or to focus on the learning outcomes of Black students, the lack of tangible resources provided to teachers reportedly prevented them from applying this knowledge in a classroom setting. It was explicitly encouraging to discover that the TDSB has reportedly, awarded schools with a high proportion of Black students additional funding in order to insure the academic success of Black students. The downfall here was; the disproportionate rate at which teachers were being granted access to this funding. This calls for the TDSB to seriously re-evaluate the strategies currently being used to assist Black youth across the board.

Initially, I had hoped this paper would have allowed to me to identify the culturally responsive practices of Black educators that reportedly fostered positive impacts on Black students, in order to be able to make clear recommendations for all teachers to employ regardless of race. Instead I found that the way in which these teachers used CRP specifically reflected their culturally informed opinions of experiences, opinions and desire for Black students to do well. CRP became less of approach used in scattered lessons throughout a unit or within culminating assignments, instead it was present in each of their classes and who they were as educators each day. Taking the time to dedicate full classes to let students vent and question their responses to allow them to think more deeply about their opinion and views based on the societal structures and develop their critical consciousness and cultural competency was ingrained in the fabrics of what these teachers represented. This representation was not based in Blackness or a connection to Black culture, but in sincere care and love for their students to do well and succeed. This is less of discussion of pedagogical approach than it is of beliefs and intentions that are beyond the skin of the teachers of Black students. Moving forward, more research needs
to be done with teachers who choose to use CRP in classroom with a high percentage of Black students and on the factors influencing their decisions to do so.

Next, in Chapter Five, I will discuss the broad implication of my study, and what my findings suggest that Black students, white teachers and Black teachers might be experiencing and how this research has informed my practice as an educator. I will also make recommendations directed towards administrators, the TDSB, and policy makers. Lastly, I will suggest potential areas of further research.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.0 Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will start by summarizing my key research findings and their importance. Second, I will discuss both the narrow and broad implications of my findings in respect to several stakeholders. Additionally, I will offer a range of recommendations to be considered by educators and the Toronto District School Board. Following this, I will highlight areas of future research and finally, I will conclude the chapter with brief commentary on the significance of narrowing the achievement gap and my hopes for the education of Black students in Ontario moving forward.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

The narratives in this study represented four Black high school teachers’ experiences working with Black students and their purposive use of culturally responsive pedagogy to support the engagement and academic achievement of these students. The findings of this study revealed five main themes in response to research questions:

1. Black educators conceptualize CRP as an opportunity to restore Black students’ self-confidence previously lost due to the Ontario education system
2. Black educators used various indicators to measure the improvement of Black student ‘engagement’
3. Black educators reportedly used CRP to demonstrate effective approaches to advocate for change around issues of racism
4. Culturally responsive Black educators are disadvantaged by the racism and practices of ‘other teachers’ with white privilege
5. The limited resources reportedly offered by the TDSB leave Black educators ill-equipped to adequately attend to the achievement gaps faced by Black students
What follows is a brief description of each theme which correspond to the list above.

The first finding of this study revealed that the participants’ intentional use of CRP was motivated by their optimism in its potential to heal the lack of self-confidence in Black students. Teachers described this lack of confidence as a common observation and assigned the Eurocentricity of the Ontario curriculum as the culprit. Each participant spoke of CRP as a means to heal the self-image of Black students and Dwight, in particular, spoke of the positive impact he personally saw in students he had taught multiple times describing them as finally viewing themselves as smart.

Additional analysis provided insight in the complexity of student engagement and that the characteristics of Black student engagement are distinct as opposed to a more general definition of the term. When initially asked to define student engagement, educators opted to describe various levels of participation, smiling, and excitement. On the other hand, when teachers were asked to provide scenarios where they could identify an improvement in Black student engagement when CRP was employed, characteristics such as improved in-class attendance, actually submitting assignments and in-class participation were used. Furthermore, when asked to describe Black student disengagement, many observable traits such as, inappropriate laughter, name calling, and disruptive behaviour were used. This suggesting that ‘engagement’ may look very different for Black students than it does the general student population. Also, it was reported that often time, Black students are passed on from grade to grade by racist teachers who hope to avoid teaching these students for another year. Ultimately, participants were able to identify cases where using culturally relevant plays or books to teach the Ontario curriculum that Black student engagement improved. Interestingly enough, these improved levels of engagement were reported to carry forward into lessons where more traditional materials were used.
The third finding was that CRP was reportedly being used as a tool to demonstrate effective approaches to advocate for change around issues of racism. Given the current issues across the United States this did not come as a surprise. Educators chose to incorporate plays, novels and figures from Black history who challenged stereotypical roles and stood up for themselves in ways that were not seen as oppositional in order to be heard by their white counterpart. This was of significant importance to these educators because of the rage and anger in students, given their personal experiences with law officials, and what they were bombarded with week after week in the media. Teachers allowed their classrooms to be used as an outlet where students could openly express their frustrations about what was happening in the U.S and in their immediate communities. Dwight went even put his lesson aside some days to use his classroom as a platform for students to ask questions and share their experiences of racism, around traumatic events. Otherwise, according to him, students were distracted the entire class. By making this decision Dwight was not helping to shape students perspectives, he was also helping to develop their critical consciousness and cultural competency.

While the participants of this study made it clear how important it was, in their opinion, to incorporate CRP in classrooms with a high percentage of Black students, they were very open in sharing the challenges they had faced as a result of teachers with white privilege who held low expectations for Black students. They expressed how accustomed Black students were to these low standards that it made it difficult to maintain high standards. These teachers experienced resistance from Black students and Angela’s Black students went as far as to drop out of her class towards the beginning of the semester after she clearly set out her classroom expectations.

With respect to resources available to Black teachers working towards bridging the achievement gaps of Black students, teachers consistently reported that limited resources are offered by the TDSB in regards to accessibility to funding supposedly meant to support Black
student success. Participants shared that schools with a high population of Black students were provided additional funding by the board, given the socioeconomic status of these students and the community they were in. Unfortunately, Dwight who was a department head, expressed how easily he was able to access this funding while, Rose shared experiences of being constantly denied access by those in administration at her school. She offered insight into this issues as her belief was that funding was actually being re-appropriated to things like textbooks and balancing the school budget, leaving her students without that resource. Throughout each interview there were multiple statements that supported the notion that Black educators, no matter what was being offered by the board, were still left ill-equipped to adequately attend to the achievement gaps faced by Black students.

5.2 Implications

Based on the findings from teacher reports and experiences working with Black students, in this section I will focus on the implications of this study on the administrators, parents and teachers of Black students and more specifically the culturally responsive educators of Black students. Finally, I will identify how this study has influenced my own professional practice and my roles as a sister, mother and educator to the Black youth, and the actions I will take to see them successful in the future.

5.2.1 Broad: The educational community

Firstly, this study has helped to shed light on multiple issues possibly being faced by administrators, parents and teachers of Black students who are choosing to skip classes, lack participation or behave inappropriately in class. Rather than simply being troubled or at-risk, like many institutions prefer to refer to them as, Black students might actually be disengaged. Based on many of the responses provided by participants the source of this disengagement may be due
to the Eurocentricity of the Ontario curriculum or gaps in their learning after having been passed on by previous racist teachers. Similarly, these very reasons may be what has helped to cause the confidence in Black student to be so low. A study conducted by Tavani et al. (2003) found a strong correlation between student confidence and academic success. Therefore, if Black students continue to perceive themselves as only being able to achieve a certain level of marks, this will continue to be a self-fulfilling prophecy and low academic achievement will continue.

In hindsight, the data from this study suggests that using culturally relevant material to convey the Ontario curriculum, may prove to have a positive impact on not only the engagement and behaviours exhibited in class but, the level of engagement observed when culturally relevant materials are absent.

Secondly, the teachers of Black students in Toronto schools may be finding it difficult to access funding allocated to improving the success of these students. Based on participant reports, this may be a result of funding being used in schools to balance other budgets as opposed to the money being used as it was originally intended.

Finally, like many of the participants in this study, culturally responsive educators may be experiencing resistance form Black students who choose to skip their classes, not participate in class, or not hand in assigned work, making it difficult to maintain high standards. This might be a result of the low standards these students have been accustomed to in the classrooms of teachers who see little potential in them. Due to systemic oppression and racism, teachers with white privilege most likely are not challenging their quality of work or providing guidance on good study habits or how to go about improving assignments. Furthermore, culturally responsive educators may be finding it difficult to adjust their standards for Black students accordingly in order to improve their level of engagement, and this may be a result of the behaviours associated to engagement being rather foggy. Lastly, educators who choose to employ CRP may find it
difficult accessing resources that can be easily incorporated into their classrooms and are finding themselves having to reach out to alternative organizations that have the success of Black students at the heart of their agenda.

5.2.2 Narrow: My professional identity and practice

In respect to my professional development in light of these findings, my identity and practice has changed immensely, especially as a science educator. One of the key findings of this study was the ambiguity of the term engagement and that the disengagement of Black students may look very different from the disengagement of other students in practice. Furthermore, the root cause of these students to either skipping my classes, being disruptive, or not handing in work actually may have very little to do with the fact that students simply not being interested in the curriculum but rather, that this student has gaps in the learning as a result of them being passed on by previous racist teachers or teachers with white privilege. In order to end the cycle, it is my job to work with that student, parents and administrators to help fill those gaps in order for current concepts to be understood. As a sister to a Black brother who consistently strives to simply pass courses with a 50, I will need to begin to dismantle the structures representing his highest potential, instilled in him through systematic forms of oppression and racism in order for him to improve his ideas of success. As a mother of my two Black boys, with them being as young as they are I feel that it is my responsibility to building them up emotionally, mentally, spiritually and psychologically, at home and to set high standards. This is irrespective of how society and teachers view them and their potential to success academically.

Unfortunately, the currently equity within the TDSB, and I’m sure in many other school boards, has a long way to go. With the current societal structures, imagines in media and systemic barriers in place, Black students are not regarded as equal and as long as things remain
as is, teachers who try to change their academic and social outcomes, will always face a series of challenges. I feel that in order for true change to come about governments need to be challenged, current policies need to be challenged and school boards collectively need to be challenged. The saying that comes to mind is “it takes a village”, in this case it is not necessarily to raise a child but rather to change the future of a child. Parents, teachers, administrators and scholars will need to come together in order for Ontario schools to become a place where Black students are encouraging, guided and mentored to reach their full potential and where failure or mediocrity is unacceptable.

5.3 Recommendations

Given the implication of this study there are a series of recommendations that should be considered by various groups in order to improve the experiences of Black students in Toronto schools. Given the relationship between Black student behaviour, engagement and the positive impact of CRP, it is recommended that teachers of Black students attempt to adopt culturally responsive practices as means to possibly improve Black student’s level of engagement and ultimately in-class behaviours, attendance, and class participation. Secondly, the relationship between the above observable traits and the possibility of learning gaps as a result of students being passed on, I recommend that administrators keep this in mind as students are sent to the office. Although, exclusionary forms of discipline are often considered students are disruptive in classroom setting, turning to these forms of discipline will only widen existing learning gaps for these students. Instead I suggest that administers request that teachers attend to the academic needs of these students in order for them to be placed on a path of success. Furthermore, as a preventative measure policy makers need to inforce a procedure where teachers who award students a mark anywhere from 45-55 percent will need to provide substantial evidence to support the student receiving this mark. Also, if students’ midterm marks reveal they are
struggling with the content, students should be required to attend mandatory extra help sessions and teachers required to devise an appropriate plan for student success. This will negate educators the freedom to ignore Black students who need help but choose to skip or act inappropriately in class.

As veteran and beginner teachers continue to learn best practises around inclusivity and equitable teaching, it is imperative that professional development at the school level, organized by administrators, include workshops on best practices when incorporating CRP specifically geared towards Black students. Not only are strategies important to cover but tangible resources like web links, alternative curriculums, explicit activities, books, texts and so on should be shared in order to allow for smooth integration into existing lessons. It equally important that administrators advocate for the entire school to adopt the practices and pedagogy associated to CRP to reduce the level of resistance existing culturally responsive educators experience from Black students. Another strategy to reduce this resistance would be for administrators to have all white teachers to a mandatory PD workshop on the topic of power, privilege and oppression, given the current societal structures in place. This may allow teachers to identify where they reside on the scale of power and oppression in reference to Black students. In turn, this will may them to make decisions that impact these students, from a place of knowledge as opposed to a place of ignorance.

My final recommendation is aimed at the TDSB management team, whom are responsible for the dispersal of funding to individual schools. The inconsistency of teacher accessibility to funding for Black students suggest that TDSB management team should consider assigning a member from the board to each school to manage funding. This may ensure that monetary contributions being made to support Black student accessibility to resources given their socioeconomically status are properly managed and distributed.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

One of the key findings of this study revolved around the distinction between student engagement and Black student engagement. Being that a well-established characteristic of culturally responsive teachers is that they strive to maintain high standards, it is important to have an explicit understanding how ‘engagement’ may change from student and student and how to then employ strategies and techniques to maintain ethical standards for that individual student. That being said, future research should look towards understanding exactly how do teachers who identify as culturally responsive begin to navigate between maintaining high standards in classrooms with Black students versus simply getting students to attend class and be present in their own learning. By beginning to understand how teachers go about accomplishing this we may be able to gain further insight into how to truly achieve Black student success through CRP and concrete strategies to engage Black students in various subject areas.

Another key finding that emerged from the interviews was centered around the reported lack of confidence Black students possess in the Ontario school system. As I previously mentioned in Chapter One, this issue was first acknowledged over 20 years ago by Dei et al. in 1997; it would be of significant importance to identify Black students who once viewed themselves in the same light and were able to overcome this self-concept and become academically success and pinpoint what factors allowed them to accomplish this. These two very different avenues of academic research would bring a much deeper insight into Black student success in order for the education community to close the achievement gaps that exist.

5.5 Concluding Comments

Initially towards the beginning of this study, I set out to investigate how CRP is being carried out in the classrooms of Black teachers in order to foster improved student engagement and academic success ultimately as a means to reduce the rate at which Black students
experience exclusionary discipline. It was key for me to identify the strategies and techniques being used by Black culturally responsive Black educators in the hopes that these methods could be adopted by teachers of all races. After conducting this study, it is now clear that Black student achievement is very complex and multifaceted. Students levels of engagement, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, in school support, at home support, as well as curricular presentation, forms of assessment, parent-teacher relationships and student-teacher relationships all combine to yield a positive environment and support system for Black students.

Unfortunately, before we can appropriately rectify this rather complex problem, we must first deconstruct layers of this system and identify contributors to systemic barriers and oppression. This may seem like an unattainable goal, but if we truly intend for achieve equitable education standards and design a curriculum and school environment where all students can are equally successful, this work needs to be underway on a larger scale here in Toronto.
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Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date:

Dear ______________________,

My name is Monique Power and I am a student in the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how Black secondary teachers in Ontario intentionally incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies when working with Black students. I am interested in interviewing Black teachers who have abundant experience working with Black students in a culturally responsive way. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one roughly 60-75 minute interview of approximately 19 questions, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper and informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication.

You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Monique Power

Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

My name is Monique; I am a first year teacher candidate at OISE. I’d like to thank you for
participating in my research study. The research I am conducting focuses on the achievement
gaps and behavioral divide among black youth in Ontario. I hope to learn about the efforts Black
teachers are making to change this, through integration of cultural responsive pedagogy and
other strategies. I will be asking you a series of questions that pertain to your teaching practices
and experiences when working with Black students. The interview will last approximately 90
minutes and is comprised of approximately 20 questions. I want to remind you that you can
choose not to answer any question, and withdraw from participation at any time. Do you have
any questions before we begin?

As I mentioned in the consent letter this interview will be audio-recorded.

**Section A – Background Information**

1. How long have you been living in Canada?
   a. (If born here) Where were your parents born?
   b. (If not born here) What country were you born in?

2. Do you speak any languages other than English? If so, which?

3. How do you define the term Black?

4. Can you please tell me about your relationship to ‘Black’ as an identity category?
   a. Inside the classroom
   b. Outside the classroom
   c. Can you describe the role you play to Black students outside of your role as a
teacher?

5. How many years have you been working as a teacher in Canada?
   a. In the Greater Toronto Area?
   b. At your current school?

6. What subjects and grades do you currently teach?
a. Which do you have taught previously?

7. In addition to teaching, what other roles in the school do you play? (Coach, advisor, leader of any clubs)

8. Can you describe your community involvement outside of school?
   a. Does your community involvement extend to the neighborhood of the school where you teach?

9. Can you please describe the demographics of your school and its surrounding community?
   (race/ethnicity, languages spoken, immigration, SES)

10. What would be your best estimate of the overall percentage of Black students in your own classes?

Section B – Conceptualizing Culturally Responsive Teaching

1. How do you personally define culturally responsive teaching?

2. In your view, what does successful culturally responsive teaching for Black students ‘look like’ in practice?

3. In your opinion, why is it important to use culturally responsive teaching practices in a class with Black students?

4. Can you provide an example of a lesson you taught in that was culturally responsive in relation to Black students?
   a. Learning goals
   b. Resources used
   c. Class setup
   d. Themes
   e. Was the lesson successful?

5. Can you describe to me an incident when a Black student was disrespectful and/or
disobedient in one of your classes?

i. What happened?

ii. What consequence did the student face?

iii. Were any third parties notified or brought in to assist in resolving the matter?

   (parents, principals, guidance councilors)

iv. What supports were in place for the students following the incident?

b. To what extent would you describe your own practice in this situation as ‘culturally responsive’? Why?

6. Can you tell me about the nature or extent of your interactions with your Black students’ families or communities?

7. Have you ever spoken about your own Black identity or experiences of anti-Black racism with your students?

   a. (if yes) Why was it important for you to share this with your students? (What were the key takeaways you hoped for your students to learn?)

   b. (if no) Why have you refrained from sharing these experiences with your class?

Section C – Impacts of CRP on Black Student Engagement

1. What is your personal definition of student engagement?

2. What are some typical behaviors you have seen in your Black students when they are not engaged?

3. Walk me through a time where you could identify a change in the engagement of Black students in your classroom when you used culturally responsive pedagogy.

   a. Attentiveness

   b. Effort
c. Submission date (on time)

d. Was it successful

i. (yes or no) On what basis do you think so?

ii. Was there any difference in the academic performance of students because of this?

Section E – Supports, Challenges and Next Steps

1. What resources or support systems are available to you as a Black teacher working with Black students?

   a. Usefulness / Practicality

   b. Where were they obtained?

   c. What have you found to be the most impactful resource on your teaching practices thus far?

2. Have you received any training – whether in teacher education or in-service professional development – on culturally responsive pedagogy in general OR particularly for Black students?

   a. (If yes) what did you learn? Did you find this useful?

   b. (If no) would you find this useful? Why?

3. Would you say that your school/administrative culture promotes culturally responsive pedagogy given the high population of Black students it serves?

   a. (if yes) What does this promotion look like?

   b. (if no) Why do you think this is not the case?

4. What challenges have you faced in the past or do you currently face, as a Black educator when instructing a class with a large number of Black students?

   a. What advantages do you think you have in this situation?
5. What advice would you give to Black beginner teachers that would help them to have a positive impact on the learning experience of Black students in Ontario?

6. Do you have any final thoughts?

Thank you for your time.