Strategies and Suggestions for Teachers with Students of Diverse Race/ Ethnicity with Behavioural Challenges

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Abstract

This research paper discusses the question, what are teachers’ experiences with supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary schools? Convenience and purposive sampling were used to find four Ontario Certified Teachers. The participants were a Black male, Black female, White male, and White female teacher. The data was collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and interpreted to find and synthesize themes. A rigorous analysis revealed four important themes: (1) Student background, home and school life, (2) Classroom dynamics, approach, and expectations, (3) Teacher supports, and (4) Teacher attitude. The research provides insights into how some students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges may be treated differently by their teachers than other students who present the same or similar behaviours. The research also seeks strategies for teachers to be inclusive and equitable to all students so biases, stereotypes, and potential racism do not hinder student-teacher relationships, or the student’s learning and success. The paper concludes with discussing the implications if current trends and observations of the disproportionate treatment do not change. Recommendations for the ministry, administrators, and teachers are suggested to support all students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges.

Key Words: Behavioural challenges, disproportionate, ethnicity, race, teaching strategies
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Introduction and research context

Woolfolk, Winne, and Perry (2016) state, “students with emotional and behavioural disorders can be among the most challenging to teach in general education classrooms, and are a source of concern for many prospective teachers” (p. 117). This statement carries a great deal of weight and may create fear in some prospective teachers when thinking about behavioural challenges in the classroom. As a prospective teacher, there should not be fear of behavioural challenges, but instead feel encouraged to handle them in a proactive manner. Not only is there an importance of behavioural challenges in the classroom, but it may also be important to look at who is being labeled as having behavioural challenges. Research studies, by Monroe (2005) and Noltemeyer, Kunesh, Hostutler, Frato, & Sarr-Kerman (2012), state that students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds experience differential treatment for the same or similar behaviours than other students. In a study by Fenning and Rose (2007), they found ethnicity to be a variable in discipline, and in a study by Ruck and Wortley (2002), they found students had stronger perception of different treatment for students of colour.

Through examining numerous literature resources and teacher interviews, the aim of this study is to challenge personal and system biases of classroom management style, reflect on possible biases related to race/ethnicity and behaviour management, and to provide suggestions for equitable treatment towards students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. When schools, classrooms, and teachers treat students equitably and inclusively, then specific concerns, such as behavioural challenges, should be addressed in the same fashion. According to Monroe (2005), Noltemeyer and colleagues (2012), and Fenning and Rose (2007), the reality of stereotypes, overrepresentation, biases, and disproportionate discipline of racial/ethnically diverse students with behavioural challenges is not new and continues to exist.

Overall, this research looks at teachers’ experiences with supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary classrooms. The behavioural challenges discussed in this study are actions and habits that keep the student or other students from learning in the classroom. They range in severity from disrespect and excessive noise (Fenning & Rose, 2007), to classroom disruptions (Noltemeyer, et al., 2012), to walking around the classroom during teaching time, not paying attention, and not following the rules (Woolfolk et al., 2016). Other behavioural challenges include inappropriate actions
(Howery, McClellan, & Pedersen-Bayus, 2013), talking in class and aggression (Sorani-Villanueva, McMahon, Crouch, & Keys, 2014), as well as, yelling, defiance, bullying, and fighting (O’Brennan, Bradshaw, & Furlong, 2014). This list is not exhaustive and other actions and habits may be considered behavioural challenges. Within this research project, the different ethnicities and races discussed in the literature are: African American/ Canadian (Black), European (White), South Asian, Hispanic, Asian, First Nations, and “other” (mixed racial backgrounds) (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Noltemeyer et al.; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Ruck & Wortley, 2002; Shifer, Muller, & Callahan, 2011; and Sorani-Villanueva et al., 2014). These groupings are also not exhaustive and as such, the terms diverse race/ ethnicity were selected to incorporate all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The first steps with this research through chapter one are to identify the problem, state the purpose, ask questions, discuss the research method, contextualize the background of the researcher, and present an overview of what is to come in this study.

1.1 Research problem

Personally, many instances of students treated differently for the same or similar behaviours as others in the classroom have been observed. Both just and unjust discipline has been witnessed, and it was wondered why some students were disciplined or managed in a different way. The students observed being treated differently for challenging behaviour are students of colour, mostly of African American/ Canadian or of Caribbean descent. However, it has also been witnessed and read that students of various ethnicities may experience differential treatment when displaying challenging behaviour (Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Students of diverse racial/ ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary schools should receive support for the behaviours they may present. The types of behaviours students present may keep the student and or others from learning in the classroom, and therefore require support or effective management. Proctor, Graves Jr., and Esch (2012) and Shifer and others (2011) suggest teachers should use strategies for students of diverse racial/ ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges, such as specific classroom management styles, special programs, or integration and inclusion practices. Teachers may encounter challenges in providing support for students of diverse racial/ ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges because some teachers may face difficulty implementing interventions (Bettini, Kimerling, Park & Murphy, 2015). Shifer and others (2011) suggest there may be differences in teaching strategies and support for students with behavioural challenges who are of diverse ethnicities, because African
American students are “disproportionally represented in intervention programs” (p. 254). Not only is there a concern with some types of support and management techniques, but there is also a concern with how students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds are treated (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Through analyzing existing research in literature and through semi-structured one-on-one interviews with educators, the data is explained, discussed, coded, categorized, and analyzed related to the problems expressed.

1.2 Purpose of the study

This research topic is significant because of personal experiences throughout life, and the desire not to follow in the same path of biases, misconceptions, and differential treatment in personal conduct as a teacher. Personally, I have not experienced differentiated teaching strategies from my own teachers for behaviour management based on my racial/ethnic background. However, during my elementary years, I knew a male student of colour with behavioural challenges and I do not believe that student was supported equitably. I also believe because the student’s behaviour was not addressed, it affected his education. Witnessing students with behavioural challenges of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds during my experiences through volunteering, previous jobs, and practicum at different public schools has also contributed to my opinions. I noticed students of a particular racial/ethnic group, Black students, were labeled as having behavioural challenges. It appeared to me these students were treated differently by teachers than students of other races/ethnicities with behavioural challenges. The differences in treatment were level of tolerance, tone of voice, and consequences for first time and multiple offences. Critical Race Theory (CRT) may have a positive effect on the teaching strategies and support for students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. I feel students of diverse backgrounds who have behavioural challenges should be supported with culturally relevant pedagogy, possibly Special Education educators, as well as integration and inclusion in the classroom. I have witnessed these strategies in successful and unsuccessful instances, and they are addressed in chapter two of this research project.

I agree with the documents by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013; 2014) that state all students should be included and treated with equity. I want to learn about the problems stated because I have witnessed a diversity of students with behavioural challenges and I feel not all
students are able to get the support they may need, nor are they treated equitably. As a result, I fear this may compromise their ability to achieve success in school and ultimately their future.

1.3 Research questions

To generate thoughts on this research, a number of questions were pondered, such as what teachers are doing to create an inclusive classroom for students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges; and how can educators be proactive, instead of reactive when encountering students with behavioural challenges? To focus and organize the learning and data collection throughout the qualitative research process, a key question and three subsidiary questions were concentrated on. The key question: What are teachers’ experiences with supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary schools? Through a review of the current literature and through responses from educators in the interview process the content of the paper aims to answer this question. The first subsidiary question is what strategies are elementary teachers using to support students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in the classroom? The answers to, and sentiments around this question can be beneficial for teachers to implement toward students regardless of race/ethnicity and behavioural challenges. The next subsidiary question is what are the challenges of elementary teachers in supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in the classroom? This is a reality as there are challenges in all classrooms. Personal and particular interest was placed on the last subsidiary question, which is, do teachers use or observe different teaching strategies for students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in the classroom? This question seeks to find out if different strategies are used for students of diverse race/ethnicity, particularly minorities, compared to students of the majority, or European ethnicities. This question is supported by a literature review and by experiences from the interview participants.

1.4 Research methods

For this research study, a qualitative approach using semi-structured one-on-one interviews was conducted. Following Creswell’s (2013) advice, broad assumptions and personal biases from the beginning and throughout the research process are acknowledged. Creswell suggests reviewing the literature with an interpretative lens to identify rationales and assumptions. According to him, it is also important to gather informal research throughout the process such as through readings, talking with others, observations, and other forms; and to
gather formal research at specific stages. Data was collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews and through readings. The next phases of qualitative research, according to Creswell, are analyzing data, interpreting data, validating the strategies used, writing the study, and then sharing the findings. The methods of this research are discussed in detail in chapter three.

1.5 Researcher background

Through the development and expansion of my philosophy of teaching, more focus is on inclusion and equity. As a Canadian woman of a diverse (or mixed) racial/ethnic background, and witness of viewing teachers with different management strategies for students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges, I am particularly concerned. I witnessed an incident where a European (White) male teacher disciplined a Caribbean Canadian/African Canadian (Black) male student more harshly than a Greek (White) male student who displayed similar behaviours. Both were told to stop the behaviour, specifically talking while the teacher was teaching or to stop being disruptive. However, I only ever witnessed the Black student being told to sit outside the classroom for his behaviour. Conversely, the White male student was not asked to sit outside the classroom. Many factors could have explained why this Black male was disciplined differently than the White male, such as compliance, or the teacher could have based it on experiences and history with the student. As my knowledge deepened by reading more articles and talking to others about this topic, I felt more strongly about my research, and more passionate about the inequities in schools. I was not surprised at my experiences of witnessing different approaches in education towards students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges, but I was disappointed. It is concerning it appears the students of minority races/ethnicities are treated differently by teachers compared to students of majority races/ethnicities with behavioural challenges. I believe teacher biases and perceptions are a factor for behaviour management and classroom supports. I also believe CRT may have an effect on teaching strategies and support for students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. Other factors may also contribute to disproportionality of treatment, and all of these may affect student education. As a woman of colour, and more importantly, as an emerging teacher, I care about all students’ safety and right to equitable and inclusive treatment. I want to be fair and consistent to my future students, and I hope other teachers will be as well.

I am aware of and acknowledge my own biases as a woman of colour. Through my experiences, I noticed I relate more to students of similar races/ethnicities as me. Sometimes I
was more lenient with my management of a student whom I related to, partly because I feel students deserve many chances to behave, and partly because I do not want to negatively discipline students who remind me of myself. My management style ultimately leads to the same result with discipline. However, I tend to give some students more chances than others do before taking action. Throughout this research, I became more aware of my biases, and now challenge them. I want my pedagogy as a teacher to be equitable towards all races/ethnicities, and give the student what he or she needs to be successful in the classroom.

As an emerging teacher, I have been aware of and respect the practice of self-reflection. I reflected on lessons, interactions, and events to see what went well, what I could have done differently, and what I could implement next time if a similar situation arises. Ryan (2005) suggests to do more than be reflective; he suggests being reflexive, which is to be introspective and have, “a deep inward gaze into every interaction whether it be in teaching or any other interaction in life” (p. 2). Ryan states this process helps to improve interactions, feelings, thoughts, and behavior. I believe reflections helped make me a better teacher, a better person, and continue to help me reach my goals of inclusion and equity. McGhie-Richmond, Irvine, Loreman, Cizman, & Lupart (2013) state inclusive schools ensure:

All students are welcomed, valued, and learn together in regular education classrooms, regardless of their particular learning characteristics and needs. In inclusive classrooms, teachers adapt their instructional practices so that all students, including students with special learning needs, achieve in ways that are meaningful. (p. 197) Despite their differences, it is believed students should be included. Teachers should learn more about their students, and find the best way to educate and include each student. I have witnessed students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges and the teachers’ actions and strategies in the classroom. I brought my background and experiences to this topic, and enhanced my understanding through research in literature and through interviews. By researching this topic, I have learnt skills and strategies of how to effectively and inclusively manage a classroom, including one or more students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. I also hope my research can be shared and potentially be of assistance to other teachers looking for ways to support all students with behavioural challenges.
1.6 Overview of the study

This research addresses the problem, discusses challenges, and examines strategies through a literature review, as well as through conversations via interview with educators. This research may be a sensitive topic to some people. However, it is a topic that needs to be addressed. In the next few chapters, this study examines, compares, and discusses the scholarly literature related to students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. Broadly, there are more American resources than Canadian resources. However, studies from both sources have some similar information on the problem this study focuses on, as well as suggestions and strategies. This research also aims to help fill the gap pertaining to the lack of Canadian resources, with a focus on Ontario elementary schools.

Chapter one introduces the problem and questions driving the study. Chapter two examines and discusses the literature on this topic. Chapter three explains the methodology and interview process following a qualitative research design. Chapter four delves into the research findings and themes. Lastly, chapter five looks at the implications, key findings, and recommendations.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Chapter overview

From personal childhood, volunteer, and practicum experiences as an adult in a classroom, there have been many students with behavioural challenges of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. The researcher observed some students of a particular racial/ethnic group (such as African or Caribbean Canadian) were labelled as having behavioural challenges, such as talking in class, getting up during teaching, and aggression, and were treated differently as a result. This study was interested in exploring and researching teachers’ experiences with supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary schools. Research studies, such as by Monroe (2005) and Noltemeyer and others (2012), show that students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds are often disciplined differently for the same or similar behaviours than other students. As a woman of colour, this concerns me, and the aim of the paper is to discover ways in which all teachers can treat each student with equity regardless of behaviour, ethnicity, race, and other factors. Behaviour is a factor in education that teachers must address and manage in the classroom. Noltemeyer and others note teachers with different experiences and backgrounds will encounter students with behavioural challenges and will react in their own way to manage the behaviour. O’Brennan and others (2014) feel “reducing student problem behaviour remains a leading concern for school staff, as disruptive and aggressive behaviour interferes with student achievement and the school climate” (p. 125). Throughout chapter two, the disproportionality among racially/ethnically diverse students and possible challenges of supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges is examined. There are also suggestions on what strategies teachers are using to support racially/ethnically diverse students with behavioural challenges. Lastly, there is a discussion of the research on suggestions for change and equity in the classroom.

2.1 Disproportionality among students demonstrating behavioural challenges

A problem found in some schools today and in the past is equity and inclusion for all students (including those from different races/ethnicities with behavioural challenges). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) guide on equity and inclusion says all educators must be inclusive, equitable, and provide a safe learning environment for students to succeed. With this guideline and policies in place, it is interesting to see this is not always true because some students are not treated equitably and inclusively as the literature supports. According to
O’Brennan and others (2014), students of diverse race/ethnicity (mainly African American and Hispanic students compared to White students in the United States) are overrepresented or disproportionately referred to the office with office discipline referrals (ODR’s). Skiba, Polini-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz (2006) show these same racial/ethnic students are also overrepresented in particular disabilities categories, disproportionately placed in restrictive classrooms, and Monroe (2005) and Noltemeyer and others (2012) note these students are also disproportionally disciplined for certain behaviours. The researchers noted agree on this trend of overrepresentation and disproportionality among racially/ethnically diverse students and describe why it may be. Noltemeyer and others suggest awareness of this phenomenon so that a self-fulfilling prophecy is not created, and to be proactive in managing student behaviour.

Interestingly, much of the research reviewed has a stronger focus on males. Noltemeyer and others (2012) find in their research, “male students consistently and disproportionately receive disciplinary actions in schools” (p. 97). O’Brennan and others (2014) agree male students are viewed differently, and in their study in particular, as more aggressive, less relatable, and less favourable. According to the Canadian study by Ruck and Wortley (2002), Black males are more likely to be suspended from school than White males. This area could be further developed in the future. However, it is outside the boundaries of this particular study.

There is much research on the differences among Black male students compared to White male students. For example, results from O’Brennan and others (2014) study shows Black students had higher levels of problem behaviour compared to White students. Ruck and Wortley (2002) examined student opinions on the treatment and perception of various races in a high school study; the results showed ethnic minorities (or students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds), were perceived to be more likely to be disciplined than White students. Through the research of Fenning and Rose (2007), race/ethnicity are a variable in discipline and it is evident among the discipline referrals for Black and White students. Why is race/ethnicity a factor in behaviour discipline? What makes students of diverse races/ethnicities vulnerable to differential treatment? The literature examined was used to answer these questions.

2.1.1 Biases and perceptions

Some teachers have particular beliefs and stereotypes of students. Monroe’s (2005) research study suggests teachers’ opinions and stereotypes of certain students, particularly African American students, are from the media and scholarly portrayals of contemporary Black
life culture as people who are violent, antiauthoritarian, use drugs and who display other social concerns. If educators have a particular mindset, it may be hard to change. For example, Theoharis and Haddix (2011) did a partial ethnographic study on six White principals of urban schools and one principal shared some of their classroom teachers had particular viewpoints:

I was struck by the fact when we had a group of Black students I got many calls alerting me and seemingly nervous about their presence even though they were not loud in the hall. But when a group of White students who were much louder came, no one seemed to notice and no one showed evidence that they were concerned or nervous. (p. 1341)

The teachers of this school seemed to have a pre-existing bias and opinion about Black students. Theoharis and Haddix note how the principal of this particular school saw the importance of needing to address the biases by talking with the staff and reflecting on these biases.

Monroe (2005) argues there is evidence showing “black males are disciplined with greater frequency and severity than their peers… [and] many problems are connected to cultural mismatches between teachers and students” (p. 48). O’Brennan et al. (2014) similarly found:

Teachers tend to rate their relationships with students more positively if there was a match between the teacher’s and student’s ethnic identity. Given that majority of teachers are White females, this research would suggest a tendency for Black male students to be rated less favorably than their White female counterparts. (p. 126)

It seems unfair that Black male students are treated differently. It also seems unfair that the race/ethnicity and gender of a teacher can affect relationships with the students. This is part of the problem, differential treatment is too present, and changes need to be made. There may be biases and stereotypes that lead to the less favourable relationships or it could be a lack of relatability, cultural awareness and racial/ethnic diversity. Noltemeyer and colleagues (2012) agree with this idea and looked at other research to support the view that some “European American teachers rated African American students less favorably than European American students on measures of disruptive behaviors and noncognitive academic skills and habits” (p. 97). Biases and perceptions exist, and it is up to the individual to change these, and to treat each student as a unique individual. A teacher should not cloud their judgment with thoughts that may not relate to the child’s behaviour. Fenning and Rose (2007) feel any student can “misbehave” (p. 537), and it is important not to make quick judgments based on one or two occurrences, nor to jump to conclusions based on a student’s race/ethnicity.
2.1.2 Critical Race Theory

My philosophical position on race/ethnicity and differential treatment were supported by my experiences and research. The research study drew on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which Parker and Lynn (2002) define as “a legal theory of race and racism designed to uncover how race and racism operate in the law and in society” (p. 7). Parker and Lynn show “how race and racism affect the education and lives of the racially disenfranchised” (p. 8). Education is important and Monroe (2005) feels being labelled a “bad” student can affect education. Kauffman, Mock, and Simpson (2007) as well as Skiba and others (2006) also feel being disproportionately disciplined and overrepresented in special education programs can also affect a student’s education. CRT is deeply rooted in history and creates a cycle of racism and other societal and educational problems. Educators can be the change. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) also refer to CRT in their study, and state that it has a deeply rooted effect on education. It would be beneficial to compare these beliefs with a Canadian study referring to the CRT. This gap in Canadian literature should be filled by bringing awareness towards minority students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges who are often treated differently in comparison to majority racial/ethnic groups. The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2008) says, “the educational system reflects and often perpetuates discriminatory practices of the larger society” (p. 4). Educators need to reflect on their own biases, and what they know about different races/ethnicities and not be influenced by stereotypes. Everyone has biases and stereotypes based on certain groups of people. It is what one does with their thoughts and actions related to those biases and stereotypes, which can make the difference in student education.

2.2 Challenges of supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges

McGhie-Richmond and others (2013) found, “in general, teachers have been more likely to favor inclusion of some students over others depending upon the type and extent of disability... teachers are more accepting of students with physical disabilities than cognitive or behavioural disabilities” (p. 200-201). This statement is disappointing because it lacks equity and inclusion of students with and without disabilities. Why do some teachers feel this way? McGhie-Richmond and others also found teachers tend to favour students they believe they can manage versus the students who are perceived to be more disruptive. This evidence connects with Fenning and Rose’s (2007) research, which discusses teachers’ desire to have control in the
classroom and found if a student does not fit the social and behavioural norms of school then they are labelled as “dangerous” or “troublemaker” (p. 537). As well, Fenning and Rose note if a teacher feels a loss of control, these feelings could influence the type of behaviour management or punishment for the student. Another important factor Fenning and Rose share is, “students of color are unfortunately targeted as part of this fear and anxiety and subsequently are more likely to be on the receiving end of our most punitive discipline consequences” (p. 537). This article is informative and includes a discussion balancing both behavioural challenges and students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds; it was an effective contribution to the literature because it reminds readers anyone can “misbehave” regardless of race/ethnicity (Fenning & Rose, p. 537).

Trends in the literature suggest challenges in the classroom may be lack of control, inconsistent discipline, lack of support, and, or lack of understanding. Some of the researchers agree on challenges, while others may not. This section looked at various studies related to challenges.

### 2.2.1 Challenges with management in the classroom and school communities

A document prepared by the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2008) shares a definition of classroom management as a positive classroom climate through teacher created activities that make opportunities for effective teaching and learning. How a teacher manages a class may determine student behaviour, because the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education document states, a poorly managed class where teachers struggle to teach students may lead to discipline issues, whereas a well-managed class can provide a flourishing environment for both teachers and learners. There may be a perfect strategy for behavioural management for each student, but there are still potential challenges that may arise. Challenges may include classroom control, consequences from teacher actions, or lack of resources (Bettini et al., 2015; Skiba et al., 2006; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). Bettini and others (2015) do not reference race/ethnicity in their study, but they describe the challenges teachers have in relation to students with emotional and behavioural disorders. They state the challenges in supporting students’ academic and behavioural needs, especially that teacher’s often feel overburdened with many responsibilities, and believe teachers need better support from administrators. Administrators, according to Bettini and others, are not always prepared to offer support, give advice that can be acted on, nor provide sufficient instructional opportunities for the students with emotional and behavioural “disabilities” (p. 121). Under-funding, lack of teacher preparation, and increasing classroom demands are challenges noted by McGhie-Richmond et al. (2013). Skiba and others
(2006) agree limited support and resources are a challenge to having an inclusive classroom, and list other challenges, such as lack of teacher training on inclusion, disabilities, and challenges.

Another related challenge is a lack of cultural understanding or a “lack of adequate professional training to work with students from diverse backgrounds” (Gérin-Lajoie, 2012, p. 213). Gérin-Lajoie (2012) is a Canadian researcher who discusses multiculturalism in Canada, noting what schools are doing is not enough, and may actually be part of the problem because some teachers say they are “colour-blind” to the diversity of students (p. 213). This may seem harmless initially, but equality is not the same as equity and some students may need different treatment to be fair. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) would agree being “colour-blind” is not effective for inclusion because there are different races/ethnicities in the school, and it is important to be aware of all their differences.

Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, and Leaf (2010) found Black male teachers tend to give more major ODR’s (for abusive language, bullying, harassment, fighting, and defiance) to Black students than White teachers; however, White teachers tend to give out more minor ODR's (for disruption and property misuse). In this study, the race/ethnicity of the teacher does not seem to matter in the discipline of Black students. There could be other factors involved, but it is interesting to note that more White teachers give out minor ODR’s. Noltemeyer and others, (2012) suggest this could be representative of the fact that educators may misunderstand the behaviour and judge it as a disruption and educator’s views on students may (sub) consciously affect students and could cause a self-fulfilling prophecy.

2.3 Strategies and suggestions for equity and inclusion

Different teachers have different methods for classroom control or management and classroom engagement, such as Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS) as mentioned by Fenning and Rose (2007), Howery and others (2013), and Woolfolk and others. (2016); as well as distinct classroom rules, and ODR’s as noted by O’Brennan and others (2014). Fenning and Rose (2007), state behaviour management strategies are meant for teachers to meet the needs of individual students, as well as a classroom by modelling and teaching standard or consistent positive behaviours that are expected for a student and class to function effectively. Monroe (2005) recommends people should self-interrogate personal beliefs about students (of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds), implement culturally responsive strategies, talk more openly about school discipline choices, and maintain student and class interest by being engaging. Skiba and others
(2006) suggest for inclusion to occur, educators need to remove barriers in order to provide equal educational opportunity for all students. Educators develop strategies (they believe) will work best for them and for their classroom. Sometimes there are strategies that will work for the whole classroom, which is inclusive to all students, while some teachers may implement individual strategies for specific students. Various research studies discuss different strategies that teachers use to support students with behaviour challenges, and students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. This research discussed literature on teacher’s approaches, and looked at Ontario school policy. Next, literature on whole class strategies and lastly strategies for individual students was examined. This section also focused on inclusion and equity practices for students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. The literature review was meant to illuminate some prevailing strategies that may be helpful for all teachers.

2.3.1 Culturally relevant pedagogy

Both Fenning and Rose (2007) and Monroe (2005) believe some educators lack cultural relevance and connectedness to students. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) agree some educators lack the cultural awareness to understand students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds because they do not share racial, cultural, nor linguistic norms and traditions. Not being able to relate to students may create a barrier, or lessen a connection, whereas having something in common may assist some teachers in relating to students. Young (2010) suggests in order for a connection with students, educators should have a culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP). Young defines CRP as a three-pronged paradigm and theoretical model that addresses student achievement, assists students to “accept and affirm their cultural identity”, and assists students “in developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 248, p. 249). Young believes the lack of a CRP in the classroom contributes to the racial achievement gap, defined as minority students, and disadvantaged students not doing as well in school as non-minority students and advantaged students, due to oppressive factors, such as racism. Young questions educators, asking why they are not teaching students about social inequities that cause oppression, such as racism and blames educators for their own lack of cultural awareness.

Gérin-Lajoie (2012), also agrees about educators needing to be culturally aware, but through her research, discovered educators feel they do not have enough training to meet the needs of the racial/ethnically diverse student population. Gérin-Lajoie, also reports that some
educators “perceive racial and ethnic minorities as students who do not always fit into school. They still consider them [students] to be “others”, especially when a student presents a “problem”” (p. 218). As an effort to challenge these issues, Gérin-Lajoie focuses part of her research on “the training and professionalization of teaching personnel, and the transformation of pedagogical practices” (p. 212). Helping to change the teacher can be impactful on the education and behaviours modelled to the students. Theoharis and Haddix (2011), agree educators need to be culturally aware and sensitive to their students, and recommends administrators to lead and encourage teacher growth and development, especially in areas of race/ ethnicity and cultural differences, and for the individual to reflect on self-biases.

It is important to reflect on self-biases because it may lead to self-discoveries, and positive change in how an educator observes and manages student behaviour, and how an educator engages students. Voltz, Brazil and Scott, 2003 (in The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008) state:

misreading behaviors or communication patterns of culturally and linguistically diverse students (i.e., White, Black, Latino, Asian, Native American) can lead teachers who are unprepared to meet the educational needs of these students to see them as having a disability and request a referral to special education. (p. 2).

This is unfortunate, and seems to be a common problem according to Skiba and others (2006). Really getting to know a student, including cultural aspects, could possibly lessen these mis-readings and overrepresentation of certain students in behavioural programs and, or special education. The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education caution interpreting behaviours through a singular cultural lens because this can lead to disproportionality in discipline and special education. However, a solution to this is knowing the importance of classroom management because it can reduce and prevent disproportionality in discipline and special education.

2.3.2 System wide strategies- Ontario Ministry policy

There are Ontario policies, strategies and guidelines under the Ministry of Education (2013, 2014) in effect on equity and inclusion for all students in school. For example, the Ministry of Education (2014) document titled “Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for policy development and implementation”, discusses teacher education, school improvement, various Policy/ Procedure Memorandums (PPMs), and school compliance with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Within this Ministry of Education guideline, the
Ontario provincial vision on equity and inclusion must be “understood as a journey, not a destination”, because it is ongoing and a shared responsibility (p. 5). The Accepting Schools Act of 2012 (cited in Ministry of Education, 2014) it is a requirement “for all school boards to provide safe, inclusive, and accepting learning environments in which every student can succeed” (p. 9). This means schools need to be inclusive of all students regardless of race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, exceptionalities, behaviour, and other factors. The Ministry of Education equity and inclusion guideline also states three goals Ontario schools must continue to pursue, which are: shared and committed leadership; equity and inclusive education policies, which allow students to feel engaged, welcomed, supported, safe, and included; and thirdly, practices, and accountability and transparency, such as measures of success outlined in the schools’ strategic plan. These policies and guidelines are effective literature that shows schools are expected to be inclusive and equitable to all. Why are there still inequalities and exclusions? McGhie-Richmond and others (2013) suggest underfunding, growing classroom demands, and lack of teacher preparedness as obstacles in successful inclusion. However, with increased use and focus of the Ontario policies, changes can be seen, but more research may be required.

An effective way for school boards to review, develop, and implement equity and inclusive education policy is to pair the PPM No. 119 with the 2009 document Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, and the Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). PPM No. 119, in Ontario Ministry of Education (2013), discusses eight areas of focus, which are: board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices; shared and committed leadership; school- community relationships; inclusive curriculum and assessment practices; religious accommodation; school climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment; professional learning; and accountability and transparency.

School boards have their own policies, and then each school within the board will follow its own policy. The next level would be the principle, and then the individual teacher. Teacher experiences vary, and what happens and works for one teacher in the class may not happen, and, or work for a teacher of another class.

2.3.3 School wide and whole class strategies

Fenning and Rose's (2007) research examined supporting students with behavioural challenges and noticed trends in the differential treatment of racially/ ethnically diverse students,
particularly Black students. Fenning and Rose provide suggestions to address and change this trend, suggesting four proactive and fair discipline policies and practices for schools to engage in, that can be implemented for all:

(a) review of discipline data to determine what infractions result in suspension (e.g., whether minor nonviolent offenses result in suspension) and if certain groups are overrepresented in the most exclusionary discipline consequences, (b) the creation of a collaborative discipline team to create proactive discipline consequences that are fair to all, (c) the provision of school wide professional development to help promote cultural competence, particularly around issues of classroom management and teacher-to-student interchanges, and (d) the development of more proactive school discipline policies for all students, based on models of positive behaviour support. (p. 538)

These suggestions are exemplary because it incorporates collaboration, consistent terminology and consequences, teacher development, and PBS strategies that work for all students and the whole class. Fenning and Rose define PBS as a:

comprehensive approach to the standardization of discipline policies, the proactive teaching of expected behaviors, and development of positive teacher-student interaction that not only addresses the punitive discipline and alienation often experienced by minority students but also promotes a better school climate for all students.” (p. 538-539)

Fenning and Rose successfully argue that a positive behaviour model and teaching students how to behave appropriately in class are effective strategies for all students with and without behavioural challenges. The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2008) also refers to PBS and feels it is successful and can be designed to be culturally relevant. Ways it can be culturally relevant, according to the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, are if a teacher understands that behavioural appropriateness is influenced by culture; connect with students in a caring and respectful way; teach expected rules and behaviours within a culture of care; be supportive; and involve families and the community.

According to O’Brennan and others (2014), “classroom teachers who establish clear expectations for students and incorporate the use of a positive reinforcement system, such as praise, recognition, or special privileges, are linked with increased appropriate student behavior” (p. 127). Positive reinforcement, praise and recognition are all great examples for whole class strategies to manage student behaviours as it may lead to an increase in positive behaviour.
O’Brennan and others examined classroom climate and noted how it can affect the behaviour, student development, and teacher interaction, taking into account covariates related to reports of problem behaviour, such as gender, race, academics, prosocial behaviour, and concentration problems. O’Brennan and others state, student problem behaviour is a common concern for teachers, and implementing whole-school rules and expectations that promote positive behaviour through a prevention program or a tiered program can be very effective. O’Brennan and others suggest a Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program because it “would address both school wide needs for connectedness among students, teachers, and administrators, but would also provide specific behavior management skills to staff that could help reform antisocial behavioral norms within the classroom [and overall school climate]” (p. 134). Oakes, Lane, Cox, Magrane, Jenkins, and Hankins (2012) also argue having a tiered model with elements of PBIS and Response to Intervention (RTI) is practical and supportive for all students socially, academically, and behaviourally. These three tiers seem to be effective focuses. However, there should also be a focus on racial/ethnic diversity within these tiers. Further investigation through literature and firsthand experiences from educators through interviews could deepen the understanding of this approach at the school wide level.

Some schools have an inclusive policy, and aim for the least restrictive classroom or environment, especially when considering students with special needs (Howery et al., 2013; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Sorani-Villanueva et al., 2014). Students who have behavioural challenges may or may not have special needs, but some behaviours may segregate students from the classroom (Kauffman et al., 2007). Researchers who are suggesting least restrictive classrooms focus on the fact that inclusion is better than segregation. The strategy of inclusion aims to have supports in class for students rather than sending students with a behavioural challenge elsewhere, unless they are at risk of harming themselves or others.

Most of the whole class strategies are from American studies. However, there are some informative strategies from Canadian studies. Howery and others (2013) looked at participants from the Greater St. Albert Catholic School Division; and found its educators have an effective strategy for inclusive education, which incorporates PBS and RTI. RTI is “a continuum-based process that focuses on access to high quality, evidence-based instruction, data-driven decision making, a tiered model of supports and a systems level approach to improving academic and behavioral outcomes for all” (Howery et al., p. 274). Howery and others, believe RTI
involves, “expecting and valuing diversity, access to differentiated learning (instruction and assessment), use of emerging and assistive technology and supports for positive behaviour” (p. 278). As with other studies considered, a tiered approach seems to be an effective strategy to reach the whole class and school to improve student behaviour, including academic and social changes. While whole class strategies may be beneficial, teachers may also have strategies to support individual students.

2.3.4 Individual strategies for individual students

Howery and others (2013) found using the pyramid of behavioural support that draws upon PBS and RTI, are strategies that are universally effective (or have a school-wide approach). However, the same pyramid can have a targeted or intensive individualized approach for students who need support that is more direct. Reaching and supporting all students in the school is ideal, but it starts with each teacher’s classroom, and more importantly, each individual student of a classroom. Some students may need individual supports or “more targeted behavioral supports” such as “providing classroom observation and consultation, providing individual or group work with students on social skills instruction, increasing self-regulation, emotional expression and problem-solving skills and developing friendships” (Howery et al, p. 280). Teaching students how to behave by providing them with instructions on how to regulate and express themselves, is an effective tool to reduce classroom behavioural issues, and support the students.

Kauffman and others (2007), suggest identifying students with significant concerns in a timely fashion, because without proper accommodations, and the longer the student is without support, the more intensive services and supports would be required over time. However, one should not be hasty about this because students should also not be quickly identified because they may be misidentified and lead to the misrepresentation discussed previously. Bettini and others (2015), presented information from other research studies and noticed a “combination of poor academic skills and disruptive behaviors deprive these students of access to valuable academic content, placing them further at risk for academic failure” (p. 121). However, Bettini and others, saw in the same study that academic engagement could reduce potential behavioural challenges. It is important to keep students engaged to reduce potential behavioural challenges.

Clark and Breman (2009), who did a study on collaborating with school counsellors and
other educators to provide academic, social, and emotional support for students with special needs suggest another effective strategy. Students with special needs may have some behavioural challenges, and Clark and Breman suggest in order to limit or curtail certain behaviours, teachers should have “classroom accommodations, such as extended time on assignments or specific classroom seating”, because without classroom support, “social and behavioural issues can have academic consequences” (p. 6, 7). Howery and others (2013), state behaviour can affect education, so it is important to have supports, such as differentiated instruction for students with behavioural challenges to help them succeed academically, socially, and behaviourally.

Other researchers agree on collaboration methods as classroom management strategies. O’Brennan and others (2014), Shiffer and others (2011), and Skiba and others (2006) all mention inclusion practices as ideal for all students regardless of any behaviours, disabilities, and emotional, social, or academic challenges. Educators should acknowledge biases, change biases, and treat each student with equity. Educators should also look at whom they are managing, and make sure the management is fair/ equitable and consistent to all students regardless of race and ethnicity. Monroe (2005) provides suggestions to change the disproportionality of discipline towards racially/ ethnically diverse students through four broad recommendations, which are:

1. Provide opportunities for teachers to interrogate their beliefs about African American students… 2. Incorporate and value culturally responsive disciplinary strategies… 3. Broaden the discourse around school disciplinary decisions… [and] 4. Maintain learners’ interest through engaging instruction. (p. 47, 48)

These recommendations are to help combat the stereotypes that some educators may have about African American students; however, these may also be applied to all students of all races/ ethnicities. McGhie-Richmond and others (2013) believe inclusive schools involve collaboration with educators who work to provide opportunity for all students to achieve success in meaningful ways, and this aligns with the Ontario School Policy as noted in the Ontario Ministry of Education documents (2013, 2014). McGhie-Richmond and colleagues (2013), state collaboration can involve having special needs assistants, administrator support, resources, and co-operative teaching moments. Educators can share strategies that work to limit individual behavioural challenges. McGhie-Richmond and others focused on collaboration, but that this study did not include factors relating to race and ethnicity is a limitation to this study.
Cassidy and Jackson (2005) note how discrimination can affect a student’s access to safe, orderly and inclusive education. Not all students need the same education, but they deserve a chance for fair education; being inclusive is fair and equitable. Sorani-Villanueva and others (2014) state, “schools that promote inclusive environments with structured opportunities for positive student interaction can foster development of all students” (p. 61). Sorani-Villanueva and others also suggest educators should make academic modification and accommodations for students, (particularly with disabilities), such as “copies of lecture notes, less homework, more examples, extended time, study guides, tests read aloud, organizational tools (e.g., binders), assistive technology (e.g., laptop computers), and school supplies e.g., calculators)” (p. 60). Rivera and others (2014) agree collaboration amongst all teachers is a great way to brainstorm and try different ways to include all students. These suggestions align with the Canadian study from Howery and others (2013), by using technology and differentiated instruction as tools to support students with behavioural challenges. The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2008) states teachers should respect student opinions and perspectives. Ruck and Wortley’s (2002) study asked students their opinions on race/ethnicity and treatment in school, and this shows student voice is important. There are many tools, methods, and resources teachers can use to help keep all students engaged, and to support them with any challenges they may face.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

Biases and opinions seem to stem from perceptions, misconceptions, and stereotypical information. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) document states some opinions, stereotypes, and conceptions of a group of people can be conscious or unconscious. Teachers should view each student as unique individuals and not with a preconceived notion and bias. To avoid stereotyping and different classroom management styles of students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges, Theoharis and Haddix (2011) suggest educators reflect on their practices, assumptions, biases, and their culture. Reflection is important for personal and professional growth, and should be a frequent practice to learn what works best for the person reflecting and best for each student in the teacher’s classroom. Ryan (2005) also agrees teachers should be reflective and reflexive in their thinking and beliefs, which includes looking inward and deeply reflecting on one’s own beliefs and biases. This research does not intend to make educators feel guilty of their biases. However, the research aims to educate
individuals on their teaching practices and behaviour management strategies towards students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges.

As a woman of colour, I aim to make a change within myself, and be cognizant of my beliefs, biases, opinions, and reactions in situations I may encounter. Instead of being reactive, I want to be proactive in how I manage a student and a classroom. I aim to model positive behaviours, actions, and habits and teach the future generation that each unique individual has a right to be included and treated in an equitable manner. “In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. Our experience shows that barriers can be removed when all education partners create the conditions needed for success” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 1). Schools should be a place of equity, inclusion, and safety for all students and not just some. This study aims to bring attention to the problem, to challenge personal biases, and to find ways in which educators can help change the problem.

In alignment with the literature reviewed, each student should be included, despite his or her differences. Teachers should learn more about their students, and find the best way to educate each student and include them in the classroom. Educators also have the responsibility of managing behaviours in the classroom. Each student is unique, and each classroom is unique so teachers may have varying experiences per classroom and per student. What should be consistent are the rules that teachers apply and the consequences they have for the same behaviour of racially/ethnically diverse students. Some teachers should use strategies that will benefit each student, and this may include classroom management styles, special programs, or integration and inclusion practices. The literature was informative and revelatory to many problems regarding teachers’ views on behaviour of students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. The different resources included qualitative and quantitative studies, normative studies, Ministry of Education policies and documents, and course texts related to inclusion, equity, behaviour challenges and racial/ethnic diversity. This literature review process was eye opening as the content was delved into deeper, and has given hope for change for tomorrow. The research study continued through interviewing four elementary school teachers to find out their experiences related to students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. Using this type of qualitative study, the interview findings were compared with the literature and personal experiences with hopes of sharing personal learning with other educators.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Chapter overview

According to Creswell (2013), “all researchers seem to start with an issue or problem, examine the literature in some way related to the problem, pose questions, gather data and then analyze them, and write up their reports” (p. 50). So far in the process an issue was identified and questions were posed in chapter one. Literature in chapter two was then examined to support personal beliefs, as well as led to new information. In this chapter, the research methodology is described. First, the approach and procedures and the instruments of data collection used, are examined. Next, the participants and sampling criteria, participant recruitment and biographies are elaborated on. Data analysis procedures, then ethical review procedures, and then the methodological limitations and strengths are discussed. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a summary of key methodological decisions related to this research, and the rationale for the decisions made in relation to the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research approach and procedures

This research study used a qualitative research approach and procedures, by doing a literature review and critical analysis of existing research, as well as interviews with participants connected to the research topic. According to Creswell (2013), a pursuit in qualitative research is defined as:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. (p. 43-44)

Qualitative research is effective because it is personal yet transferable. Qualitative research studies topics and issues in their natural settings, and Creswell explains it attempts to interpret the information and meaning people bring to the topic and issue. Qualitative research is more than just numbers, or a data set. Further, it is not deductive, such as in a quantitative study; Creswell states more questions can be asked, more dialogue can be recorded, and other factors. Quantitative studies have their advantages, and according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Creswell (2013), they can be similar to qualitative studies and even incorporated with qualitative studies. Tracy (2010) thinks quantitative studies have been more favoured for scientific validity
because of its basis in numbers. Despite the impact a quantitative study can have, qualitative research can be just as revealing. Tracy states quantitative studies are appreciated for precision, whereas qualitative studies can have rigor or “rich complexity of abundance” (p. 841). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative research is a type of data collection that is descriptive, inductive, open-ended, adds to people’s lives, focuses on the process rather than the outcome, and is emergent and flexible because it can change over time.

A qualitative study was suitable for the interviews because it allowed for an intimate setting, which helped clear up any misunderstandings and made participants feel more comfortable. Emphasis was expressed towards the informants that the questions of the study are not meant to be judgmental. Another positive, according to Creswell (2013), is there is no one way to do a qualitative study. This aspect made writing the research paper more effective because the researcher was able to draw on various approaches and make necessary adjustments.

3.2 Instruments of data collection

Data can be collected through various methods. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) state some typical ways are through interviews, videos, and interactions. Creswell (2013) also states data can be collected in other ways, such as through photographs and other visual materials, digital text messages, or sound. For this study, data was collected through literature, informal observations, informal discussions with fellow colleagues, and semi-structured interviews. A general interview guide approach or a semi-structured one-on-one interview approach was used with a few teachers to collect data. The interview was meant to be a conversation that flows. The goal was to collaborate and use what was learnt from the teachers to enhance personal and others’ knowledge, and look for alignments with the literature reviewed. The general interview guide approach, from here referred to as semi-structured interview, was used as it is more structured than an informal interview, which Turner (2010) believes is mainly conversational and “in the moment experiences” (p. 755). A semi-structured interview has questions that are posed by the researcher, which risks being a limitation because responses may be affected by how a question is worded. However, Turner explains there is flexibility in that the researcher can change the way the question is posed, and change the flow and structure if needed. Flexibility is important and aligns itself with qualitative studies, because changes may occur. During an interview, a new question may develop based on responses and experiences. A semi-structured interview was also appropriate for this research because it helped make the process less formal
and comfortable for the participant to answer more freely, and allowed for a rapport with the participants; which Turner thinks is important. According to Turner, a semi-structured approach is also less structured than a standardized open-ended interview where participants are always asked identical questions. The value of a semi-structured interview is that it draws on various methods to conduct interviews and can be adapted to each interview situation. Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Creswell (2013), and Turner (2010) all agree semi-structured interviews can also lead to spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant answers and conversation from the interviewees.

A personal introduction, the purpose of the study, and the interview questions were sent beforehand so that participants would not be surprised during the interview. Turner (2010) notes the importance of being prepared before the interview. Turner quotes the researcher McNamara, who provides eight principles to consider before an interview, which are,

1. choose a setting with little distraction; 
2. explain the purpose of the interview; 
3. address terms of confidentiality; 
4. explain the format of the interview; 
5. indicate how long the interview usually takes; 
6. tell them how to get in touch with you later if they want to; 
7. ask them if they have any questions before you both get started with the interview; and 
8. don't count on your memory to recall their answers. (p. 757)

These steps were valued when preparing the email to send to participants, and then again preparing before the interview. Preparation also showed this research was a professional and educational endeavour. It was important to get teachers to participate in the interview, and therefore the interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient for the interviewee. The interview was more of a conversation, which having a semi-structure approach allows for the interviewer, and for the participant, because the structure can change as the interview unfolds.

The interview protocol (located in Appendix B) was organized into four sections. First, the questions began with the participant’s background information and experiences. Next, questions about their encounters and experiences with students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges were asked, followed by questions about their teaching practices and strategies. Lastly, the interview concluded with questions regarding supports and challenges, as well as the next steps for teachers. According to Turner (2010), effective research questions are a crucial component to interview design. The advice of Zeichner (1995) was followed, because he suggests framing questions positively because this helps to really learn
from teachers and moves away from the possible perception of teachers being portrayed in a negative light.

### 3.3 Participants

According to Creswell (as cited in Turner, 2010), selecting the appropriate candidates to interview is very important, and Creswell suggests acquiring participants who will be open and honest to sharing their information and story. This section addresses methodological decision-making, related to research participants and introduces the teachers for the interview. This section discusses the sampling criteria, participant recruitment, and participant biographies with a pseudonym to protect the individual’s identity as well as other teachers, related schools, classrooms, and students that were discussed.

It is important to get different viewpoints and compare firsthand information with information from the literature. From the literature review, O’Brien and others (2014) stated, “Teachers tend to rate their relationships with students more positively if there is a match between the teacher’s and student’s ethnic identity” (p. 196). This statement was used as encouragement to interview four participants so that there would be a White/European male and female teacher, as well as a male and female teacher of colour to share their experiences with students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. The aim was to gather a variety of perspectives and compare the data for similarities, differences, and see if the insights drawn from the data related to those found in the literature review.

#### 3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The following criteria were applied to teacher participants for the interview. Teachers must have encountered students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges in their experiences. Teachers must have experienced a racially/ethnically diverse classroom or racially/ethnically diverse school. Teachers must have implemented behavioural strategies on an individual student level, and or, classroom level. Participants must be elementary teachers in Ontario. There must be both male and female participants. At least one participant must be of White/European ethnicity, and one of an ethnic minority (Black/African American/Canadian, Caribbean, South Asian, Asian, or another racial/ethnic minority).

In order to address the main research question, the interview participants encountered students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. As well, participating teachers had a racially/ethnically diverse classroom, and or, school. The interest was in learning
about potential disproportionality of discipline applied within the school. In addition, because some of the questions inquired about behavioural supports and strategies, it was important for teachers to have implemented specific strategies on an individual level as well as a classroom level. To maintain a geographical focus, and to compensate for the lack of Canadian resources, teachers employed within Ontario as an elementary school educator were sought. Both male and female participants, who varied in age and teaching experiences were interviewed. Lastly, it was deemed beneficial to the study to have teachers from various racial/ethnic backgrounds to increase the potential of rich and varied data from this small sample. It is important to note that there are varying degrees of race/ethnicity and culture. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) believe that not all minority students are the same, not all students with behavioural challenges are the same, and the list could go on. Theoharis and Haddix also note there are also varying degrees of “Whiteness” (p. 1347), and emphasize that there are varying factors that make White school leaders different, including gender, language, sexual orientation, religious affiliations, and class. It is interesting to see a different perspective, and realize that there are many differences within each culture and race/ethnicity, and this is why each person should be viewed and treated as a unique individual.

3.3.2 Participant recruitment

Robinson (2014) provides a four-point approach to qualitative sampling that includes, defining a sample universe, deciding on a sample size, devising a sample strategy, and sourcing the sample. Robinson states the size of the sample is determined by the theoretical and practical considerations. For this particular study, Master of Teaching students are required to interview two to three participants for the Master of Teaching Research Project (MTRP) because of the period given to complete the research paper and the amount of work required to collect data, analyze, and interpret information. Robinson notes that a small sample size allows for an intensive analysis of each interview, and is therefore a positive feature in the MTRP.

According to Robinson (2014), common sample strategies are random sampling, convenience sampling, purposive sampling, stratified sampling, cell sampling, quota sampling, and theoretical sampling. For this research, convenience sampling as well as purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. According to Robinson, convenience sampling is locating participants based on certain criteria and accepting participants on a first-come-first-serve basis. Purposive sampling is non-random and chooses participants based on the categories and subject
being covered, because “certain individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question” (Robinson, p. 32). Participants were recruited by using the network of professors at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the network of elementary teachers from practicum experiences, and by asking fellow teacher candidates about educators in their network that have a connection to this research topic and sample criteria. People contacted were provided with an overview of the research study and participant criteria. If the individuals initially contacted knew of others who were thought to be a good fit for the study, these individuals, for ethical reasons, were sent personal contact information through the initial participant. The idea was to make potential participants feel comfortable and willingly volunteer rather than feel obligated. Participants were also partly chosen on a first-come-first-serve basis due to time constraints. However, particular interviewees who were thought to really connect to the topic were approached first.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

Participant 1 – Jayson Grant is a Black male teacher with roots in the Caribbean and has been a certified teacher since 2009. At the time of the interview, he was a part of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). He has had various experiences in different schools and at the time of the interview, he taught a Special Education class. Jayson stated he advocates for respect towards students and believes in getting to know each student. One of his classroom engagement strategies is call and response, which encouraged his students to feel safe to participate.

Participant 2 – Andrew Sampson is a White male teacher and has been a certified teacher since 2013. At the time of the interview, he was an Occasional teacher with experiences in various schools in the Halton District School Board (HDSB). He has a social justice and equity background and this is evident in his classroom practices and lessons for his students that he mentioned. Andrew was a part of one schools' Social Justice Committee. Key points addressed in Andrew’s interview were being aware of a student’s “backpack” which is a metaphor for other factors occurring in a student’s life.

Participant 3 – Antoinette Leroy is a Black female and has been a certified teacher since 2009. At the time of the interview, Antoinette was a French Immersion teacher at a TDSB school in the East end, but has had experiences in schools in Toronto’s West end and noticed some differences. She believes in giving students a voice and teaching them how to talk through and explain their emotions.
Participant 4—Amy Bolton is a White female and has been a certified teacher since 1999. At the time of the interview, Amy was a Special Education teacher with a new board, formerly working in the TDSB as a classroom teacher and a Special Education teacher. Strategies Amy used in her classroom were having a warm and welcoming environment and modeling respect.

3.4 Data analysis

To analyze the data, the interviews were transcribed and coded using the research questions to interpret, find and synthesize themes. According to Creswell (2013), data analysis is also called the interpretation phase. Creswell also states data analysis is complex and can be time-consuming because of the “task of sorting through large amounts of data and reducing them to a few themes or categories” (p. 49). Tracy (2010) calls data analysis “an explanation about the process by which the raw data are transformed and organized into the research report” (p. 841). Analyzing data is an important part of the research process as it is done to interpret findings and compare them to personal experiences and beliefs, as well as discuss why the themes are important, and how they relate to existing research drawing back on information from chapter two. “Null data”, what participating teachers did not speak to, why this matters, and why this is related to the research topic was also looked at.

Creswell (2013) uses an interconnected spiral approach to analyze and organize data in qualitative research. The first loop is data management, which Creswell explains involves organizing files and converting files to text. The next loop is reading and memoing and Creswell says this is where the researcher analyzes and gets a sense of the whole database by reading over transcripts, writing notes in the margins, and beginning to form categories. Tracy (2010) states data analysis is significant because it is when the researcher sorts, chooses, and organizes the data in a way that is relevant to the researcher and the topic. Tracy explains that data-analysis conceptualizes the information collected and relies on prior knowledge and past research to conceptualize new understandings and findings that can be used by future researchers. Tracy’s point is significant because a goal is to have this research paper be a contribution to literature and fill in the gaps of the present research related to students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. The next loop in Creswell’s (2013) spiral approach is describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes. This is the heart of qualitative analysis according to Creswell, as coding and categorizing needs detailed descriptions. Creswell recommends starting with lean coding, or a short list of five or six categories. The next process
of the spiral approach is interpreting the data and making sense of it through finding larger meaning beyond the themes and linking it back to research literature. The final phase Creswell explains is representing and visualizing the data, which could involve charts in text form, metaphors, and other literary devices to turn the raw data into specific themes.

3.5 Ethical review procedures

Robinson (2014) mentions the importance of having an ethical review, stating “all potential interviewees should be informed of the study’s aims, of what participation entails, of its voluntary nature, of how anonymity is protected and any other information that will help them reach an informed, consensual decision to participate” (p. 35). Following the MTRP ethical protocol, participants were not coerced into participation, and signed a form giving informed consent. The letter of informed consent [located in Appendix A] explains the nature of the study, stating the sensitivity of the topic and the right for participants to have confidentiality, the right to withdraw, to know the risks of participation, member checks, and data storage, as well as what will happen with their contribution to the study.

According to Tracy (2010), ethics is very important and the “universal end goal of qualitative quality” (p. 846). Ethics is part of all research and Tracy discusses different kinds of ethics related to a qualitative study that include procedural, situational, relational, and exiting ethics. Procedural or categorical ethics applies to this study in the sense of needing informed consent, and ensuring privacy and confidentiality of participants. Tracy states relational ethics are connected to the researcher and their feelings, character, actions, and consequences towards others and understanding the researcher will not use the participant just to get a good story. Lastly, exiting ethics, according to Tracy, can be applied to this research study because it involves what happens beyond the data collection and interpretation with consideration on how to represent the data. As part of the MTRP process, a transcription was provided after the interview to clarify the accuracy and retract any statements before conducting the data analysis. Participants also received a copy of the research once completed. This process of sharing the data and research with the participants relates to exiting ethics.

Due to the nature of the topic and how racism and CRT may be discussed in relation to the possible disproportionality of students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges, there was a small risk with participating in the study. Some questions could have produced emotional responses, which could have caused the interviewee to feel vulnerable. The aim was to
reduce this risk by providing participants with the interview questions ahead of time. It was also important to address this concern upfront in the email and consent letter to minimize the risk. Throughout the interview and study, it was mentioned that participants have the right to refuse to answer any questions, and can withdraw from the study at any point. The ethical procedures were addressed in the letter of consent, and included information, such as being assigned a pseudonym and eliminating identifiers, such as the school name and obvious area/ location. Anonymity was to encourage participants to be more open with their responses. Participants were asked to sign the letter of consent agreeing to be interviewed as well as audio-recorded. The consent letter also provided an overview of the study, addressed ethical implications, and specified expectations of participation, which was a 45-60-minute semi-structured interview. The letter also informed participants that all data (including audio recordings) would be stored on a password-protected laptop and phone and be destroyed after five years.

3.6 Methodological limitations and strengths

The methodological limitations of the research study are the scope of research, as well as the small participant size. Having a small number means the information cannot be generalized, as the data was specific participant experiences. A larger participant size could have provided more details and comparisons in the data. However, this would have taken a longer time to transcribe, code, and analyze and possibly not be feasible within the period of the MTRP. Surveys were not allowed to be conducted, as per the MTRP guideline, to get additional data that may not have been answered as honestly in a face-to-face interview or one-on-one interview. Due to the program and the ethical parameters, only teachers could be interviewed, and not students or parents. Student opinions regarding discipline for behavioural challenges would have given a different perspective to the study that would have been interesting to compare to teacher’s opinions. Informal observations were made, and literature with student participation were considered, such as the study of Canadian high school students by Ruck and Wortley (2002), where the students were asked to give their opinion on the disciplinary practices in their school. The results of Ruck and Wortley’s study showed students perceive Black students to be the ones most likely to receive differential treatment, and then South Asian students, students from the “other” racial/ ethnic backgrounds, then Asian students, and White student were perceived to be the least likely to receive differential treatment. Having a student’s opinion can really help to see how students feel, and this can help teachers implement better strategies and
practices so that all students can feel included and treated equitably. Despite not being able to interview students, informal observations used to gather data and at times personal bias related to personal perspective and positionality, were limitations. However, observations were used to fuel the research and support personal opinions as well as challenge them with literature.

The methodological strengths are getting real examples from teachers. This is valuable because comparisons were made between different teachers in different schools, and trends, parallels, and differences were analyzed, which is presented in chapter four. Another strength was the use of a semi-structured interview because it allowed what Turner (2010) calls an in-depth discussion, compared to a survey where Creswell (2013) feels there is not much room for expanding thoughts. The semi-structured interview and qualitative study was also a strength because it gave the participant a voice on their opinions and lived experiences. Another significant methodological strength, as per Bogdan and Biklen (2007), was qualitative research is emergent and flexible. Personal thinking was edited and updated as the study unfolded.

3.7 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter the research methodology was described by reviewing the research approach and procedures, followed by the instruments of data collection that were used, including the literature review, informal observations, and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Next, the sampling of the participants including the sampling criteria, the importance of participant recruitment, the sampling approach, and participant biographies were described. Explanation of the data analysis procedures were noted, stating data was transcribed, coded, themes created, and “null data” considered, as this can also lead to important findings. The ethical review procedures were then shared, mentioning that the letter of consent is meant to limit risk and vulnerability. Lastly, the paper discussed the methodological limitations and strengths, particularly noting the sample size and the flexibility of an emergent qualitative study.

As a novice researcher, the guidelines for the MTRP were used, as well as information supported by research. I became an agent of change on this topic of students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges by bringing more awareness to situations that occur or may occur in elementary schools, and then by suggesting strategies to help fix the problem. This research is not meant to make teachers feel bad about any biases they may have, but to encourage teachers to reflect on their biases, and be aware of them, and in turn, find ways to change the bias, and focus on supporting the student(s). Chapter four is the analysis of the research findings.
and the generation of and synthesis of themes. The analysis expands on current understandings from the literature, as well as provides new understandings and fills in the gaps found in the literature. Chapter four is also used to share the strategies for positive and proactive behavioural management strategies and classroom engagement strategies for students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Chapter overview

Students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges are not all treated the same as identified in chapters one and two. The literature review also explored challenges and strategies for teachers with students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. The next step involved interviewing participants, and collecting data. Chapter three explained the process of data collection. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data analysis of the four semi-structured one-on-one research interviews. Throughout the analysis, the key research question was referred to: What are teachers’ experiences with supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary schools? The subsidiary questions were also important and kept in mind during the analysis. The purpose was to identify, what strategies are elementary teachers using to support students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in the classroom? As well, what are the challenges of elementary teachers in supporting these students? The third question was to address if teachers use or observe different teaching strategies for students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges.

Throughout the chapter, connections are drawn between participants’ experiences, beliefs, and the literature reviewed in chapter two. The participants are referred to by their pseudonym name. Jayson, a Black male, Andrew, a White male, Antoinette, a Black female, and Amy, a White female had some similar and different experiences. The interviews were coded and analyzed. Subsequently, the findings were organized into four main themes and further subthemes. The first theme is about the impact of student background, home and school life. The subthemes are about a student’s backpack or what students carry with them, and student demographics and behavioural connections with a focus on looking at where students come from, who they look like, and if and how that relates to behaviour. Theme two is about classroom dynamics, approach, and expectations based on the teachers interviewed personal opinions. The subthemes are type of classroom, and if this matters; having safe, welcoming, and engaging environments, because this helps to connect with students; and co-creating criteria and how this can be effective. The third theme focuses on teacher supports, with the subthemes titled: Limited administrative support for behavioural challenges; Professional development; and Collaboration with others. These subthemes shed some light on the participants opinions about what supports
are available, what training is available, and how working with others can be very beneficial for student success. The last theme is teacher attitude and how who the teacher is may affect student behaviour. The subthemes are benefits of having a culturally relevant pedagogy because knowing about diversity is important; and building positive genuine relationships with each child to increase class engagement and reduce challenging behaviour. In this chapter, the themes are described and further elaborated on in the specific subthemes. The participant data on each theme are shared, and next the significance of each theme and its connection to existing literature is examined. Lastly, the findings are summarized with suggestions for next steps.

4.1 Theme 1: Student background, home and school life

An analysis of participant responses seems to suggest a strong connection between home and school life, with the former having an effect on the behaviour of students in the classroom. To elaborate on this idea, Andrew introduced the term “student backpack” which he described as all the things the student carries with them outside of school into school. This subtheme was explored and some interpretations and connections were made with how this connects to students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. Student demographics and behaviour connections was the other subtheme which examines race/ethnicity of the students as well as the teachers’ and the connections to behaviour.

4.1.1 Student backpack

According to Andrew, a White male, long term occasional teacher, the student backpack is a “sort of a metaphor for all the other things going on in a student's life and you have to acknowledge as maybe leading to some of the behavioural challenges or just general behaviour you see in the classroom.” This sentiment was a prominent part of the interview and a term that is very fitting. Students may carry many emotions, feelings, and stress from things that happen outside of school. These occurrences are brought into the school, and can be ignored or perpetuated throughout the day through different types of behaviours. For example, both Andrew and Amy, a White female teacher, stated a student’s hunger and tiredness could have an effect on how they behave throughout the day. Amy often gave granola bars and drinks to students who stated they were hungry, and could be aggressive or violent. Amy also provided clothes for students who needed them. The majority of the students in Amy’s class from the story she mentioned were Black. This was an interesting point because it aligned with perceptions presented by Monroe (2005) that Black males are often seen as violent and they display other
social concerns. Reasons such as hunger and poor living conditions may be the reason for violent behaviour and it is unfortunate that living situations are often connected to race/ethnicity. Antoinette, a Black female teacher, also noted that she was very conscious of her students living situations, noting who had low socio-economic statuses and the connection with behaviour. Antoinette also stated parents might see different behaviours at home, than at school and that the environment change could be a factor for different behaviours.

In contrast, Jayson, a Black male teacher, mentioned positive home to school connections. Jayson connected home and school life through class Dojo, a technological application to track student behaviour, participation, and other factors that families can connect to and view their child’s progress. Jayson further described he used the Dojo in a positive way and not a punitive way to show the performance of each students learning skills and help keep them on task. Using the Dojo also seems like a way for families to see areas in which they may work on with their child. Jayson shared a story about a Black, Jamaican male student who “had a hard time in the classroom setting.” Jayson described he would have meltdowns, run out of class, hit people, tackle the principal, and display violent behaviour. This student may have had many things in their student backpack, but Jayson said he connected with the student’s mother to share strategies that were used at home so they could be consistent at school. Jayson stated these were “somewhat effective”. Connecting with families may be beneficial for some students, but the sentiment seems to be that it depends on the student, as each one is a unique individual.

These findings about a student’s backpack and living situations are important because it speaks to what some students may be facing and could explain behaviour. In the literature review in chapter two, there was not a huge focus on a student's background other than race/ethnicity. However, after analyzing the data from the participants, a student's background and home life may influence behaviour in the classroom. Monroe (2005) noted teachers’ opinions and stereotypes of certain students, particularly African American students, are based on the media and scholarly portrayals of Black people as violent, antiauthoritarian, drugs users and who display other social concerns. These beliefs can loosely translate into students’ life beyond school. Parker and Lynn (2002) also showed how race affects education and the lives of people who are racially marginalized. Possible further research on a student’s background and impact of the home life at school would be beneficial as this is something that each participant alluded to as an important factor in students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges.
4.1.2 Student demographics and behaviour connections

Andrew noted some of his students come from diverse backgrounds and may have different cultural traditions and the parents may have different parenting styles. Andrew said these factors “could affect how you're going to manage your classroom or respond to behavioural challenges of that student.” It is important to note that teachers may experience cultural and racial/ethnic differences between themselves and the student, which could relate to student behaviours and how a teacher behaves and, or reacts. Of all the students who were listed (one to two per participant) as an example, only two were White and one of those two being a female. The other female student mentioned was Black and the rest were Black males. Jayson pointed out that there is an overrepresentation of Black males in Special Education and who are labelled behavioural. There was no surprise hearing Jayson’s comment as it was something already known. Monroe (2005), Fenning and Rose (2007), Kauffman and others (2007), Noltemeyer and others (2012), and Skiba et al. (2006) all state there is an overrepresentation of males in Special Education, and an overrepresentation of visible minorities. The fact that most of the student examples presented by the participants are Black males can support the research statements.

Jayson, Amy, and Antoinette mentioned the importance of having students reflected in the curriculum (and not merely be White-centric). They also noted the teachers in the schools they taught at usually do not reflect the students of the community. Antoinette said in her experiences, “students who have a representation of someone who looks like themselves, tend to have … fewer I guess challenges… or don’t express themselves in the same ways as if they have someone who does not reflect who they are.” Antoinette noted that administrators should be aware of student population and hire teachers so that students are reflected because she finds the majority of teachers are White middle class females. The literature by O’Brennan et al., (2014) supports Antoinette’s comment that the majority of teachers are White females. Antoinette felt it important that students need to see someone who looks like them in the classroom and felt it is the hardest for male students to feel connected to a teacher because there are mostly female teachers. O’Brennan et al., also support Antoinette’s comment because they found teachers have more positive relationships when there is a match in ethnicity, and because the majority of teachers are White females, Black male students may be rated less favourably compared to White female students. This is an important finding because it helps to explain why there is a problem and possible differential treatment between students and teachers, especially when there
is a racial/ethnic or cultural disconnect. Even though the participants did not necessarily say they do anything different for the White students, Black students, Bengali students, Asian students, and other students in their classroom, it is interesting that representation was a term brought up.

It is important to know what behavioural challenges a student may have and why, but it is also very important not to make assumptions and blame students for their behavioural challenges. Jayson felt students are sometimes falsely blamed for behaviour. Jayson commented, “Behaviour is always viewed as something that kids bring into the environment … Rather than something we can shape, mould, support, etc.” In addition to this comment, Jayson felt social challenges are sometimes confused with behavioural challenges. He explained behaviour in the classroom is subjective and dependent on the teacher’s discretion. Jayson gave an example, if a teacher feels that a student’s voice is loud and affecting the learning, this could be considered a behaviour that should be documented. The student may disagree they were loud and affecting the learning, and this could create a power struggle, or a social challenge, that is then seen as a behavioural challenge. Jayson also commented that the volume level is “the number one battle ground … especially as it pertains to … West Indian Black girls.” It seems Jayson may have had experiences with this in his previous classes and his comments could be an area of further research. Noltemeyer and others (2012) noted teachers react in their own way to behaviour. Each teacher defined their idea of behavioural challenges as violence, resistance, disruption by yelling and screaming, and inability to reach students. These definitions connected with the literature in chapter two. However, each participant noted that it is not solely the student’s fault for the behaviours displayed; other factors can affect students. Andrew, like Fenning and Rose (2007), believe all students, regardless of race/ethnicity and behavioural challenges can misbehave.

Challenges may stem from not being represented and heard, or it could be from transitions throughout the day, as Andrew and Jayson both suggested. Challenges could also be from various other factors that the student is carrying with them. As Andrew stated, it is important to be aware of student’s backpacks and not take any challenging behaviour as a “personal dig against you as a teacher, but as a result of all the complex issues that might be going on in that student’s life.” This is significant, because challenges in a student’s life may stem from their race/ethnicity and the perceptions society and individuals have on a particular race/ethnicity. It may be beneficial to have students represented in the school through teachers, books, celebrations, and in other ways to make students feel included and safe.
4.2 Theme 2: Classroom dynamics, approach, and expectations

What students carry with them to school can be turned into a positive rather than a potential negative. Each participant shared the type of classroom experiences they had and discussed whole classroom approaches and individual approaches to student engagement and management. There was also importance placed on having a welcoming, safe, and engaging classroom environment and co-creating expectations as beneficial to positive behaviour.

4.2.1 Type of classroom

The participants had similarities in the examples they gave regarding the type of classroom they had. A majority of the students were from various visible minority groups, except the schools Andrew worked at which are a majority of White students, but he noted a growing number of visible minority students. Jayson, Antoinette, and Amy all talked about Special Education classes, as they have all been Special Education teachers, where students are often withdrawn from the regular classroom half the day. This type of classroom seemed to align with race/ethnicity and with behavioural challenges among the students from the participants’ experiences. Jayson’s class in particular stood out because there was “one non-visible minority, and … eight visible minorities” and only one was a female. Jayson also stated this demographic and gender divide are typical in Special Education. Each participant mentioned some students being on Independent Education Plans (IEPs), and in Andrews’s self-contained gifted class, all twenty-five were on IEPs and one had a behavioural IEP. The other participants noted they had more students with behaviour IEPs in Special Education. Amy also shared some students in one of her classes were diagnosed with special needs and others were not. The research is not implying that Special Education classes have many students with behavioural challenges, but this was a trend from the interviews to be noted. The literature by The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2008) showed there is a connection with Special Education and behavioural challenges and warns that students are sometimes in behavioural programs and may not need to be. Jayson also spoke to this and stated that it is also difficult and a lengthy process to get students out of a behavioural program or get the exceptionality removed.

Amy also shared an example of a student in a regular classroom, but with other undiagnosed Special Education students, who was very violent and threatened other students to the point where she said the class was dangerous. She also noted this student was in a school and class that was “a bit rough” and where the students had gone from “teacher to new teacher”
often. It was interesting to note that this class had many Black students, including the student mentioned by Amy. The students race/ethnicity relates back to who is considered to have behavioural challenges, and the next question would be to find out why, then what supports and strategies are needed? The changes and factors of the classroom can affect a student’s behaviour, which relates back to understanding the situations that each student is coming from and facing.

4.2.2 Safe, welcoming, and engaging environments

The participants were asked questions about strategies they use for specific students and for the whole class. Out of this question emerged the theme of the classroom environment as being a welcoming, safe, and engaging space. Each participant shared their thoughts and practices. Andrew and Jayson stated the significance of encouragement and incorporating student interest into lessons. Jayson recalled a class in which the majority of his students were interested in hip-hop and therefore incorporated this to engage his students. For example, he used songs they liked and examined the lyrics for equity and social justice issues. Along with interests, Jayson felt that positive reinforcement, praise, a non-confrontational approach, motivation, and self-confidence building were all beneficial to creating a positive, welcoming, and engaging environment for his class and could minimize negative behaviours or behavioural challenges. Studies by O’Brennan and others (2014), Fenning and Rose (2007), Howery and others (2013), and Woolfolk and colleagues (2016) would all agree that praise and positive reinforcement help with encouraging positive behaviour of students. Amy had a similar approach to Jayson. Amy believed in teaching respectful communication and modeling positive behaviour. Antoinette and Andrew also noted teachers should positively model what is expected of students, which Fenning and Rose (2007) agree. Amy also felt students should have opportunities of choice in the tasks during class and should have differentiated instruction according to the student. Amy used humour, positive encouragement, rewards and incentives to create a safe, welcoming and engaging classroom for her students and stated, “all the behaviour management stuff that tends to work is just making sure that your classroom community is warm and welcoming.”

Antoinette cared about inclusion and engaging students. She found it a challenge when she could not “reach” a student. Antoinette said she made her students feel safe, welcomed, and engaged by “being open and valuing what they have to say as much as what my thoughts are or opinions of something.” Antoinette welcomed students’ opinions of her lessons, and would take ownership of a poor lesson where students were not engaged. This kind of reflective and
reflexive thinking aligns with the literature by Ryan (2005) who states teachers should have an inward gaze on experiences and occurrences. Andrew also spoke about being a reflective practitioner. Reflecting is important for all situations teachers’ experience.

Andrew mentioned that students should have trust and safety in the school to “be themselves” and feel included. All participants spoke about equity, social justice, and/ or inclusion and how these are important to have and implement in the classroom. Jayson and Amy (both more recent Special Education teachers) were the only ones who said that the students get what they need. Amy noted it may not “be fair” to some students, implying equity is about fairness and not sameness and she explained this to her students. Jayson noted that he treats his students differently based on getting to know them and their ability to handle certain interactions. For example, he said some students can handle him saying “you’re better than that, come on”, and some students may not respond to that type of “push”. He also found that some students may respond to praise; other’s may not, or some students are intrinsically motivated, whereas others are extrinsically motivated and said, “it really depends on the kid.” It was interesting that the Special Education teachers spoke to equity in terms of student treatment because, in the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), equity and inclusion are underlying topics interconnected throughout the program. The discussion of equity shows that it is an important factor in education and the participant Special Education teachers seem to know this. Maybe they had recent workshops, or an assumption is maybe these educators understand differences in students more due to specific course training, or it could just be part of their personal practice. These are speculations and further questioning may be needed to decipher why Amy and Jayson mentioned students get what they need.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2013, 2014) documents discuss how schools should be equitable and inclusive to all students. However, Jayson felt, “it’s difficult to … marry the inclusive model with the reality of school structure.” This is believed to be true based on personal observations, listening to participants, and literature reviewed by Fenning and Rose (2007), Monroe (2005), Noltemeyer and colleagues (2012), Skiba and others (2006), and Theoharis and Haddix (2011), who all note some form of inequity amongst students of diverse race/ ethnicity and behavioural challenges, and, or general differential treatment.
4.2.3 Co-creating criteria

As much as the teacher has a responsibility to manage and engage students and their behaviour, the student also has a role. Andrew stated it is important for students to co-create success criteria and collaborate on classroom expectations. Antoinette also stated this and added students should be taught to be aware of their own actions and emotions. Jayson also mentioned expectations as a way to keep students on track and manage behaviour. Andrew felt when students co-create criteria and class rules then the students “know what’s appropriate [and] what’s inappropriate.” Antoinette and Amy also both mentioned student ownership of their own actions and how this is more impactful then the teacher saying that they are doing something “wrong” or are not following the rules.

Jayson spoke about classroom conventions and that different teachers have different rules. For example, Jayson allowed for a cypher and hip-hop techniques of a call and response where students do not need to raise their hand. His students were into hip-hop culture and so he and the students co-created the classroom convention of using a cypher to communicate. Jayson noted that he only had nine students and that this may not work in a larger class. Other teachers may find when a student calls out, or does not raise their hand, a behavioural challenge. Research from Fenning and Rose (2007) may suggest a cypher is disrespectful or even excessive noise because it involves calling out, not raising one’s hand, and maybe talking over each other which they noted were considered examples of behavioural challenges. However, this is why rules need to be set from the beginning by the teacher and students about what is acceptable and what is not in the classroom and in the school. Andrew noted when students are a part of the rule making; they are more likely to follow the rules. Jayson also talked about being consistent with rules and consequences. Something that stood out was when Jayson exclaimed, “Once you establish a culture and expectations for that space, I find students are able to rise to those expectations.” Some students may need constant reminders, but trusting them to follow their co-created rules creates a more positive environment than assuming they will continue to misbehave. Knowing the students and their interests should be applied to class rules and expectations.

The participants’ sentiments about co-creating expectations are great practices. In order for co-creation to be successful, students need to have a voice. Amy and Antoinette both shared the importance of student voice and student interest. Andrew and Jayson both repeated the notion of incorporating student interest into the curriculum and environment. There are more students
compared to teachers in a classroom; therefore, including students in class rules could show a teacher cares about what they have to say.

4.3 Theme 3: Teacher supports

Each interview led into discussions about teacher support where there was a bit of a divide amongst some teachers on their opinions and experiences. Amy, Antoinette, and Jayson had experiences with limited administrative support, whereas Andrew had some positive experiences with support. Amy shared the most about administrative support for students with behavioural challenges, and she was the most experienced teacher in terms of years as a teacher, as well as years teaching Special Education. Other themes discussed were professional development courses taken and the importance of collaboration with others including teachers, families, and students as strategies and resources for teachers when engaging and managing students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges.

4.3.1 Limited administrative support for behavioural challenges

Each participant was asked about administrator involvement with students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. From participant experiences, it seems some administrators were not supportive and left the teachers to fend for themselves when in need of assistance with behavioural challenges. The data collected was significant because the original thought was that administrators are the “go to person” for advice and resources. Antoinette and Jayson briefly mentioned they had experiences where there was a lack of support from administrators. Jayson noted amongst the five schools he taught at, each was different in terms of supports. Jayson found, “there are supports for every other exceptionality except for students with behavioural challenges… and the only support might be a safety plan.” This is not helpful when teachers have students that are being disruptive and potentially harmful. Antoinette also noted it depends on the school. She worked in some schools where students got a lollipop for office visits and then, “just get to hang-out in the office.” This does not really resolve issues. Antoinette limited sending students to the office, because she said she did not get the full story when students went to the office and ended up asking more questions to find out what happened than if she handled the situation on her own. Antoinette also noted her administrator liked to use an office sheet referral, but mentioned it is not effective when help is needed at that moment.

Amy shared stories that involved a lack of administrative support where at times she felt like there was “no help”. In one school, a (Black) parent yelled at Amy in the hallway in front of
a (White) principal. This situation sounded difficult and could possibly have been avoided with more administrative support. Amy said the principal did not stop the parent from yelling, and instead of talking with the parent in the office, the principal and the parent took Amy out of the classroom, leaving her class unattended. Was this principal afraid? Or, uninformed? Or thinking of stereotypes, as Monroe (2005) would suggest the media has portrayed Black (youth in particular) in a negative light? There could be many factors associated with this story, and more discussion could have elicited further understanding. Another example Amy shared was when her class changed their opinion and respect for her after a misconstrued attempt at helping a Black student, and the administrator was too busy with other behavioural students in the school that help could not be offered. The literature reviewed supports how the interviewees feel because Bettini et al. (2005), McGhie-Richmond et al. (2013), and Skiba et al. (2006), all note administrators may not always be able to offer support, resources, or assist teachers. It can be implied administrators that are not supportive may lead to teachers having students with more behavioural challenges, than if the administrators are supportive. Theoharis and Haddix (2011) recommend having administrators who lead and encourage teacher growth and development.

Even though Amy provided some examples of limited support, she shared a positive story of another principal who had a “huge impact… on the student body and just culture of the place.” Amy felt this principal was supportive of the staff and students. Andrew also shared a positive story of administrative support. Andrew discussed a principal who came into the school and made changes to have a stronger social justice approach. The principal formed a Social Justice Team and brought in posters by Unlearn, a company that inspires critical thinking in regards to various social justice concerns. Andrew stated the unlearn posters at his school were effectively used to challenge views and biases towards First Nations, race, and other topics. Andrew felt the administrator was supportive, provided suggestions, and influenced a positive school culture.

There was not a full agreement amongst participants about limited administrative support, but it was noted it seemed to depend on who the individual administrator was rather than a general lack of administrative support. According to the participants, some administrators are very helpful and provide resources, whereas others may be too swamped, and, or unable to assist when needed. What does this say? Maybe more professional development courses should be offered, or more school initiatives implemented with consistent consequences so that teachers may not need to be reliant on administrators who can get very busy.
4.3.2 Professional development

The participants were asked, “In your professional development [PD] and professional learning, what if any, conversations or opportunities have there been about discipline and behavioural challenges? Have any of those conversations specifically connected to working with students representing racially/ethnically diverse groups?” The idea was to see what PD was out there, what discussions were being had, and ultimately if there are supports for teachers who have students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. What was found was there are PD courses on student engagement and classroom management, but nothing specific to race/ethnicity and behavioural challenges. However, it seems the strategies the participants learnt were transferrable to use for students of diverse race/ethnicity and behavioural challenges.

Jayson shared his PD was curriculum based and about “providing an engaging program to minimize these types of things [behavioural challenges].” Jayson also noted, “There’s a lot of talk of making sure the students’ voices are heard.” This seems to be a strong and growing sentiment and approach as noted by The Metropolitan Center for Urban Education (2008) about respecting student’s perspectives, and as shown by Ruck and Wortley (2002) for including student voice in their research study on race/ethnicity and perceptions of treatment by teachers. Jayson also had behaviour management systems training, that taught about “employing a non-confrontational approach and just dealing with students with respect” which he said he has made a part of this practice. Andrew also shared PD related to classroom management, but noted it was limited in terms of talking about student identity. More PD is needed in various areas related to behavioural challenges and its connection with diverse race/ethnicity.

Amy stated her PD and discussions were a two-pronged approach. She said a lot of focus was around supporting children, “making sure they feel welcomed and included,” getting students positively engaged, and valuing student experiences. The other end, Amy stated, was looking at progressive discipline where she said, “We’re not just jumping into the most severe ‘punishment’”. This implies situations may have been assessed on an individual basis based on previous history and relationship with the teacher. Antoinette mentioned having only one PD “dealing with … behaviour issues… mainly dealing with students who had been in places where they had seen violence… in the home.” Although this PD was not focused on race/ethnicity, Antoinette noted the types of students that would be seen more, or had more information on were “either First Nations, or students who were newcomers to Canada.” This was an interesting
point because it is talking about factors that may influence behaviour, and race/ethnicity seem to be connected to violence in the home, and this connects back to a student’s backpack and how living situations can affect behaviour.

Saphier and Gower (in Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2008) feel “instituting classroom management principles has implications for the learning progress of all children, especially low-performing, poor, special education, and racial/ethnic minority children” (p. 2). The literature reviewed by Skiba and others (2006) showed there is a lack of teacher training on inclusion, disabilities, and challenges. Gérin-Lajoie (2012) agrees with Skiba and others and adds there is a lack of professional training for teachers when it comes to working with students from diverse backgrounds. The literature aligns with some of the participants experiences because it seems there could be more types of PD and training. Race/ethnicity do seem to matter in terms of factors that affect students’ education and behaviour in the classroom, but, from the data, there are not many PD sessions that connect race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. However, there are best practices noted that could be applied to all students.

4.3.3 Collaborating with others

McGhie-Richmond and others (2013) and Sorani-Villanueva and others (2014) note the benefits of collaborating and having inclusive models in the school. The participants echoed this and elaborated further. Andrew and Antoinette both discussed the effect of collaborating with others. Antoinette felt it important to collaborate with students and get feedback about the lessons and activities. Antoinette also tried a trial and error approach as well as asked the particular student’s past teacher for what strategies worked. Antoinette warns about asking other teachers in case there was not a positive interaction. Andrew talked about teams noting he engaged in cooperative problem solving, spoke with the Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT), communicated with families, discussed strategies with his grade team and the principal, as well as had conversations when necessary and available with a child and youth councillor. Andrew called the meetings he had “kid talk”, which was “an opportunity for you to talk about students that might be struggling with either mental health and wellness, or with behavioural challenges, or maybe peer conflicts … or lack of engagement” or lack of interest in school. Like Antoinette, Andrew warned there is a fine line when talking about struggling students, because it could lead to stereotyping. This is why he felt it was important to “really know” the student and “foster a sense of community or collaboration” with each student and the classroom as a whole.
Clark and Breman (2009) feel collaborating with school counsellors and other educators are beneficial for providing academic, social, and emotional support for students with special needs.

Jayson spoke about collaborating with parents on strategies that work at home, and collaborating with other teachers regarding strategies and materials to use in the classroom such as for tracking behaviour. Amy spoke about the community, and shared a story where parents of the Black students in her class misunderstood a comment and all agreed to not talk to her. The issue was resolved, but the example shows that it seems families can influence other families and can side with the teacher for a stronger and impactful educational success, or go against teachers and could lead to possibly more challenges. Amy is a White female, and most of her students were Black. It is implied there may have been a disconnection amongst the students and the teacher, which led to misunderstandings. Amy stated that she often collaborated with students on how to be successful, but in a few instances, students were offended at the help offered. Further questioning could have elicited more discussion on this topic, and further research could be done related to students feeling offended at help offered from a teacher of a different race/ethnicity compared to a teacher of the same race/ethnicity.

4.4 Theme 4: Teacher attitude

Teachers have a large role in student development both socially and academically. Having a culturally relevant pedagogy, (CRP) helps to know students and understand others. Young (2010) defines CRP as a three-pronged paradigm and theoretical model that addresses student achievement, teaches students to accept and affirm their cultural identity, and teaches students critical thinking about inequities that institutions perpetuate. Educators should also build positive and genuine relationships with administrators, fellow teachers, as well as families, and the students. Each teacher, in their own way said positive relationships start by listening to students and understanding where they are coming from.

4.4.1 Benefits of having a culturally relevant pedagogy

Andrew repeated it is important educators “know the students” including “the family structure as well as the racial, religious, and cultural identities.” Jayson and Andrew both used the terms CRP and, or culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (CRRP) which is another term for having cultural awareness. Young (2010) states educators need CRP to have a connection with students and understand students. Jayson was asked about seeing any connections between racial/ethnic diversity and behavioural challenges; he responded:
I don’t know. It’s a bit of a nuanced thing, so I think it really depends on the cultural competence of the person in the front of the room. So, certain behaviours that might be demonized in one setting… in other settings, they are not as problematic. He also shared his experience of White administrators and teachers handling behaviour situations effectively and Black teachers and administrators horribly. From these comments, it is assumed Jayson felt it depends on the teacher having a CRP or CRRP and not necessarily or not always the race/ethnicity of the teacher that matters. However, O’Brennan and colleagues (2014) note the race of the teacher may affect student relationship.

Jayson said he makes CRRP a part of his practice and always talks about the importance of being aware of the diverse student backgrounds and “having a cultural competence for all your students” because this can help with student engagement and management. He also warned not to “overreact to race” nor act as a “saviour [because] then you will automatically create victims.” In relation to Jayson’s comment, Theoharis and Haddix (2011) noted a story about a group of Black students returning to school to visit and the principal was notified there were a loud group of students in the hall. A short time later a louder group of White boys, according to Theoharis and Haddix, returned to visit and the principal was not notified. The teachers in this case seemed to overreact to the Black students and likely due to biases and stereotypes.

As a White female, Amy may have faced some challenges with her students and their opinions of her, but she understood the importance of finding similarities and making sure her class had information about “different cultures, and that’s in a really positive light.” Andrew, a White male, also shared the importance of being aware of the students, recognizing biases, knowing the student, and being culturally responsive to the students in the class. Andrew’s school also made an effort to incorporate the different identities of the community with multicultural events and discussing social justice and equity around particular groups. Andrew’s advice to teachers is to celebrate diversity and for schools to encourage CRP, as well as social justice and equity, which Gérin-Lajoie (2012) would agree and promote.

4.4.2 Building positive genuine relationships

Who the teacher is and their personal attitude seems to be the strongest factor in how to effectively manage students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. Each participant spoke about the importance of having a positive relationship with students and how this can reduce behaviours, or help teachers better understand why the student is showing a
particular behaviour. A positive relationship to Jayson involves showing students respect, creating relationships inside and outside the classroom, even if the student is not in his class, and pronouncing students names properly. These all seem like simple steps to build positive relationships and connections. Andrew’s idea of building a positive rapport was to include student inquiry because he felt this led to more engagement, which would decrease behavioural challenges. Knowing a student’s interest and personality were concepts that Andrew felt were important for genuine relationships and reducing behavioural challenges. Jayson and Andrew also mentioned how a teacher responds to behaviour can also affect behaviours shown later.

Antoinette shared the same opinion as others about making connections with students. Antoinette focused on talking with her students and listening to what they have to say which she said helped in building relationships and managing behaviour. Antoinette mentioned the importance of really getting to know the students to find out where the behaviours may be stemming from. Antoinette stated she asked students to talk about their emotions and explain why they said something or did something that was disruptive to the learning. Antoinette would question, “What message are they getting across and how would they like to represent themselves in our classroom space?” She felt doing this taught students how to self-regulate and manage behaviour and helped with understanding their true emotions and feelings. Howery and others (2013), also note the benefit of teaching students about self-regulation and emotions.

Amy felt positive relationships are built from respectful communication and talking to each other about emotions and feelings. Amy also worked to build self-esteem, self-worth, and self-value with her students. Sorani-Villanueva and others (2014), feel positive interactions benefit all students. When students feel respected, welcomed, included, appreciated and cared for, behavioural challenges may be reduced as seen in most of the participants’ examples.

4.5 Chapter conclusion

Chapter four discussed the four main themes and subthemes that emerged from the data. It is important to understand the student’s background to be better able to support all students. It is also important what the classroom dynamics, approaches and expectations are. Teaching is not a single person job, collaborating with others, and support is beneficial for both the teacher and student. Through collaboration and teacher attitude, positive genuine relationships may be formed, which makes communicating and understanding easier. Analyzing each theme allowed for connections to the literature and areas where more literature would have been beneficial.
Knowing what a student is going through outside of school may help to understand certain behaviours, emotions, and performance at school. As well, the demographics of the school may connect to behaviour. It was expected by the researcher that each participant would give an example of a Black male student with behavioural challenges, so it was surprising when one participant shared an example of a White female. Fenning and Rose (2007) say any student can misbehave and this can be applicable to any race/ethnicity. Participants’ responses and the literature noted race/ethnicity of the teacher may matter in student connection, representation, and behaviour. Further literature in this area could have been beneficial.

Secondly, the type of classroom was considered an important factor in behaviour. Most of the classroom spaces described were Special Education classes, or not a “regular classroom”. The type of classroom may be significant, but so is feeling safe, welcomed, and engaged. Within the classroom, students need to be a part of the rules and understand the consequences in school. With these factors, negative behaviours may be reduced, based on the participants’ experiences.

Thirdly, support, or lack thereof for teachers, was mentioned in the literature and supported by the participants’ views. Professional development (PD) was also considered a support and each participant had taken some form of PD that could be indirectly related to supporting students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. Lastly, collaboration with others was deemed an effective form of support as stated by participants and the literature reviewed and perceived to help with managing student behaviour and engaging all students.

The final theme was about the teacher’s attitude. Both the literature reviewed, and the participants mentioned CRP, CRRP, and respecting cultural diversity as effective in understanding students. Building a positive and genuine rapport can also help in understanding why a student may have a behavioural challenge. Each participant shared how talking to students, something so simple, can be very effective in student behaviour. As well, not making assumptions and buying into biases particularly around race/ethnicity may be effective in reducing what is seen as a behavioural challenge.

The participants shared many thoughts. Jayson said there is “no one-size-fits-all approach.” Each teacher is different and has unique experiences and teaching styles, but it can be helpful to learn from others experiences when looking for strategies for students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges. Chapter five addresses the implications of the findings, provides recommendations, and looks at potential areas of further research.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Chapter overview

The present study was designed to learn more about effective strategies and suggestions for how to engage and manage students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. The findings serve to support the extant literature pertaining to these problems, and serve to share effective strategies on how to engage and manage students, as well as what challenges teachers may face. The findings also serve to tell more about different strategies and suggestions for teachers of students of different races/ethnicities.

Chapter one described the problem of disproportionate representation of students of colour having behavioural challenges and the differential treatment of students of minority race/ethnicities in comparison to majority races/ethnicities for similar behaviour. Lived experiences and observations ignited the flame for this research. Chapter two reviewed the current literature of differential treatment of students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges and sought to find strategies and suggestions to change the problem. Chapter three described the qualitative processes of the research including the reasons for a semi-structured interview. Chapter four shared the participants’ data through the themes that emerged. This chapter summarizes the research findings, highlights the present study’s implications for various stakeholders, provides several recommendations, and suggests directions for future research.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance

Following interviews with four educators, two males, two females, of which two are Black, and two are White, a rigorous analysis revealed four important themes: (1) Student background, home and school life, (2) Classroom dynamics, approach, and expectations, (3) Teacher supports, and (4) Teacher attitude. The different perspectives of the participants interviewed are their stories and the information should not be viewed as a generalized single story. However, the findings are suggested strategies, and teachers should find what works best for their students.

The first theme, student background, home and school life, served to remind teachers to be cognizant of the “student backpack” or the things a student carries with them from their home life or life outside of school that can affect their behaviour in school. Teachers should keep in mind and find out if the student has eaten, if there are changes occurring at home, know the students culture, race/ethnicity, and other factors. Getting to know students becomes a crucial
aspect in understanding students and likely understanding behaviour. The interview data found both female teachers, and the male Black teacher believe the students’ identities should be represented in the curriculum, and Antoinette, the Black female teacher, felt students should be represented in the teaching staff because she felt most teachers are White middle class females. The former can be more easily achieved because teachers can easily find books, posters, and materials to represent diversity, compared to the latter, which requires teachers applying to various schools, as well as Principals hiring racially/ethnically diverse teachers. It is important to be aware of who the students are, where they come from, and to incorporate these factors into understanding the student. The findings are significant because it is important each student feels safe and welcome in the classroom and school. With the growing diversity in Ontario schools, increasing awareness about differences amongst students should motivate teachers’ behaviours to be more inclusive.

The second theme, classroom dynamics, approach, and expectations served to remind teachers about what type of classroom seems to be common in connection with behavioural challenges. From the literature and participant data, Black students and students with behavioural challenges are overrepresented in special education (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Kauffman et al., 2007; Noltemeyer et al., 2012; & Skiba et al., 2006), and these individuals seem to be commonly connected with behavioural challenges. This should serve as a warning or concern that racism, biases, and stereotypes may be involved. Other significant data served to remind teachers of the importance and positive effects of having a safe, welcoming, and engaging environment. Not only should teachers incorporate the students’ interests, but they should also co-create criteria with students for various activities and classroom rules.

The third theme, teacher supports, served to remind teachers of the resources within their school. The participant data touched on what having limited administrative support for behavioural challenges can be like, compared to what it means to have administrative support. The latter can lead to an overall positive school climate and the former can lead to feeling helpless. Professional development was considered a type of support to the participants, and an area they agreed could be more geared towards training in knowledge around students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. Participants also agreed collaboration with various people was a great strategy.
The fourth and final theme, teacher attitude, served to remind teachers to be cognizant of their own beliefs, practices, and pedagogy. This section, in particular aimed to show the benefits of having a culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), as stated by all the participants in some way, and Yonge (2010) encourages all teachers to adapt this pedagogy. Building positive genuine relationships with each student so they feel included, respected, and understood was another subtheme that emerged. Amy and Jayson strongly felt positive relationships can lead to respect in the classroom. As well, understanding students’ actions, and the potential reasons behind them, is important for building relationships as noted by the participants.

A significant finding from the research is race/ethnicity is still an important factor related to a person's opinions and actions. Monroe (2005) stated the media has given a negative portrait of Black males and this can affect others’, including teachers, opinions of all Black males. The majority of the students described by the teacher participants were Black males and this stood out as a reflection of societal views and stereotypes. Ruck and Wortley (2002) shared a study of high school students’ perceptions related to how they felt they were viewed/rated from their teachers about behaviour. The study showed participants felt students of colour were more likely to receive differential treatment. Black students were considered the most likely to be treated differently. The list continued with South Asian students being second, then “other”, next, Asian students, and White students were perceived to be the least likely to receive differential treatment (Ruck & Wortley, 2002). This is a problem. Teachers should be aware of their biases, racism, beliefs, and understanding, and expand on their knowledge so that students feel respected, acknowledged, supported, and safe. If students do not feel supported or cared for, and if they recognize differential treatment because of their race, this could lead to educational implications, more behavioural implications, and possibly fuel a self-fulfilling prophecy of negativity and failure as noted by Noltemeyer and others (2012).

5. 2 Implications

The present study has important implications for educational reform. In broad strokes, this study should serve as a reminder to policymakers and curriculum planners that schools need to actually be inclusive and equitable as stated in policy documents (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, 2014). Consistent with the conclusions of Fenning and Rose (2007), Howery and others (2013), as well as O’Brien and others (2014), the present study finds school-wide approaches can be beneficial. The study also provides novel insights into the issue of what type
of supports are available as well as if supports are available, and that policymakers and administrators should take heed. In each school, the principal sets the tone. The participants of this study recognized that a principal, whose goal is equity and inclusion and makes the effort to notice and appreciate the diversity of a school, could make a difference. Teachers also make a difference, and play an equally important role for creating change.

### 5.2.1 Broad implications

The broad implications from this study are to show what may happen to student success if the problems of differential treatment continue to exist. If students’ interests and well-being in all areas at school, including behavioural challenges from students of diverse race / ethnicity, are not cared for, it could negatively affect the overall school climate and potentially student success. Schools should have a type of behaviour system that monitors how students are treated, and has guides and rules in place that have fair consequences for students and their behaviour, similar to what Fenning and Rose (2007) propose. If there is no consistency of consequences and equity in treatment, the overall school climate could be negative. The participants alluded to this noting negative instances of lack of support from administrators, and or policies or lack of policies in the school on reporting and handling behaviour challenges. If there are no interventions in a schools’ management and policies, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013, 2014) goal of safety and inclusion will not be adhered. If students recognize differential treatment, as Ruck and Wortley (2002) show in their study, more negative behaviours may surface, or a sense of distrust, negativity, exclusion, and lack of interest may be present. A student's race/ ethnicity and behavioural challenges should not deny them the rights of safety and inclusion.

### 5.2.2 Narrow implications

The present study also has three specific implications for teachers working with students of diverse race/ ethnicity with behavioural challenges. This includes all students with behavioural challenges. First, if teachers do not make connections, there may be misunderstandings. Second, not understanding the root cause of behaviour may lead to quick assumptions and lack of proper support. Lastly, a teacher's reactions may have stronger implications than they think because students do notice, and are aware of how others view them.

Students may display behavioural challenges in the classroom when they feel they are not respected and represented in the class or school. An educators’ lack of cultural awareness, because they do not share racial, cultural, nor linguistic norms and traditions may create a
barrier, or lessen a connection with the students. If connections are not made, with either the teacher, or the materials in the class, or the curriculum content, this in turn may lead to students acting in a certain way that could be viewed as a behavioural challenge. As well, racism, biases, and opinions of the teacher may create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Noltemeyer et al., 2012) and, or worsen race/ethnicity relationships and behaviour relationships.

If teachers are unaware of, do not pay attention to, nor address a student’s personal backpack, the behaviours seen in class can become progressive and affect student learning. Understanding a student is important and taking note of how often behaviour occurs and when it occurs is also important or it can lead to assumptions, biases, stereotypes, and it will not solve the problem, it can worsen it. Cassidy and Jackson (2005) warn discrimination can affect education. If teachers do not look for the root cause of the behaviour and just feel the student is not “abiding” and following rules, then the behavioural challenges the teacher feels is occurring will likely continue. What if the student is just hungry or tired, and if they were provided food and a chance to rest, would they not be more ready to learn and “follow class rules”? Would students not be more engaged? If all teachers took the time to define what they really feel a behavioural challenge is to them, and then took the time to find out why a student is having behavioural challenges, it could help the student feel cared for and understood. These types of questions are what the participants asked themselves to understand their students.

Teachers who are reactive to student behaviours seen in class, instead of being proactive, and or looking at all of the evidence, may end up with more students being put in special education or removed from class for what is labelled behavioural challenges. Jayson noted there are many students in Special Education who may not need to be there. He also stated it could take a long time to get a student out of Special Education. If teachers are proactive, know their students, and set expectations with students early on, it may limit challenges (Clark and Breman, 2009; O’Brennan et al., 2014). Without expectations and guidelines, a teacher may react differently each time there is a behavioural challenge and this may cause strain in relationships.

Teachers must also be aware of their biases, which may be seen as racism. Societal opinions can affect personal opinions. The Critical Race Theory (CRT) is still relevant today as there is racism all around. How students are portrayed in the media can alter one’s opinion in the classroom. Things teachers have heard from other teachers, can affect personal opinions about a particular student, and particular races/ethnicities. Even though people have biases, believe in
stereotypes, and have negative views, it is important to challenge these, and treat each student as a unique individual. Either consciously or not, the reactions a teacher has may differ for students of different gender and, or different race/ethnicity. Students notice teacher perceptions as stated by Ruck and Wortley’s (2002) so keep this in mind and or it may create a self-fulfilling prophecy as Noltemeyer et al. (2012) warn.

5. 3 Recommendations

The implications of the present study point specifically to four recommendations for ministries of education, school administrators, and teachers. The first recommendation is for the Ministry of Education to encourage each school to implement a whole system that promotes positive behaviours and respects students. Fenning and Rose (2007) suggests schools should follow a Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS) system. PBS involves devoting a team to review infractions and make the consequences for all students, rather than different people making consequences each time, in an attempt to be fair, and to follow a proactive school discipline system. O’Brien and others (2014) offer a similar suggestion of Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) that aims to address school needs and provide teachers with management skills. Howery and others (2013) suggest Response to Intervention (RTI), because they want positive schools to support students socially, academically, and behaviourally. These are a few suggestions and the board should help each school use a system that works for their student population. The participants of the study suggest the system involve CRP/CRRP.

The second recommendation is also for the Ministry of Education. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2013, 2014) state their boards stand for inclusive and equitable schools. To honour this practice, they should provide and encourage professional development for teachers of students with behavioural challenges from diverse races/ethnicities. Gérin-Lajoie (2012) believes in teacher training through professional development and reforming the pedagogy. McGhie-Richmond and others (2013) are aware of underfunding as a reason for lack of change. However, if the Ministry’s overall goal is equity and inclusion, money should be distributed in an equitable way and not necessarily an equal way. Not only should there be professional development, but the Ministry of Education should address the structures of power, oppression, racism, and social justice and provide opportunities to teach teachers about this. There are teachers who are racist, or may say and do things that are based on their race or the race of others, and sometimes unintentionally. The Ministry should provide professional development on
how to address the concerns of racism and provide more opportunities for teachers to learn how to be culturally, racially, and ethnically inclusive as well as how to talk about it. Based on the participant data there is very little, if any, professional development or school discussions about race/ethnicity and racism. These type of talks need to be had, and these types of courses need to be offered.

The third recommendation is for school administrators to prioritize equity issues in the school. Administrators are encouraged to look at trends and problems and delve into why there is an issue. If the school is an example of Black students being overly disciplined, ask why. Talk to the staff, as Theoharis and Haddix (2011) did when teachers informed the office about a group of loud Black boys, but not when there was as a group of louder White boys. If the school has a high population of a specific race/ethnicity, then look to represent that in the school either through the teaching staff, through school initiatives and materials, or through the curriculum as Antoinette felt was needed. Andrew noted the importance of social justice and how it should be a part of school culture. Students need to be taught with a social justice lens to better understand the world and they should be taught and guided on how to be agents of change.

The final recommendation is for educators. Teachers play an important role in student development and education. Based on participant data and literature review, daily self-reflection is proposed. Ryan (2005) notes the importance and benefits of being reflective and reflexive. Teachers should ask themselves: “What do I know? What do I not know? What do I need to know”? If a situation occurs, where a reaction may have ensued based on race/ethnicity, a teacher should reflect on what happened, and ask if they were inclusive and equitable. Without self-reflection, a teacher can continue to react and teach in a way that is ineffective. Everyone does things for a reason whether it is conscious or not, but asking why could open an individual up to change, and help teachers support each student in the way they need to be supported. The strategies a teacher implements will differ per person, but a recommendation that can be applicable and beneficial to anyone is self-reflection. Each participant referred to self-reflection in some way. They would reflect on what worked with the students, what did not, and came up with alternative ways to reach their students. When the participants tried to find out why the students were having behavioural challenges, they often talked to the student to understand their feelings, or to the parents and this helped. Another suggestion for teachers is seeking support from the people connected to the student, as well as support from the student.
5.4 Areas for further research

Inasmuch as the present study has served to expand upon the extant literature, it has also highlighted the need for further study. In future research endeavours, it is recommended a greater emphasis be placed upon the gender of students who are labelled as having behavioural challenges in connection with their race/ethnicity. The educator participants all gave examples of male students (one or two) except for two stories about females. Many of the examples in the literature reviewed were about male students also. This is an important area of future research and research scholars may want to direct more attention to next. Why are males mostly labelled with behavioural challenges? Then, why are they mostly of particular races/ethnicities? The other area would be to compare the data on diverse racial/ethnic males labelled with behavioural challenges and diverse racial/ethnic females labelled with behavioural challenges to see if there are any differences or similarities in the data, and the reasons why.

The data was based on Ontario teachers and schools, which was lacking in existent literature. The research reviewed was mostly American and this study can serve as a Canadian, particularly Ontario, elementary school related example. An area of further study could be to find more local studies, or to do a larger participant research study in Ontario. Having more relatable data could be beneficial for discovering trends and creating solutions to problems.

Furthermore, the research and statistics on the effects of academic success when students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges are treated differently or inequitably should be studied. To ensure students’ futures are not being jeopardized because of a teacher's perception about student behaviour and potential racism, it is imperative to do research in this area. Questions to consider are: Does being labelled with a behavioural challenge in elementary school affect one's grades in high school and then set them on an unsuccessful and/or challenging path? Does being compared and treated differently based on race/ethnicity enhance a self-fulfilling prophecy? Researchers may want to direct their attention in this area to find ways to lessen the racial achievement gap Young (2010) refers to, and to find ways to lessen the subtle and, or overt racism. Everyone has biases and opinions. However, what an individual chooses to do with these thoughts and feelings could make a difference.

5.5 Concluding comments

As a woman of colour, whose goal is to be inclusive and equitable to all, the present study is important because all students should feel welcome and safe at school, including being
respected, understood, and a part of the classroom in some way. In Ontario, it can be argued the minority races/ethnicities are becoming the majority, and this should be celebrated. The problem this research sought to address was the differential treatment of students of diverse race/ethnicity with behavioural challenges. It is strongly believed that any student can misbehave (Fenning & Rose, 2007), but it is important to find out why they are misbehaving. As well, it is important to understand that students may not be misbehaving, but there may be a disconnect with teachers who could be racist, biased, and or stereotyping students which is something that is alive in schools. The pedagogy of the teacher, the amount of administrator support, as well as school policy and the curriculum all has an influence on behaviour management and students behaviour. The literature reviewed and data from four educator participants served to support the problem identified, and sought to find strategies to change this.

The data is significant because it suggests teachers should be aware of numerous factors, including demographics and a “student's backpack”, the potential burdens they carry with them throughout the day, before judging students and using a method to manage behavioural challenges from students of diverse race/ethnicity. Another interesting finding, cited in the literature and participant data was the increased behavioural challenges in Special Education classes. Teachers also should not feel alone. Collaborate with others, seek professional development, and use administrators as resources if available. Teacher attitude is probably the most important theme and finding because they are the ones with the students and often the ones disciplining particular behaviours. Yonge (2012) suggests having a culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) to connect with students. A positive and genuine connection could lessen behaviours in class and reduce any potential implications related to student achievement.

As part of the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013, 2014) policy documents, schools are expected to be inclusive and equitable to all students. This idea is a Ministry goal that should be implemented by the schools and administrators as well as the teachers. If teachers reflect on their practices, biases, stereotypical representations, opinions, and beliefs, as well as reflect on occurrences where they are managing behaviour, then it could make a change to the current problem. The goal should be to support each student so they can be successful. Each student is a unique individual and should be treated in an equitable and inclusive way regardless of race/ethnicity, regardless of behavioural challenges, and regardless of any other factors.
References


Ryan, T. (2005). "When you reflect are you also being reflexive?" in *Ontario Action Researcher, 8*(1), 1-5.


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Dear ________________,

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/UFT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. As a student of diverse mixed ethnicity, in a pre-service teaching program, I am interested in learning from a sample of diverse teachers’ experiences with supporting students of diverse ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary schools. My research will focus on teachers’ experiences on how students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges are treated. Findings obtained from this study may be informative for current teachers and future teachers in the promotion of equity and inclusion for all students within the educational community, as well as challenging system and personal biases. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

As previously stated, I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the MT program. My coordinator providing support for the research process is Angela MacDonald. The purpose of this research study and interview process is to allow the MT students to become familiar with various ways of conducting research. Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded as part of my data collection. 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, as well as 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 Angela MacDonald. You are free to change your mind at any time, and withdraw after you have consented to participate at any time, and even after the interview itself. If you choose to withdraw, contents from your interview will be destroyed immediately. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. Given the topic about ethnicity and behaviour guiding the research questions, the questions may illicit some emotional responses which could cause the interviewee to feel vulnerable. To address this and create a space of comfort, you will be provided with the questions ahead of time. There are no other known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you after the interview to ensure accuracy.

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,

Brianne Tyson
Research Coordinator’s Name: Angela MacDonald
E-mail: E-mail:

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by ____________ (name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ____________________________
Name: (printed) ____________________________
Date: ____________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study, and for taking the time to be interviewed. This research study aims to learn about a sample of diverse racial/ethnic teacher’s experiences with supporting students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds with behavioural challenges in elementary schools for the purpose of determining trends, strategies and suggestions as related to the literature reviewed. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your teaching experiences and experiences of other teachers. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

To begin, please state your name for the recording?

Background Information

1. How would you describe your identity in terms of your race/ethnicity?
2. How long have you been a teacher/educator?
3. How long have you been teaching at [blank] school?
4. What are the racial/ethnic demographics of your current students? Is this typical of your classes in the past? If different; how so?

Teacher Perspectives/Beliefs

5. In the schools in which you worked, have you seen a connection, if any, between racial/ethnic diversity and behavioural challenges? (If so, please elaborate?)
6. In your professional development and professional learning, what if any, conversations or opportunities have there been about discipline and behavioural challenges? Have any of those conversations specifically connected to working with students representing racially/ethnically diverse groups?

Teacher Practices

7. What do you consider to be behavioural challenges in the classroom?
8. What is your approach to general classroom engagement (/management)?
9. Can you give me some classroom engagement (/management) strategies you find effective and have used with your students? (Any others?)

10. a) Over your teaching experiences, have you had any specific students with behavioural challenges in the classroom?
b) Tell me about these particular students?
c) How would you define them in terms of race or ethnicity?
d) How would you define their challenges?
e) What strategies did you use to move forward in those situations?

11. a) What classroom engagement (/management) strategies do you find most effective for your students?
b) Tell me about how it affected the student, the behavioural challenge, and the strategies used to move forward?

12. How do you decide what factors you use to differentiate your strategies and responses to challenging behaviours in the classroom?

Supports and Challenges

13. In what ways, if any, do you feel the school administrator and, or systems or policies support students with behavioural challenges? What about for students specifically representative of racial/ethnic diversity?

14. In what ways, if any, do you feel the school administrator and, or systems or policies support teachers with students (representative of all racial and ethnic diversity) with behavioural challenges?

Next Steps

15. What, if any, are your professional or personal goals related to classroom engagement (/management) for students with behavioural challenges?

16. What are your recommendations, if any, for your school, or the system and policies to address these issues with students of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds and behavioural challenges?

17. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers about the best way to think about and support classroom engagement/management for diverse racial/ethnic students with behavioural challenges?

Thank you kindly for your participation, time, and responses for my research study.