



Deconstructing Racism as a Barrier to Quality Education

COALITION FOR EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Deconstructing Racism as a Barrier to Quality Education



(Report prepared by Abisola Oyasiji, Ph.D.)



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August 2020

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The cover depicts two diverse hands making a pinky promise, while extending from an open book. A tree holds these two hands together.

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Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by grants from:

- The Department of Canadian Heritage's Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program;
- Alberta Ministry of Culture and Tourism Anti-Racism Community Grant Program; and
- Calgary Arts Development Authority's Artshare Program.

We would also like to thank all the individuals, agencies, community and religious organizations who provided support for recruiting participants, analyzing and interpreting the research findings.

Our utmost appreciation goes to all the participants who shared their personal stories with us.

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Executive Summary

According to the 2016 census, 10.6% of immigrants in Alberta were of school-age (5-24 years old). This has contributed to a high level of racial diversity among the K-12 student population in the province and especially in Calgary. This level of diversity is also accompanied by the problem of racism in schools. Using an anti-racism framework grounded in the principles of community-based research, this project used the power of individual stories, the energy of the community's collective voice, and the engagement of youths, parents and school workers to understand the experiences of racism in the school system, the impacts and then advocate for systemic changes that will address the issue of racism in Calgary schools. Data for study were obtained through the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion and thematic content analysis was used to analyze the data collected. Thirty participants including youths, parents and school workers took part in the research. Participants were of African and Asian backgrounds with representations from the following countries: Bangladesh, Iran, India, Vietnam, South Sudan, North Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, Jordan, Eritrea, Ghana, Ethiopia and South Africa.

There were some limitations to this study. First, it relied on a relatively small sample size and may not be a representative reflection of the range of racism experiences within K-12 schools in Calgary. Also, the interviews were exclusively a personal account of participants' racism experience, which cannot account for personal biases. However, the critical findings and implications in this study still serve as important points of discussion on the issues of racism in schools.

Summary of Findings

From our data analysis, the manifestations of racism as reported by our participants are summarized into the following themes:

Race-based Bullying

- Race-based bullying exists in various forms such as physical attacks, frequent use of N-word, racial slurs, name-calling, racially driven harassment and graffiti.

Anti-Black racism

- Anti-Black racism in the forms of stereotypes and racial profiling is a major problem that both students and parents faced within the school system.
- As a result, this discrimination often leads to assumptions and generalizations that lead to conflicts and false accusations.

Inequitable punishment

- Black students reported that they experienced more unjust punishment in school compared to non-racialized students.

Microaggressions

- Some of the research participants reported cases of microaggressions in the form of micro insults.

Incorrect Placement into English as a Second Language (ESL) program

- Youths and parents reported that racialized students born in Canada were automatically placed into ESL classes without necessarily assessing them for the need.
- They claimed that they realized this was done to keep governments' ESL funding in place.

Lack of Racial Diversity in School Staff

- Racialized students and parents do not see themselves represented in the teaching and administrative staff of the school, nor on the school council.
- Youth participants reported seeing very few teachers of racialized groups all through their schooling years.

Eurocentric Curriculum

- Participants expressed their concerns and the desire to have a truly inclusive curriculum that is representative of the diversity in the classrooms today.
- Participants also deemed some kinds of literature to be unfit for use in a diversified classroom.

Teachers' Low Expectations

- Youth participants reported that they experienced biases from teachers in such a way that they are prejudged with low expectations in their academic journey because of their racial background.

Downplaying the acts of racism in the school system

- Participants reported that incidences of racism in the school are often dismissed or not taken seriously.
- Racialized youths that have experienced racism in the school expressed some lack of trust with school staff. They reported that in most cases after reporting acts of racism, the situation becomes worse.

Inadequate support within the school system

- The accounts of our participants showed that racialized students and parents do not receive adequate support within the school system after incidents of racism.

The Impacts of Racism

The impacts of racism on the lives of racialized youth and parents were quite serious. They included psychological, emotional, social and mental impacts. Specifically, they unfolded in the forms of emotional toll, self-denial, suicidal attempts, anger, insecurity, low self-esteem, questioned identity, frustration, inferiority complex, poor academic performance and social dysfunction.

Recommendations

The collective voices of racialized parents and youths that have first-hand experience of racism, together with the contributions of the school workers, have provided the following recommendations:

- Ensure diversity among school staff
- Involve school administrators, teachers and students in anti-racist education
- Address biased treatment against Black students
- Acknowledge, investigate and deal with racist incidents
- Offer opportunities for open dialogues
- Develop inclusive curriculum
- Provide anti-racist education early
- Empower immigrant and racialized parents
- Reassess the current ESL placement system and ensure accountability of its funding.
- Develop clear procedures for reporting racist incidents
- Include racialized community members in assessing policies and making reforms within the education system

Section One: Project Overview

1.1 Background

Over the years, the growth of immigrant population in Canada has led to a great diversification of the Canadian population's characteristics. According to the 2016 census, not less than 7.5 million people, that is 21.9% of the Canadian population, were immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2016). Alberta, and Calgary especially, have also witnessed a strong presence of immigrant population and this diversity is increasingly evident in schools where students are of different racial background mix (Statistics Canada, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2011). The 2016 census shows that 10.6% of immigrants in Alberta were of school age (5-24 years old) (Statistics Canada, 2017).

This growing immigrant population trend has also been accompanied with the problem of racism in schools (Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation, 2019). Racialized youths face significant barriers in accessing learning opportunities and achieving favourable educational outcomes because of the racism they experience in schools (Chavous et. al. 2003; Aronson, 2002). Often, they do not receive adequate, specialized services to support their unique needs, which is exacerbated by the interpersonal and institutional racism that is embedded within educational systems (Peel District School Board, 2020; Varma-Joshi et al. 2004). Consequently, racism in schools and the structures that enable it, detrimentally impact immigrant and racialized youths' access to equitable and quality education (Centre for Race and Culture, 2013).

Using an anti-racism framework, this project uses the power of individual stories, the energy of the community's collective voice, and the engagement of youths, parents and school workers to understand the experiences of racism in the Calgary school system and its impacts, and then advocates for systemic changes that will address the issue of racism in Calgary schools.

This report is grouped into five connecting sections. The first section gives an overview of the project. In the second section, we examine the theoretical underpinning upon which the study was grounded while the third section presents the research methodology, which includes the design, data collection and analysis. In the fourth

section, we present the findings of the study. In the last section, we discuss the implications of the study and present the recommendations for moving forward.

1.2 Setting the context

The school plays a significant role in the well-being and success of immigrant and racialized youth and children. However, racism in schools and the structures that enable it have become significant barriers to immigrant and racialized youths' access to quality education. The inequities in the experiences of racialized minority groups in schools create a systemic barrier to success for them. Students who have experienced or perceived racial discrimination in schools are likely to have poor academic performance, low self-esteem, and a high dropout rate, while tending to undervalue the importance of schooling, finding the school experience to not be enjoyable, and struggling with adjusting to school practices and expectations (Brown, 2015).

Krahn & Taylor (2005) concluded in their study that visible-minority immigrant students have higher educational aspirations than Canadian-born non-visible minority students. However, several other studies have reported otherwise. For instance, Roessingh (2001) revealed that youth with English as a second language have persistently experienced higher dropout rates. Also, Ngo et al. (2017) noted that those who have been exposed to pre-migration trauma and interpersonal conflicts at home, at school, or in the community, are vulnerable to gang recruitment. Yet, immigrant and ethnocultural learners often do not receive adequate, specialized services to support their unique needs and are also faced with other forms of marginalization in schools caused by racism.

Our past initiatives identified racial discrimination as an additional challenge that racialized youth have faced while in school (Coalition for Equal Access to Education, 2014 and 2009). A participant in our 2011 research on the Educational Experiences of English as a Second Language Learners (Coalition for Equal Access to Education, 2011) shared this specific instance:

She [my teacher] was racist. I don't waste my time with it, and especially because she is an educated adult and should have known better. This one time we got into an argument over marking because she marked me unfairly. I went to talk to her about it but even though she noticed it was marked wrong, she still told me she had no time and ask me to come back later. And this was after class as well. When I went to her the next day with the same problem, she looked at it again, and said being dumb has nothing to do with marking hard. After that, I didn't say anything. So I left, however, every time I wrote a test the same teacher would

mark me differently from the rest of the class. I spoke to the principal, and he said he would resolve it, but after that nothing worked out between me and the teacher in class. Another time we got into an argument again and she said some racial remarks, saying "you should be proud, you were brought from the jungle to learn the language of the people" or something like that. I wish I recorded that because when I would talk to the principal there wasn't ever any proof.

In our 2014 study, participants of African descent shared their experiences of being discriminated against and feeling unwelcome in school. One participant shared this story:

I think most of the time I worked so hard because I don't wanna be that Black kid who dropped out. I graduated because I don't wanna be the Black kid that never made it. It's kind of, you're trying to beat stereotypes continuously and I think it just gets tiring.

The same study showed how many young people recalled their early educational experiences as being "the only Black kid," or "Chinese kid," or "Asian kid," in their school. Accounts of discrimination were especially salient for youth from African backgrounds and/or those who wore headscarves. These youth also identified a double standard applied to them. For example:

My parents always say because we are immigrants we need to work twice as hard as the people who are born here to like achieve the same thing.

Contemporary media also covered incidents of interpersonal racism in Canadian schools. For instance, a CBC November 6, 2013 broadcast reported an incident of a Central Alberta school trustee who was accused of sending racist tweets. In a 2016 article in the Toronto Star, Noor Javed and Kristin Rushowy reported incidents that included teachers warning students to check their bags after a Black student went into a change room alone. The report also revealed how elementary students use the N-word to address their peers and young teens committing racially motivated verbal and physical violence against a classmate (Toronto Star, 2016). Global News also reported hateful graffiti on a Calgary school calling for violence against Syrians and mosques (Global News, 2016). In 2019, a devastating case of suicide, which was attributed to racial bullying in school, was also in the news where it was reported that "tireless bullying drove 9-year-old Syrian refugee to suicide in a Calgary School," (CTV, 2019).

Participants in our 2018 Youth Leadership Program also shared their direct and indirect experiences in racism in their schools and how these incidents have affected their motivation and access to opportunities in their educational journey. In the book *Racism and Anti-Racism in Canada*, Ngo (2018) noted that although a recent review of the

existing policies and regulations among the major public school boards in Canada show that most have addressed human rights, diversity, multiculturalism and discrimination, only four (Vancouver School Board, Toronto School District Board, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board and Montreal School Board) have incorporated the principles of anti-racist education in their policy documents and acknowledged the various levels of racism. Other school boards have reinforced multicultural education, which encourages respect for diverse cultural norms, values and traditions, but does not adequately deal with biased attitudes and discriminatory behaviours and the individual and racial inequities at the structural level.

Past research and contemporary personal accounts show that there are still significant issues in our school system and therefore an immediate need to identify the policies and practices that marginalize racialized youth and then work to institute systemic changes to develop a school environment that is not only more diverse and inclusive but also anti-racist and provides equal access to quality education for immigrant and racialized youth. The issue is significant on both a local, provincial and national level as it is fundamental to their success as Canadian citizens. These issues initiated the need to carry out this project in recognition of the government's increased focus on addressing racism and its adverse impacts on all aspects of society. We are relying on government commitment to supporting solutions that will be developed in this project to sustainably address the systemic causes and consequences of racism, particularly in the very institutions that shape the hearts.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

- To engage racialized youths and parents to understand how they experience racism within Calgary school system;
- To understand the impact of interpersonal and institutional racism on the lives of racialized students and their parents; and
- To develop a set of recommended strategies from the perspectives of racialized students, their parents, and school workers, to address racism in schools and facilitate changes within the school system.

1.4 Research Questions

This project addressed the following research questions:

- In what ways does racism manifest in the lives of racialized youth and their parents within the school system?
- How have experiences of racism in schools impacted the lives of racialized youth and their parents?
- What strategies are recommended by racialized youth, their parents, and school workers to address racism in schools and to effect institutional and policy change?

Section Two: Theoretical Underpinning

2.1 Anti-Racism Education Framework

This research is grounded in the Anti-racism Education Framework. The Framework originated from Great Britain and evolved into the Canadian landscape around the 1980s (Henry and Tator, 2010; Dei, 1996). The Anti-racism Education Framework emerged as a critique of the traditional multicultural education which focused mainly on intergroup harmony, the celebration of diversity, cultural heritage and pride (Darren and Paul, 2008). However, Anti-racism Education identifies the social and political significance of race and readily acknowledges and interrogates the existence of inequitable power relations in complex interactions at both the interpersonal and institutional levels. (Ngo, 2018).

Anti-racism Education aims to address the issues of systemic discrimination, change institutional structures, validate the lived experiences of an increasingly diverse student body, and provide a curriculum that is attentive to achieving high academic standards for all learners (Lund and Carr, 2008; Carr and Klassen, 1997). The Anti-racism Education approach also provides the knowledge, skills and strategies for educators to critically understand racism and its origin in order to recognize and challenge it (Centre for Race and Culture, 2004). Using the anti-racist framework, Hebert (2017) explored the intersectionalities and systemic oppression of Black youth in Toronto. The study examined how the spatiality of race and class influences the education curriculum offered to youth in high priority neighbourhoods in Toronto. The study also discovered that the effect of racialized streaming and negative perceptions of Black Youth resulted in further marginalization, as exemplified by the 40% dropout rate and a continued cycle of poverty amongst these youths (Herbert, 2017).

Based on the premise of the Anti-racism Education Framework, the current study examined how racism manifests in schools and what its impact is on racialized youth and parents in Calgary.

2.2 Definitions of Terms in Anti-racism Education

In this section, we clarify the key terms used in anti-racism education. This is essential to remove any form of ambiguity that may be connected with their usage. This will also enhance effective communication with our readers of the exact meaning of terms used in this report. These definitions were drawn from scholarly literature, experts' publications and many other relevant documents.

Race: Race is a social construct and does not exist in any scientific sphere. It is a concept of dominance that distinguishes people based on certain characteristics such as skin colour, ancestry, cultural affiliation, etc. (DiAngelo, 2012; Wijeyesinghe et al. 1997).

Racism: This has to do with the belief that a specific race is superior to others and is often reflected in the way people from relatively lower social power racial groups are subordinated by the racial group of people with more power. Racism encompasses a web of hierarchy in economic, political, social, and cultural structures, and in the beliefs that systemize and enable an unequal distribution of privilege, resources, and power in favour of the dominant racial group at the expense of all other racial groups (Grosfoguel, 2012; Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997).

Anti-racism: This a process of recognizing the existence of racism and taking active steps to eliminate it by effecting necessary changes in organizational structures, policies and systems (Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre, 2020).

Interpersonal Racism: This is a form of racism that exists between individuals. It refers to the directly perceived discriminatory interactions between individuals, whether in their institutional roles, such as between a school administrator and a student, or as public or private individuals, for example, between students themselves (Karlsen and Nazroo, 2014; Krieger, 1999).

Systemic Racism: This includes policies, practices and procedures that have indirect and direct racism negative impact and disadvantage on ethno-racial minority learners (Henry and Tator, 2010). Systemic racism restricts access to services and opportunities based on race.

Internalized Racism: This is the form of racism that exists within individuals. It is defined as "acceptance by members of the stigmatized races of negative messages about their abilities and intrinsic worth; It manifests as an embracing of 'whiteness,' self-devaluation, resignation, helplessness and hopelessness" (Jones, 2000).

Anti-Black Racism: "Anti-Black racism refers to a virulent form of racism that is directed against Black people and their resistance to such oppressions" (Benjamin, 2003). It entails prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is

directed at people of African descent who now live in white-dominated societies. It is deeply rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and colonization.

Racialized Group: In recognition that race is a social construct, the Ontario Human Rights Commission suggests that when it is necessary to describe people collectively, the term “racialized person” or “racialized group” is preferred over “racial minority,” “visible minority,” “person of colour,” or “non-White,” as it expresses race as a social construct rather than as a description based on perceived biological traits. The commission clarifies that these other terms treat “White” as the norm to which racialized persons are to be compared and have a tendency to group all racialized persons in one category as if they are all the same (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2020).

Ethnic Group: Generally, ethnic group refers to a community-type group of people who share a common heritage, ancestry and culture (Green, 2005; Isajiw, 1993).

Discrimination: This involves harmful actions toward others because of their ethnicity, nationality, language ability and accent, or immigration status and can take place at both individual and institutional level (Brown, 2015).

Stereotypes: These are set of generalized attitudes, assumptions and beliefs that are based on false information about a group of people based on certain characteristics such as race/skin colour, gender, ethnicity, etc. (Brandt and Reyna, 2010; Paul, 1998).

Microaggression: This is defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al. 2007).

Curriculum: This is the composition of the entire school environment and includes such aspects of school life such as interactions among students, staff, and the community, and the values, attitudes, and behaviours conveyed by the school. The curriculum also includes books, classroom seating arrangement, teaching plans, group work, assignments and projects, languages spoken in the school, racial composition of the school staff, composition of school teams, types of sports played, extra-curricular activities to mention a few (Su, 2012; Egan, 2003; Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993). According to the Alberta Government (2016), “curriculum is designed to enable learning opportunities that are equitable, inclusive and accessible to all Alberta students.”

Section Three: Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study incorporated an Anti-racist Education Approach, grounded in principles of community-based research (Jagosh et. al. 2015). Community-based research is a methodological practice that is guided by the core principles of collaboration and partnership where research brings together the community and researchers to explore and create opportunities for social action and social change (Weiner and McDonald, 2013; Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, 2012; Roche, 2008). Community-based research is marked by the following principles: collaboration, participation, orientation toward change, inclusiveness, empowerment, and capacity-building (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2010; Strand et. al. 2003). Leveraging on these principles, we were able to engage with racialized youths and parents who have lived experiences of racism in order to get crucial information that other research methods might find only by accident. In a community-based methodological approach, people who are deeply affected by issues know intuitively and more directly what is important when they see or hear it in the course of research. These advantages provided us with a more accurate picture of the issue of racism faced by racialized youth and parents in Calgary.

Given our objectives of seeking a deeper understanding of the experiences and impact of racism in Calgary schools, we also adopted a qualitative research approach because of its appropriateness in providing deep, rich, intricate, detailed and descriptive information. This qualitative research approach is particularly valuable because it can showcase the interactions between individuals and their environment and helps explain intricate social phenomena. It also depicts the experiences, realities, perspectives and imaginings of the research participants such that they can identify themselves in the results (Creswell, 2015; Patton, 2002). In addition, findings from qualitative research have also been found to be increasingly useful in informing policy decisions (Rahman, 2017).

3.2 Community Engagement and Mobilization

Informed by Community-Based Research (CBR) methodology, which promotes the involvement of community members in all aspects of research in the quest to proffer solutions to issues of community concern, we collaborated with community organizations, researchers, individuals and ethnocultural communities. After the research was developed in response to racialized youths' and parents' concerns on the issue of racism, we held a community consultation meeting prior to the project kick-off. This meeting involved community representatives in constructive dialogues and interactions about the issue of racism in schools and how we can effect systemic changes in our school environment. We conducted outreach efforts by collaborating with immigrant-serving agencies, including African communities (including Nigerian, Ghanaian, Eritrean and Sudanese) and Asian community associations (including the Filipino community, Vietnamese Youth Association, and Chinese Community). We also held a community forum that involved more than 20 representatives from community groups, organizations and racialized youth groups. The forum participants were key stakeholders who have expertise and knowledge about racism and anti-racism in education systems, specifically with immigrant and racialized youth and their families. They also helped guide the research, provided support to the recruitment of participants, and gave us valuable input regarding the interview and focus group questions, data analysis, knowledge translation, and dissemination of the study findings.

3.3 Sampling Approach and Recruitment

Based on the need to involve participants with lived experience of racism, the study adopted a criterion sampling technique. Therefore, participants were expected to meet certain criteria to participate in the study. The inclusion criteria for youth were:

- self-identification as a racialized youth with experience(s) of racism in school,
- aged between 14 to 25 years,
- had attended or are currently attending a school in Calgary, and
- currently residing in Calgary.

For parent participants, the criteria were:

- must be parents of a racialized youth with experience(s) of racism in school in Calgary and,
- currently residing in Calgary.

The inclusion criteria for school workers were:

- have had experience working with racialized youth in Calgary schools and,
- be knowledgeable about the experiences and impacts of racism on racialized students in Calgary schools.

3.4 Data Collection

Data collection for this study was obtained through the use of in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. All interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

3.4.1 *In-depth Interviews*

The initial design was to invite youth and parents to participate in either individual interviews or focus groups while school workers were to participate in a focus group. However, as the recruitment process began, we were faced with the COVID-19 global pandemic and consequently had to adjust the process to the most convenient and safe conditions for our target participants. We were able to hold individual interviews for youths, parents and school workers, but could only convene one focus group for the youths.

The individual interviews were semi-structured and took between 45 to 60 minutes. The semi-structured format enabled a flexible interview protocol and enhanced by follow-up questions and probes. This method also allowed the participants the freedom to narrate their experiences and also express their views in their own terms. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews took place at locations convenient to our participants, such as the public library and a university campus. Only one interview took place at our office location. All of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the exception of four, which took place by phone in response to physical distancing measures put in place by the City of Calgary for COVID-19 spread prevention. All the interviews were carried out in the English Language. The emerging insights from the interviews were regularly presented to stakeholders, which informed their advice, conversations and action.

For interviews with the youth, participants were asked about their experiences of racism in schools, the impact that these experiences had on them, and their views on strategies to effectively address racism in schools. For the interviews with parents, participants were asked about their children's experiences of racism, its impact on them

and their children, and strategies to address racism from the perspective of parents. Additionally, parents were asked about their own personal experiences of racism in schools, its impact on them, and strategies to address racism directed towards parents of racialized youth in schools. For the school workers' interviews, we shared with them the themes that had come up in our prior analysis of individual interviews with youths and parents on their experiences of racism in schools. We then asked if those themes resonated with their own experiences. Their answers generated additional insights including suggested strategies to address racism in schools.

3.4.2 Focus Group

The focus group with racialized youth was audio-recorded, consisted of 8 participants, and lasted for about 120 minutes. At this focus group session we reflected on the broader manifestations of interpersonal and systemic racism experienced by racialized youth in schools, as well as the strategies to address racism in terms of practice and policy.

3.4.3 Demographic Questionnaire

To build a picture of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, we used a demographic questionnaire to gather data on country of origin, number of years lived in Calgary, current level of education, languages spoken, type of school board attended, current role as a school worker, and employment status.

Throughout the data collection process, we ensured a high level of ethical procedure, making sure that participation was voluntary and that all participants consented to participate by formally agreeing to and signing the consent forms.

3.5 Data Analysis

We analyzed data using the process of thematic content analysis. This method is known for its strength to describe, simplify, comprehend, analyze and interpret a reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The processes involved in this type of qualitative analysis included transcribing the data verbatim and coding and identifying the themes and categories of information recorded during the data collection process. For this study, themes were centered around discussions on forms of racism experienced and its impact on the participants. The common words and phrases from discussions and interviews under the relevant themes and categories are identified and presented in the

findings here by direct quotations from participants (see Burnard et al. 2008). It should be noted that themes were not predetermined but rather identified throughout the analysis process based on the frequency, repetition and popularity of certain words and phrases.

Throughout this report, there are several direct quotes and narrations (presented in italics) from our research participants that provide a deeper and richer context of the individual stories. This will allow readers to see more clearly the evidence upon which our analysis is based. It should be noted that in the cases where names are assigned to quotations, for reasons of privacy we have used pseudonyms and not the real names of the participants.

3.6 Research Participants

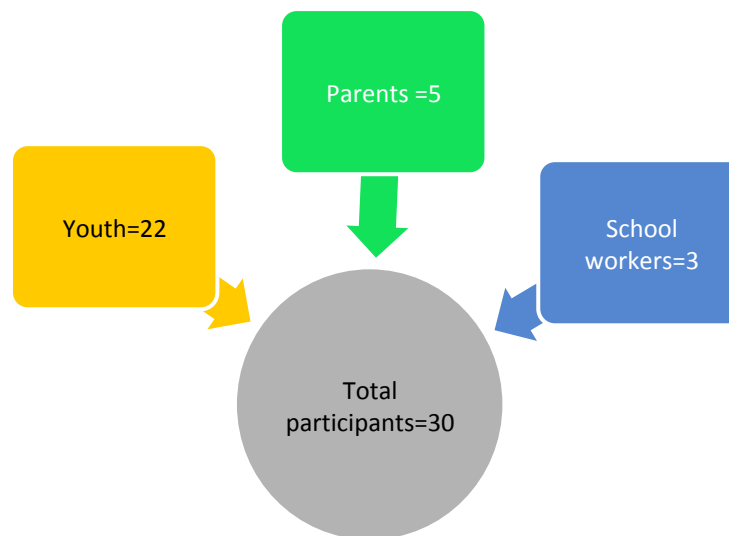


Figure 1: Overview of total research participants

Thirty participants took part in the research: 22 youths, 5 parents and 3 school workers. Tables 1 and 2 provide detailed demographic breakdowns of the youth and parent participation, while Figure 2 shows the racial backgrounds of all participants. Youth and parent participants were all of African and Asian backgrounds with representations from a broad range of originating countries: Bangladesh, Iran, India, Vietnam, South Sudan, North Sudan, Nigeria, Egypt, Jordan, Eritrea, Ghana, Ethiopia and South Africa. This reflects the mix of racialized learners in the school system in Calgary. The majority of the youth participants (17 out of 22) were between the ages of

14 – 20 years. There were more female youth participants than male. Nine out of the 22 youth participants were born in Canada. Fourteen of them identified as being of Black-African origin, three were Vietnamese, two each were Arabs and Bengali while one was Kurdish. The majority of the youths (17) started elementary school in Alberta. Eleven of them attended or are still attending, the public-school board. We observed that youths were quite enthusiastic to participate. It appeared that they saw the project as an avenue to express their burdens and voice their various experiences of racism. This validates one of the advantages of community-based research. On the other hand, we observed that racialized parents were less enthusiastic to participate. They were more concerned with meeting financial and family needs and would rather let their children talk about it. Four out of the five parent participants were females. None of the parents were born in Canada.

3.7 Research Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, the study did not adopt any form of random, systematic or representative sampling. Therefore, it may not be an exact reflection of the range of racism experiences within K-12 schools in Calgary. However, the critical findings and implications in this study still serve as important points for discussions on the issues of racism in schools. Secondly, the interviews were exclusively the personal account of participants' racism experiences and cannot account for biases. Hence, the findings should not be viewed as definite or generalized experiences of racism in Calgary schools.

Total youth participants		Number	%
		22	100
Type of participation	Interviews	14	63.6
	Focus group	8	36.4
Age	14 – 20 years	17	77.3
	21 – 25 years	5	22.7
Gender	Male	5	22.7
	Female	17	77.3
Country of birth	Bangladesh	2	9.1
	Canada	9	41
	Egypt	2	9.1
	Ethiopia	1	4.5
	Jordan	1	4.5
	Nigeria	2	9.1
	Sudan	3	13.6
	United States of America	2	9.1
Ethnicity	Black African	14	64
	Arab	2	9.1
	Bengali	2	9.1
	Kurdish	1	4.5
	Vietnamese	3	13.6
Level of school started in Alberta	Elementary (K – 6)	17	77.3
	Junior High (7 – 9)	2	9.1
	High School (10 – 12)	3	13.6
School board attending/attended	Public	11	50
	Catholic	7	32
	Public and Catholic	3	13.6
	Public and Private	1	4.5
Years lived in Canada	2 – 5 years	3	13.6
	6 – 10 years	1	4.5
	11 – 15 years	6	27.3
	16 – 19 years	3	13.6
	Born in Canada	9	41

Table 1: Overview of Youth Participants

Total parent participants		Number	%
		5	100
Age	44 – 49 years	4	80
	50 – 54 years	1	20
Gender	Male	1	20
	Female	4	80
Country of birth	Ethiopia	1	20
	Kenya	1	20
	Nigeria	2	40
	South Africa	1	20
Ethnicity	Black African	4	80
	South Asian	1	20
School board child(ren) attending/attended	Public	2	40
	Catholic	1	20
	Public and Catholic	1	20
	Public and Private	1	20
Years lived in Canada	10 – 20 years	3	60
	20 years and above	2	40
Occupation status	Full-time employment	2	40
	Self-employed	3	60

Table 2 Overview of Parent Participants

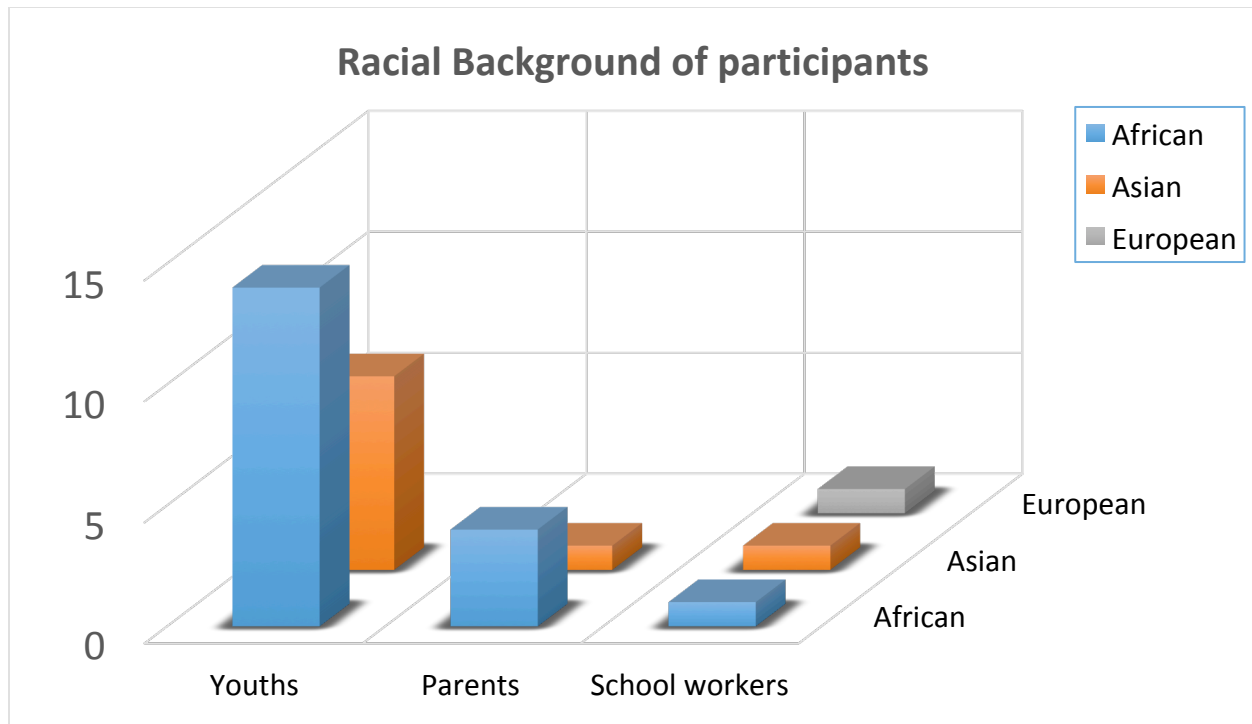


Figure 2: Overview of Racial Background of Total Participants

Section 4: Findings

4.1 Participants' Definitions of Racism

The study elicited personal definitions of racism from participants. Generally, they attributed racism to the ideology of either “inferiority” or “superiority,” based on race, skin colour and ethnicity. Participants incorporated terms such as “negative judgement,” “different treatment,” “discrimination,” and “stereotypes,” in their definitions. Below are examples of their definitions of racism.

Racism is discrimination against other groups of people based on the colour of their skin, their religion and other things like that.

My personal understanding of it is just being treated differently simply because of your race, colour and how you are.

Racism is judging other people because of their racial background.

Racism is attributing and stereotyping specific characteristics towards a race – so, Arabs are seen as terrorists and Black people are seen as burglars, robbers...and Indian people are seen as weird, pedophiles, perverts ... and Asians are seen as super smart, good at math.

Another participant described racism as being in a disadvantaged position.

I would say is being disadvantaged from everyone else based on your race or ethnicity. So, not being able to do everything or start in the same place as everyone else because of the colour of your skin, that's ... my definition of racism.

Often, the languages used to describe racism were intense, as exemplified in these participants' definitions.

Racism originates from Ignorance. It is complete ignorance towards a race. You have no idea what these people are and so you decide to give them characteristics to make it easier for you.

It [racism] is something that is done systematically and needs to be addressed.

One participant described racism in the context of its negative effect:

Racism is something that affects people in a horrible way. It can affect their life in a big way and who they become.

4.2 Manifestation of Racism in Schools



Figure 3: Manifestations of Racism in Calgary schools

4.2.1 Race-based Bullying

Participants frequently reported race-based bullying. The episodes were mostly interpersonal and existed in various forms such as physical attacks, frequent use of the N-word, racial slurs, name-calling (involving references to race and ethnicity), racially driven harassment, and graffiti (such as symbols, pictures, and direct racist comments on walls). Amaya, an Iranian youth participant, narrated her unpalatable experience of race-based bullying in her school. It happened in the time of news reports of a major incident involving an ISIS terrorist group. She related how she was constantly bullied because of where she came from and other students assumed that she was attached to the ISIS terrorist group.

I was at math class doing math work, then some girl comes up to me and she did like a joke – “Are you ISIS”? Then she was laughing and all the other kids came to the table and they started laughing. I was already really emotionally unstable at that point. It really hurt and I couldn’t stop thinking about it when I got home.

Amaya pointed out that the girl seemed to be joking about it, but it was highly unacceptable to Amaya herself. She couldn’t understand why such a significant issue relating to ISIS could be attached to her in the name of a joke. Cases like Amaya’s, where non-racialized students made similar jokes and mockery about things or issues related to their racial background were quite common among the participants’ stories.

Jamila, a youth participant of Eritrean-African descent, told of how she was constantly bullied by non-racialized students and was called names based on her physical appearance as a Black kid.

They would constantly call me names like Gorilla and the ugly hair.

A parent participant also reported that white kids called her daughter “poop” because she is brown-skinned.

My daughter was called a piece of poop because she is brown. She was even exempted from some activities because of her skin colour.

Another parent participant reported how a white teacher bullied her daughter in school. She could not recall the details of the experience but she told that she did not let it slide because she saw it as an abuse of power by the teacher.

My daughter was bullied by a white teacher. She was making some derogatory remarks to my child. I actually stepped in and went to the school and requested for an investigation because that is abuse of power and totally unacceptable. I can’t remember the details anymore but the teacher was suspended for 2 days.

The experience of 14-year-old Jasmine from Bangladesh also could not go unnoticed as her experience of racial bullying was severe to the point that she attempted suicide. At the time of the interview with her, she was still undergoing counselling to help deal with the situation. She decided to participate because she felt it was her opportunity to speak out and help others who are experiencing similar situations. Jasmine's comments reveal the pain she encountered. She was relatively new to Canada at the time; just a few days into resuming school she started experiencing bullying by the non-racialized students in her class. She narrated how they initially referred to her as Indian, called her names, and laughed at her.

When I went into the school, a girl said, are you Indian? I said I am not and then she's like you're lying and then she starts laughing. I told her I'm from Bangladesh. She goes back to tell her friends and they researched some stuff about Bangladesh and they realize there are Muslim people there and they've heard a lot of bad stuff about Muslim people, so they just assume that everyone in that country is terrorist and they are going to kill them. So, everyone starts avoiding me. Every single time the teacher would put us in a group, they would stare at me weirdly and they would be like oh please don't kill us. It was really hurtful because I didn't come to Canada to kill people. Every single time I would try to sit down, they would hit my belly and I had girl problems and especially when they did it at that time it would really hurt bad and I would have to go to the washroom and cry because of the way they treated me. It just felt like I didn't belong there and I can't focus on my studies and my future while I'm going through all that racism stuff. It felt really bad and I just regret it that I was born in Bangladesh.

Jasmine tearfully told us how they constantly beat, punched, pushed, and elbowed her and rolled their eyes at her. She also said that they would gag at her and call her smelly.

When I try to sit beside someone, they would look at me, gag and they will say it's the Bengali girl, effing terrorists and then they would stand up and walk away and it was horrible and I didn't not like that and I told the teachers about it. The teachers would call them out and then everyone goes quiet at that time. They will be quiet in front of the teacher for a couple of days but then bully me behind. I used to cry and they would call me a weak baby that I should go back to my country and never come back here again because nobody wants me here and I believe that and I told my parents that we should go back but they couldn't because my country is not safe.

The majority of our participants also brought our attention to the frequent use of the N-word towards the Black kids. They reported the N-word being tossed around in the

schools and to make it seem less offensive to the Black kids, white students would ask for permission to use it on them.

They would ask you for the N-pass ... that is, seeking your permission to use the N-word. Imagine someone asking for your permission to be rude to you.

Participants said they are now very used to this, to the point that they do not allow themselves to be too bothered anymore, even though they know that it is not appropriate.

4.2.2 Anti-Black Racism

This study found that anti-Black racism in the forms of stereotypes and racial profiling is a major problem that both students and parents face within the school system. As a consequence, this often leads to assumptions and generalizations that have resulted in conflicts and false accusations. A typical example in this study is that of a Nigerian/ African parent “Adebisi,” who was reported by a white teacher to the Child Protective Services (CPS) with the accusation of child maltreatment.

I got an email from my son's teacher that he didn't do his homework. So, I grounded him (like no TV until your homework is done). Apparently, he wasn't too happy about this situation. So, he went to school looking sad and his teacher thought he had a bad home life and called the CPS to come and investigate the incident. The issue was investigated and they saw I was not in anyway maltreating my son but I was told by the CPS not to blame the teacher because people of my culture do things to kids that are not appropriate.

Adebisi narrated how displeased she was with racial profiling of Black parents as people who often maltreated their kids. She explained that she grounded her son to make sure he did his homework and could not imagine how this could be seen as any form of maltreatment. She went on to say that this happened shortly after they had returned from a Disneyland holiday with the children, so she could not fathom how making kids take responsibility for their own bad behaviour to be considered as maltreatment or bad home life.

Dorcas, a 17-year-old youth participant from Sudan, shared her own experience with stereotyping in the school. Her narration shows how Black kids face systemic racism in the school. She reported how they were often targeted, badly labeled, and segregated from other students, based on stereotypical beliefs of Black kids as being bad students.

Black kids became targets for the teachers and the principal because they assume that we are doing bad things and we really weren't, we were all good kids. Every time we are at lunch or doing something or hang out with each other, there would always be a large number of teachers around us making sure we are not causing trouble when we never really did. We realized that on one side of the cafeteria, it was all the Black kids and on the other side were the white kids and there were never any supervisors on the other side, it was only on our side.

Dorcas explained how the situation got worse in her school when a Black girl was involved in an issue in the school and was expelled. She said this incident made the teachers even more aggressive towards the Black kids and punishments were often handed out to them unjustly.

After that happened, the teachers got more aggressive with watching us, making sure that we didn't do anything but it was just one Black girl incident that caused the teachers to target us. At one point, me and my friends were hanging out and the principal and the vice-principal and constable which is a policeman that comes and watches the school came to me and my friends and asked us if we were doing anything wrong. Later that day, they took each of my friends into the office and spoke to them, suspended two for 3 days for doing nothing at all. I felt like us being singled out just as Black girls was extremely disrespectful of the school because we never did anything wrong to anybody, we never hit or fight or yelled or talk back to any teachers and the fact that the school felt the need to pull us aside and speak to us like we did something made it seem like they are just stereotyping us as those aggressive Black girls. I even told my counsellor about this and she was saying that we do have to be careful about what happened to the school and she didn't really care for how I felt directly, she just cared more about the safety of school...That's one of the reasons why I had to leave that school because I didn't feel like I was in a school. I felt like I was just that one Black girl and that's how everyone saw me and I didn't want to be there anymore, so I moved.

4.2.3 Inequitable Punishment

Participants also reported racial disparities in school punishment. Black students reported that they got more unjust punishments in school compared to their white counterparts.

There shouldn't be a disparity when the same thing occurs and one person gets it much worse than the other person. One person gets a slap on the wrist while the other person is just brought down like a shame. I feel like there's got to be that

consistency when it comes to handing out consequences for your actions. (Samuel, 19, Nigerian.)

When it comes to Black people wearing cultural things like headwear and do-rag, the school workers take it as an act of gang violence. They just associate them with criminals. Like Black people walk in the door with like a do-rag or bandana and they say take it off, you cannot wear that but if they see someone of the white race wearing something like that, they say it's okay because of the colour of the skin. It just doesn't make sense. I think something like the headwear just allows stereotypes and prejudice to just continue (Susan, 17, N. Sudan).

Samuel also told us of an incident that happened to him in Grade 8. He reported getting a severe punishment for bringing a butter knife to school while the same offense attracted no punishment when it involved a white student.

I brought a butter knife to school to cut my apple. I didn't have time to go and put it back in my locker and the knife was on my table. I got reported, sent to the principal's office and they made a whole big deal out of it. They called my parents and I was suspended for a week. A couple of weeks later, this other girl (white) brings in same type of knife to cut her apple and they didn't say anything. All they did was tell her to put it back in her locker. They got threatened because I was a pretty big Black kid. But it was just a butter knife, what can you do with a butter knife? It is almost expected of us to do something wrong and get into trouble but then with the white kids, they basically turn a blind eye and find a way to spin the story so it doesn't look as bad. But as soon as it happens to Black kids, they just press on and keep pushing and pushing to make sure it sticks.

4.2.4 Microaggressions

Some of the research participants reported cases of microaggressions commonly in the form of microinsults. Mohamed, a new student from Egypt, experienced a shock in the first week of school in Calgary.

I was in a social class taught that year and this teacher was talking about the Yom Kippur war between Egypt and Israel (Israel was invading Sinai and Egypt was defending Sinai saying this is our land). So, she asked the class that does anyone have an insight on this issue? Then I said I am Egyptian and actually just moved here and in Egypt we refer to it as the 6th of October war because it happened then during the Ramadan. I gave some historical background about what happened from Egyptian perspective and she said your culture isn't welcomed in the class, you can't share this kind of experience because nobody else gets it.

He continued,

I immediately felt very segregated and alarmed because it cut me off from the society and the classroom in general. It was such a shocking statement to hear that your culture doesn't belong in this classroom even though Canada strives itself on bringing in immigrants and refugees and being told that in social class where you are learning about racism, capitalism and all different things [he pause and gesticulates with a look of confusion on his face].

Mohamed maintained he could have just ignored if this happened on the street but felt that:

In an institution that is built on education and striving for improvement and growth and you needed to be told to go back or that you don't belong here is very unsettling, very uncomfortable.

Lekisha, an Indian-Asian parent, told the story of how her daughter was sexually harassed in the school. She reported that she involved the police but the principal would not cooperate and amid such an unpleasant situation, she got a surprising comment from the principal.

At school, they had a reading buddy program where older children teach younger children how to read. She goes to a French immersion catholic school. And then she told me one night, she was like my reading buddy touches me (sexually). She had two different male teaching buddies. I mentioned it to the school and also called the police. The police came to interview me and they were like these boys are under 11 and 12 and they said probably nothing would have happened. And then I went to talk to the school and the principal refused to cooperate with the police and what is funny is the principal's husband is on the police force too. The principal refused to talk to the police. She refused to tell them who the boys were that they should ask my daughter. They police were like they don't want to take her (my daughter) through that trauma... The principal wouldn't release who the boys were (though my daughter told me one was Caucasian and the other like an African). But the principal wouldn't let the police interview these boys. From what my daughter told me, I think it was only the Caucasian boy that was doing it (touching her). She was only in Grade 2, she was confused and stuff. And then when I met with the principal and talked to her about it, she was like no I am not going to tell and I asked why not, she said my daughter should tell them. And I was like the police said this is too traumatic to do to a child ... And as conversation went on, she said you actually speak quite well and were you educated here in Canada? And I was like yes I have always lived here all my life and she was like that's really surprising. And I was just like I don't understand ... And I find it surprising that someone in her position would say something like

that. She was surprised that I could speak well, had an education and was advocating for my daughter. And later she said we have resources you can talk to but at that point I didn't really feel like speaking to that school because she was not there to support my daughter. She is there to protect the school board ... We did take a few therapies and she saw a counsellor. The school did absolutely nothing. My concern wasn't taken seriously because it was an ethnic child against a white boy because my daughter did say that he (the white boy) was the one that touched her and not the other Black boy ... When she started talking about how I spoke well and do I have any education here, at that point I decided that we are moving school because I can't be taken seriously by a principal and we ended up moving school.

It was an emotional moment during the interview, as Lekisha could not hold back her tears as she shared this story. She told us that she couldn't fathom how an important issue could be so trivialized with such an unnecessary remark.

Idayat, a 19-year old female participant of Nigerian origin, also told of her experience in a private school in Calgary Area. Her racism experience had intersectionality of both religion and skin colour factors.

When I started my school, I was the only person that was wearing the hijab. I asked them if there was a specific colour of hijab, they would want me to wear because I didn't assume wearing hijab will be a problem. And the kind of school I went was private school, so there was a whole interview process and it was never mentioned there. In the first week, I started getting strange looks from everybody. And then I got approached by the senior school principal who told me the colour of the headscarf is not appropriate with the school uniform regulation. After that, I sent them an email to ask if there is a specific colour they like me to wear and I never got a response back. The time came for our senior School photos and they put me right in the back of the photo to make sure that I wasn't really seen and then whenever anyone came around to look at the school they will always make sure that I wasn't in the classroom with the other people. I would say that was the biggest issue that I experienced while I was there. That is basically saying that my religion made them super uncomfortable. I felt bad for being a Muslim for the whole time that I was there - a year and half. And I remember then, when my mum will take me school, I just didn't want to go, I was always sad and she would ask me why I was feeling this way? I didn't tell her anything up until she came to the school for the parent-teacher interview and she basically got treated the same way I was treated that everyone kept staring at her, asking her uncomfortable questions like why are you wearing an hijab, can you take it off? She didn't really know what I was going through up until then.

We further asked Idayat her reasons for describing this situation as an issue of racism.

Yeah, I think it is for sure because I and other Black people around me were treated in a similar way. For instance, there was another Black kid there too and whenever we needed to do photos, we would always be the two put at the back all the time. Then I thought it was a little bit strange because there was me and this Black girl always put together at the back of the photos. It was then that I realized that it was more than how I dress. And when I was put out of class because prospects were coming, they also put her out of class. So, there was racism undertone. They didn't want the Black people to be seen at all.

Another Black parent stated how her daughter was badly treated in school by her teacher.

My experience was when she was in grade 3. A girl said to her I can't believe I am sitting with a Black girl in my classroom. So, I went and talked to the principal and they gave her a couple of hours collecting garbage but her teacher said, why did you tell your parents? So, she threatened her that why did she tell us and from that time my daughter start holding back. One other day, she was doing homework and she was struggling and I then went to her and simplified it and then she said, mom I don't want to learn that way and I said why not and she said my teacher said we should not learn it in different way at home, she has restricted us from doing that. It didn't make sense to me; I didn't trust my daughter at that time so after a week or two we had a parent-teacher interview and I went to her teacher that I was trying to help my daughter at home and she said that no and I would like to understand why and she said that well if she learn a different way and understand it then if she comes to class she would be bored and wont have anything to do and she would not be listening to me. So, it didn't make sense to me at that time but I agreed. Then from that point forward, when my daughter sees her teacher, she had fear and she stopped telling me about it because I did not listen to her. Then after few years, she said that she was scolded for telling. She threatened her, pick on her and would put her in front of the room and say okay you think you are smart and be shaming her in the classroom. So, she carried that shame and she is 19 now and anytime we mentioned that lady's name, I can see shrinking till now. She was gonna be part of this (research) but she said she is not ready to talk about it. Somehow, her self-esteem has been affected by shaming her in front of the classroom. She would say to her why is your hair this way.... She was her object to pick on and she was the only Black girl in the class.... From that point forward, she fell back because at home as immigrants we praise teachers, we treat them like gods. Myself and her dad, we could not protect her, we will say listen to your teacher. So, she was not listened to at home, she was not treated

well in school. So, she developed her own strategy to hold back but I can see how much it has affected her and the way she is doing things with her life at the moment.

4.2.5 Incorrect Placement into the English as a Second Language (ESL) program

Racialized students and parents born in Canada reported that students of colour were automatically placed into ESL classes without necessarily assessing them for the need. They claimed that this was done to keep ESL governments' funding. Dorcas, a 17-year old Sudanese origin student, commented on her own experience with ESL placement.

I grew up in Canada and I went to kindergarten here. I learned English and never had any other languages. My teacher placed me in ESL classes and I was stuck there all my junior year because my teacher assumed that I couldn't learn and that I was new to Canada. My teacher asked me where I came from and I said I was born in Egypt and I was only a baby when I came here but they still singled me out and still treated me like I was uneducated.

Yusra, a 14-year-old participant of Nigerian origin who was born in Canada, expressed a similar experience as she shared her story.

I was put in ESL in grade 2 to 3. I was born in Canada and my parents speak English but they thought I couldn't speak and read and they put me in the ESL classes. I found it to be very easy and I didn't understand what's going on. My teachers accused me of cheating like a lot of times because they thought I was doing too good on the test.

A youth participant of Sudanese origin shared a similar sentiment.

I remember when I came here and was placed in ESL. I asked my teacher what was the criteria for putting me in ESL class and she said it's because I have a refugee background. I insisted that I was capable and that they should give me a test. If I fail, you can keep me here then. They gave me the test and I score 99 and I got back into the regular classes. Then a teacher told me that they get funding from the federal and provincial governments every year and so they need to have a turnaround to be able to qualify for the funding. Then I realized that as minorities, we are a sort of revenue stream. So, while everyone else is learning about other things, we are stuck there learning basic ABC. Then by the time you finish junior/high school, you can't compete with other students.

Lilian, a 20-year old of Vietnamese origin explained how the process of ESL placement affected her.

I was isolated and had a hard time. It really didn't help me to be comfortable with my friends and my peers and so I was really shy when it comes to making new friends or talking to people in the classroom. It was really hard because I didn't have that sense of community and being part of the classroom.

Her experience resonated with some other participants, who reported that the way and manner that racialized students were taken out of regular classes and put into the ESL class made them feel isolated, segregated and somewhat deficient compared to other students.

A parent also narrated her child's inappropriate placement into ESL class even when it was obvious that she did not need it.

My daughter was very brilliant. At home, my husband speaks very good English and I am okay too. She was born here and she speaks the language (English) very well but she was put in ESL. I think in grade 3, they sent us a note to sign that she will be taken to ESL class ... I went to school to ask her teacher why does she need to go for ESL because during parents-teachers interview in grade 1 and kindergarten, they all praise her like she is beyond her age (we taught her at home, she had gone to preschool and she was ready if not over ready for her grade). And the teacher said to me that she does know that she doesn't have any issues and doesn't need any support but in order to keep ESL in the school, they need a number. To fill their number, they are taking our kids from classroom to the ESL. That was really hurtful because those kids' self-esteem is at risk. They are being told that you are not enough with those other students; you need extra support when they don't need it. Yeah, I would understand if a new immigrant came from back home or somewhere that they are learning English, yes, they would benefit from it. But those kids that were born here, integrated into the culture, they know that it is already their native language but they are taken to fill the number.

Another parent of South African origin whose family migrated to Canada also recounted her son's experience with what she describes as "not overt" racism in the Calgary public school board. She compared racism in Canada to South Africa where she came from. She said,

Back home, it is obvious when you are not wanted there but it is different here in Canada. They make you believe they are trying to help you and that was the way it was done with my son's ESL placement experience. I was approached one day by the teacher to say that my son needs to be in ESL. [English as a Second Language.] And when I asked the teacher why, she said that he doesn't listen. So I

said what does that mean? She said whenever I give him instruction he doesn't understand. So I said did you do any testing on him to see if this is language barrier here? So I said because we speak only English at home. So what do you mean that he needs to be in ESL and then she said well if you have a problem with this, you need to speak with the principal. So I spoke to the principal that I am not putting my son in ESL. And I told him you know what, the thing you need to remember is that we speak the Queens English, you guys speak the Canadian English, that we don't have the same accent does not mean my child need language skills. Its very different ... And I said I refuse to put him in ESL. If you guys haven't done the necessary assessment on my son to say that he needs to go into ESL, then I refuse. If you don't have any basis besides what you are observing but assuming that it is the fact that he doesn't understand English and you draw the conclusion, I don't understand how you come to that conclusion. I made the teacher to know that a listening issue is different from a language issue. And so I challenged the principal and so my son was not put in ESL.

4.2.6 Lack of Racial Diversity in School Staff and Councils

Racialized students and parents reported that they do not see themselves being represented effectively in the teaching and administrative staff of the schools, nor by the school councils. Participants reported seeing very few teachers of racialized groups during their years of schooling. For example, Samuel asserted,

All through my year of school here, I had only one racialized teacher. He was there for a year and just gone.

Racialized students and parents both stressed that diversity in school staff can contribute to having a better school experience for the students. In discussing this issue, Samuel remarked,

*Of course, you have someone that you can relate to. For instance, the Black teacher that I had, he was from Trinidad, he had the accent, he was a cool dude. We talked a lot, we related, he also coached the basketball team so I **really** had fun that year. Next year he was gone, I don't know what happened but I feel like if they brought in more people that kids can relate to in terms of skin colour or background then the whole problem of racism in the school system will decrease by a lot.*

A parent participant emphasized the effect of the lack of diversity in teaching staff during her children's school years. She also told us of her observation in the racial

representation of parents' teachers' association and school council of her children's school.

In the school council, you will see the barrier there and the disconnect ... Even on the parents' teachers' association, there is more representation of white people than people of color.

Our children don't have role models. They don't have brown teachers. Like my son, the first time he had a brown teacher was when he was in high school. My daughter, I don't think she ever had a brown teacher. Both of my children never had a Black teacher. So there is no role model for our children. How do they feel a connection when their teachers are all white?

Lilian, a youth of Vietnamese-Asian origin and who experienced racism in her elementary school, felt that this lack of diversity in the school system affected the way the issues of racism were responded to.

I guess the teachers were not equipped and didn't have much training or knowledge about how a typical immigrant or racialized youth experience racism in the Canadian school system. Things got better in Junior high because there were more diverse teachers.

4.2.7 Eurocentric Curriculum

Our research participants expressed their concerns and the desire to have a truly inclusive curriculum that is representative of the diversity that exists in the classrooms. This is exemplified in one of the youth participants' statements:

In social class, they share the history only from the western perspective for histories that are even related to us. I was not even allowed to correct the misinformation in a particular class.

Another participant also has expressed dissatisfaction,

In social studies, we just learnt about all these white people. I think we tried doing one mini topic about racism and the whole slave trade in February for Black history month but it was done only in a week. I feel the curriculum for social studies needs to start incorporating more diverse people. All we have learnt is the Nazi, Germany, Castro who are prime ministers, and that's all good because we live in Canada, so we obviously need to know some of its history but if you have kids that are from different countries, you want to still be able to engage them.

Participants also deemed some kinds of literature not fit for use in a diversified classroom. For instance, reference was made to one of the literature books, *To Kill a*

Mockingbird. They criticized the numerous repetitions of the N-word in this book and how it endorses the use of such derogatory words in the classroom. In describing some of these books, a participant said,

They need to get away from the literature that dehumanizes people.

However, even if these books will be retained, another participant emphasized that:

There should be a way this kind of subject is taught. Students should know that they are histories, bad histories ... there should be disclaimers before they are taught so that it doesn't reinvigorate the horrors of the past.

Adebisi, a parent participant narrated an experience about a book titled "The Underground Railroad" that was read in her son's class.

In the English Language class, they were reading this book [Underground Railroad] and they didn't mention to the parents they were going to read such a sensitive book. So, what happened was that my son came home and he was miserable. I talked to him and he told me about the book and how they were talking about Black people being slaves and getting on the underground to be shipped to Canada. And then somebody in his class remembered that he came from the US to Canada and then said, did you come underground to Canada? I contacted the ELA teacher and requested a copy of the book. After reading, I sat with my son to let him know this is part of history and it was has nothing to do with him in order to make him feel safe and comfortable and to let him know he was not going to be in shackles tomorrow because it was more of a psychological effect that the book had on him. I sent an email to the teacher to let her know this book touches sensitive issues and I feel that if you are reading something this sensitive to a bunch of young under 10-year old kids, you should let the parents know so they can be prepared for the questions. I am happy the teacher took it well and couple of weeks from then, they started emphasizing to the kids that it is a book on history and the next time they were going to read on holocaust, she sent an email to all parents to notify us.

4.2.8 Teachers' Low Expectations

A number of participants told us that they experienced biases from teachers in such a way that they are pre-judged with low expectations in their academic journey because of their racial background. One of the youth participants in the focus group session recalled an experience in high school:

We did English Test (Dash 1) and I had the highest score and my teacher told the other non-Black kids – you let her beat you guys.

This participant looked worried and asked a rhetorical question in the focus group:

How can we succeed in an environment that has already determined our destiny?

Other participants also narrated similar experiences where teachers told them they can't succeed because immigrant students do not do well in school. However, these participants have been able to defy these odds and are excelling in their endeavours.

I remember first week in school here and a counsellor told me I might not be able to finish high school because a lot of immigrant kids don't succeed. I went home sad and told my cousin who has been in Canada before me and she was like I shouldn't worry that they were also told the same when they newly came.

My daughter experienced a lot of discrimination. She was told by one of her teachers you will never be able to go to the university, you will never be able to succeed ... Well, my daughter is doing her master's degree now.

4.2.9 Downplaying Acts of Racism within the School System

Participants reported that incidences of racism in the school are often dismissed or not taken seriously.

I was on the basketball team and got in one game where I stopped the opponent from getting the ball so many times. Then on our Instagram page, a girl posted that whoever that monkey number 28 is, she needs to stop playing basketball right now and go to jail. So, I went to my principal and I showed him this comment and he said you are taking it too deeply. He said I know this is bad but why can't you just get it off (Yusra, 14, Nigerian).

In grade 6, there was this girl who was singing a song and had the N-word in it. I was really offended and I was the only Black person there. So, I went to go tell my teacher and my teacher told me that it wasn't that serious. I felt alone that no one would help me out and then if something were to happen to me again, no one would care because everyone said it was just a song and it doesn't really matter but to me it does matter and it's insensitive (Dorcas, 17, South Sudan).

Youth who have experienced racism in the school expressed some lack of trust with school staff. They reported that in most cases after they had reported acts of racism, the situation actually became worse. This led to issues going unreported as they were always scared of the possibility of backlash.

I never trusted the teachers to complain because they make things too hard for me eventually.

The teachers didn't really help me actually. It did help in front of them for a couple of seconds but they did not make me feel safe. It's like every single time I told them, I knew things were going to get worse. I felt scared of telling the teachers and then I didn't even tell the teachers anymore that time.

In the opinion of a school worker who participated in this study,

The school system does not really have a comprehensive way to address racism.

This statement might be the underlying cause of why participants reported that incidences of racism in the school are not being taken seriously.

4.2.10 Inadequate Support within the School System

The accounts of our participants showed that racialized students and parents often do not receive adequate support within the school system after incidents of racism. One of our participants whose experiences of racism in school had an impact on her mental state told us that she didn't get the needed support from the school especially when she had to miss school for a couple of appointments at the Children's hospital.

They say if I miss a couple of days, they're going to ... give me fee [ed. i.e. a monetary fine]. It was my attendance that was more important than my life and my mental health and how I was feeling at school (Jasmine, Bangladesh, 14).

I missed a lot of school at some point and obviously they knew something was wrong but they didn't follow up with me (Idayat, 19, Nigerian).

A participant who experienced racism within the Catholic school board stated that incidents of racism were not addressed, especially when it involved students with affluent parents. Here, teachers will rather want to keep their job (as some parents are influential enough to make them lose their jobs) rather than addressing reported cases of racism.

That time when I was going through racism, there wasn't any school counsellor.... I will tell you all the students work by themselves to get out of this situation. The teachers never helped us because they were too scared of the parent- they're very rich and they have a real lot of power.

However, one of our participants reported a one-time exception. She stated that a reported incident was addressed and it was the first time she got support from the school.

In Grade 9, me and my cousin were the only Black people in the class and there was an incident where this boy drew a drawing in class of a Black person burning

on a cross and on the picture, there is a comment saying it smells like chicken. My cousin and I found the picture and we were extremely mad. So, we took the photo to the principal because we knew that the teachers wouldn't do anything about it ... The principal was the only person that we can really trust not even the counsellors would help out. So, we told the principal and he called the boy to his room and the next day he didn't show up in school and we found out that he was expelled because he also disrespected the principal when he tried talking to him about it. He wouldn't really apologize and he didn't feel any remorse for what he did. So, when he got kicked out, the principal called everybody in Junior high and we all had an assembly about racism. The principal told everyone that I don't tolerate that kind of behaviour in the school. That was the only time that we actually got help for direct racism from a school figure and that was the only time that we actually felt like we were getting help and being supported by someone because it never really happened again (Dorcas, 17, S. Sudan).

Participants reported that they drew strength instead from the support of their families and friends. This often helped them to learn how to accept their own culture while adapting to life in the Canadian culture.

I really had the most support for my family. Everyone really knew how to talk me into loving myself and I realize that when you're at your lowest, you learn the best lessons that you could ever know.

In Grade 9, my cousin came to my school so I felt a lot more powerful with her on my side so if anyone were to be rude to me directly I would feel confident enough to tell them off.

I didn't tell anyone. I just talked to my mom about it and she tried to reassure me and said she'd go to the school. Eventually, my mum did not report it and I didn't too.

However, some participants stated that when they do not get support at school, they try also not to bother their parents who are struggling to cope with their household financial burdens.

I talk to my friends. We would just rant to each other about annoying things that happened. When I cried those times, they were really helpful and encouraged me ... So, that was just basically where the support came from.

I would tell my mum but she just didn't feel it was that big of an issue. She just was very focused on getting into University and getting a job.

A youth participant reported that they were sometimes made to accept the notion that racism is an individual issue rather than a systemic issue.

My friends and I have gone to the principal together at some point to complain about people or about teachers and what they're doing in class. The response is always oh you're taking it too deeply, just treat it as a joke, you have to knock it off.

4.3 The Impacts of Racism

The psychological, emotional, social and mental impacts of racism on the lives of racialized youth and parents are daunting. They manifest specifically in the forms of emotional toll, self-denial, suicidal attempts, anger, insecurity, low self-esteem, questioned identity, frustration, inferiority complex, poor academic performance and social dysfunction.

From an emotional perspective, participants described how the impact of racism affected their lives significantly. Jasmine's experience of race-based bullying put her in a state of depression such that she attempted suicide.

I was at a point where I didn't want to live just because I was born in a different country. It was very bad. They did put me into a depression hole. A hole that was almost impossible to get out of. I was like at the end where a couple of times I gave up but I got rushed to the hospital and I got help. I'm still coming out of there, becoming stronger and stronger but their words just didn't make me feel I should accept myself for who I am. I hated my culture and the way I look like. I hated my country's people because they are the reasons why I'm being treated like that. My country's friends, I stopped talking to them and I just wanted to become Canadian. I felt like maybe I could hide my culture but no I will always have the same skin. I will always have the same nationality and culture ... I don't want anyone in that situation because not everyone gets out of it.

Participants often described themselves as having low self-esteem and a lack of social confidence while they experienced racism in school. Cases of having a sense of exclusion were also reported. Some of the participants were still dealing with these impacts at the time we conducted this research.

It really did impact my self-esteem when people were discriminating me based on my colour because then I wanted to be lighter and wanted coloured eyes. I thought that is the standard of beauty (Salma, 25, Bangladesh).

The way I was taken out of class for ESL affected my social confidence (Lilian, 20, Vietnam).

I felt like I had to watch out and I couldn't really trust people (Jamila, 18, Eritrean).

When I didn't know English, it was bad because I just didn't have friends and so I couldn't socialize. So not until I learned the language that I could actually start making friends (Jasmine, 14, Bangladesh).

Youth participants described how their experiences of racism affected their childhood and adolescence and how they perceived themselves as Africans and Asians. They had insecurities about their self-identity and tried to create new standards to measure up with their Caucasian peers.

I had insecurities about myself like being Black and African. I wanted to be like them up until like 11 when I started making more friends of my culture.

I think that there's a standard of beauty that's out there that's closer to like white Standards. I wanted to be lighter and wanted a coloured eye.

There were instances that participants felt the only option out of experiencing constant racism in the school was to withdraw from school activities. This is exemplified in Yusra's experience:

After being called a Monkey in the basketball game, I was just like what is the point in even doing school sports anymore. For my school you get an award for doing 5 Sports in one year and last year ... I'm going to get the plaque, I'm going to get the trophy, I'm going to bring it home and it's going to be really cool. And then after the incident [being called a Monkey], I was like there's really no point for me to be like on a sports team. I just didn't feel like participating anymore (Yusra, 14, Nigerian).

Participants' feelings of being seen as "different" and "excluded" also brought up the emotions of anger, frustration and confusion.

It makes me really frustrated. When it happens in school I can't focus on my work. My work isn't going to be as good as I know it can be. If I go home knowing that this just happened, I spend days or hours just thinking about what happened and why it happened. And even if there is no rational answer to what has happened previously ... and that just makes me angrier. So, I get angrier and angrier and angrier and to the point that like I just don't feel like going to school anymore because you know it's going to happen, so what's the point. I feel like I'm excluded from my own friends and I'm also excluded from the people at my school because of the way I was brought up and like I'm too Black for the white people. So, where do I fit? I feel I don't know where I fit. It's confusing. I don't know what else to say.

Participants also reported the psychological and mental impact that the experiences of racism had on them.

It was majorly psychological because it made me weak ... I've taken every step and precaution to make sure that I'm conscious and aware of the problems that exists around me and how I as a Arab male, a first-generation Arab immigrant, I am under attack, I am under danger and so is everybody that is a person of colour but especially first-generation immigrants, we are targeted.

I started being aware about mental health because its something that I have never experienced before. I was just so unhappy all the time. Going to school has never been an issue for me, but then I just don't want to go to school and there was like some days I would just not go and I would just say I was sick.

My daughter was devastated by her teacher and did not want to go school. You know, it's devastating for a teacher to make disparaging statement to a child – to bully a child literally.

Some participants also got a point where they began to internalize racism. They accepted that it is a societal norm and something that is really not going to change. A parent participant gave an example of his son's situation; he experienced a lot of discrimination in the school as a newcomer to Calgary. His son is now in university and has resorted to the belief that racism will always be a part of the Canadian system.

There was a day we were talking about this issue of racism and he [the son] has come to terms with the fact because of the difference in colour and all these things, this environment will always behave that way. He has kind of built a skin towards it so it doesn't bother him anymore. That is how I will say it has affected him.

A parent participant stated that the impact of the racism on his son in school would have had a devastating impact on him if not for the role of their religious association. The church played a role in helping his son to have a sense of belonging in the Canadian system, even after being constantly discriminated against in school when they newly migrated to Calgary.

Being a Christian, we go to church and the church we go was predominantly Nigerians that are going to that church. So with that, it didn't have a very significant impact because there are alternatives. He (son) now realize that your people will still be your people.

A youth participant of Asian origin described how the constant remarks about how brown people smell made her very conscious of social gatherings.

I think a lot of it has to do with this how we cook and a lot of the spices go actually into your pores and your hair so it's like really hard to get out. I did tell my parents please change your food like I don't want to eat this. When they cook in the house, I get quite upset. Even till now like when my parents cook and I'm

going to a special event, I get a little frustrated as the smell goes on my skin and I'm always apologizing and being sorry you know like my parents cooked today so that's why I smell like this. And I do a lot of like spraying perfume before I leave the house or just trying to mask the smell or like hiding our clothes somewhere else away so that when my parents do cook that smell doesn't transfer yeah.

Despite the daunting impacts of racism, some of the youth participants devised some constructive ways to deal with it. They also developed strategies to educate others and be more tolerant of other cultures, including the dominant culture.

So when I was in high school, I got involved with Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth and another one with the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society to support immigrant youth. I made sure I volunteered right away because I didn't want those newcomers to experience the same things that I experienced. So I wanted them to have like somebody that they can talk to you and have a friend. So that's what pushed me to get involved to make spaces more inclusive and welcoming.

A parent participant also described the how her daughter's racism experience affected her

"I feel bad that I couldn't stand up for my daughter when she was experiencing racism in school. If only I knew what I now know, I would have stood up for her."

Section Five: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Discussion

Race-based bullying is a major issue of concern for racialized students due to its serious impact on them and their learning experience. The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) has adopted the Alberta Education Act (2012) definition of bullying as “repeated and hostile or demeaning behaviour by an individual in the school community where the behaviour is intended to cause harm, fear or distress to one or more other individuals in the school community, including psychological harm or harm to an individual’s reputation.” Within a typical school setting, this definition may seem to be broad and ambiguous. As revealed by the participants, bullying also manifest in racist forms and if not more clearly defined, it may continuously go unnoticed. For instance, a recent review by the Calgary Board of Education (2019) on practices and policies addressing bullying reported that “Bullying is rare in Calgary schools.” This is contrary to the findings of our study. We noted that the CBE obtained their information on bullying only from employees of the board (i.e. teachers, school principals, learning specialists and representatives in communications, policy, psychology and law). They did not involve students who are targets of the bullying. The school workers who participated in our study acknowledged that bullying does exist in Calgary schools and is not rare. What we also found in this study is that most bullying cases go unreported by the students based on reasons that included previously reported cases being discarded, and students suffering a backlash from both teachers and fellow students. Racial bullying is an issue that the school board needs to pay attention to and we should not hurriedly forget the case of the 9-year-old Syrian refugee girl, Amal Alshteivi who died by suicide in Calgary in March 2019. Several news channels reported that her parents claimed that this was as a result of several months of bullying. Also, as stressed in a report by the Centre for Race and Culture (2013), bullying in whatever form should not be taken lightly if we want to create safe schools and we

need to be able to recognize when bullying is race-based because if racism continues to be an “undiscussable issue,” anti-bullying initiatives will not be effective.

Our study has also found that anti-Black racism in forms of stereotyping and racial profiling is a major problem that both racialized students and parents face within the school system. This form of discrimination often leads to assumptions and generalizations that have resulted in conflicts and false accusations. The results of this study are also consistent with other studies on Black students’ schooling experiences. For instance, in the Peel District School Board anti-racism review report in Ontario, a staff member expressed that: “you don’t need data; you just need to see who is being sent to the principal’s office,” (Peel District School Board, 2020). Also, James (2012) argued that, “Black young men are among the most at risk students because of their over-representation in special education classes, disengagement from the educational process, poor academic performance, and high rates of absenteeism, suspensions, expulsions, and dropout due to school pedagogical and disciplinary policies and practices.”

There is presently a global wave that seeks to end anti-Black racism, especially in response to George Floyd’s murder in the United States by a white police officer. The Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau has also acknowledged the existence of anti-Black and systemic racism in all institutions in Canada (CBC News, 2020). Therefore, the revelation that anti-black racism exists in the Calgary school system based on our participants’ accounts, buttresses the Prime Minister’s assertion. Recently, the Peel District school board, after a review on Anti-Black racism issued a formal apology for “harms done to its community, and in particular, to its Black community.” (Peel District School Board, 2020). The board recognized “that systemic racism exists and apologizes for actions and decisions that have negatively impacted student learning and well-being, as well as staff wellness.”

While the English as a Second Language program has been designed to help those immigrant students who do not speak the language very well to learn it in school, most of our participants, despite being born in Canada, reported being automatically assumed to have English language deficiency and were placed in the ESL classes without proper assessment of their real need. It is important to bring this to the attention of relevant stakeholders for a constructive review of the current placement process.

The lack of diversity in school staff is also a major area of concern that needs attention. In one of our earlier studies, we found out that 65.5% of parent respondents in four School Districts across Alberta felt that there was a lack of cultural diversity in

their schools' teaching staff (Coalition for Equal Access to Education, 2009). This lack of racial representation has resulted in racialized students' and parents' inability to see themselves reflected in the school culture. Research has established that minority students who can look to their minority teachers as "symbols of success" perform significantly better academically (Centre for Race and Culture, 2004). In order to respond effectively to racism, the workforce in a school district should also reflect diversity (Centre for Race and Culture, 2013).

Participants also reported the problem of teachers' low expectations. However, it is important to note that the role that teachers play in the lives of students as well as their beliefs and expectations in their students' academic skills, is an important factor for students' educational achievements.

The curriculum is an important area in the school system because it encompasses all aspects of learning experiences. However, as reported by our participants, the Eurocentric orientation in the school curriculum in an increasingly diversified and multicultural society is a subject of concern. The nature and content of this type of curriculum gives attention and references to the experiences, values, attainments and viewpoints of the white- European culture and excludes those of the other non-dominant groups. Whether intentional or not, the Eurocentric curriculum is perceived to be discriminatory and biased, affecting overall students' values, attitudes, and behaviours. For example, our youth participants questioned why Shakespeare is the only distinguished author in the high school curriculum. They feel discussions around colonialism, culture, feminism and other related topics could also be presented through the beautiful works of several postcolonial authors, such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Camara Laye, Ama Ata Aidoo, Chimamanda Adichie, Mulk Raj Anand, and Kamala Das, to mention just a few.

The youth participants also shared concern around the way the histories of minority groups are told in the classroom. For instance, they told us that the histories of slavery in Africa are told from the perspectives of Westerners, thus promoting a single-sided story in the classroom. In a famous TED talk in 2009, the popular Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Adichie, talks about "The danger of a single story."

If I had not grown up in Nigeria and all I knew about Africa was from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscape, beautiful animals and incomprehensible people fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind white foreigner ... This single story of Africa ultimately comes from I think western literature ... The single story creates stereotypes and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue but that they are incomplete. They make one story

become the only story ... The consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar ... When we reject the single-story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.

Our findings on Eurocentric curriculum also corroborate other studies. For example, a study by Dei as far back as 1996 that examined the role of Afrocentricity in the inclusive curriculum in Canadian Schools recommends “a non-hegemonic Afrocentric education (curriculum and pedagogy) as one means to address the educational needs of specifically (but not exclusively) Black/African-Canadian students” (Dei 1996). Xasan (2017) also emphasized that “in order to transform the classroom and provide spaces free of racial oppression, teachers and educators must engage in a decolonizing process so that they can authentically de-construct and decolonize a neo-liberal curriculum.” Fiddler (2015) highlighted that “it is problematic when Eurocentric educational systems across Canada use textbooks that do not recognize the contribution of other groups of people.” A recent study by the Canadian Cultural Mosaic Foundation (2019) also identified Eurocentric curriculum as a major systemic-level challenge to teaching multiculturalism in schools. That study further revealed that while curriculum changes are occurring to support/infuse the Indigenous community, they do not address other multicultural identities and diverse cultures. From the lens of antiracist education, the curriculum should provide a balanced view and perspectives in all aspects of learning. This would enable every student, irrespective of race, ethnicity or cultural background, to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Most importantly, this approach also has the potential of equipping students with adequate knowledge that is needed to live and succeed in a diverse society (Egbo, 2011).

5.2 Conclusion

From our data analysis, we identified a number of specific ways in which racism manifests in Calgary schools. They include raced-based bullying, anti-Black racism, inequitable punishment, microaggressions, incorrect placement in ESL, lack of cultural diversity in school staff and councils, Eurocentric curriculum, teachers’ low expectations, downplaying the acts of racism and inadequate support within the school system.

There are several ways in which racism experiences impact the lives of racialized youths and parents. At the time of research, some participants had overcome these impacts while some were still dealing with them. There were moments of silence and

tears during interviews with some youths and parent participants. Their stories have brought to the forefront some evident systemic issues with regards to practices, policies, programs and procedures that exacerbate racism in the school system. Our educational institutions must pay attention to these issues. This is important to create a safe and enabling environment for immigrant and racialized children to achieve their full potential within the school system.

5.3 Recommendations

A crucial objective of this study is to engage and collaborate with racialized youths and parents to recommend strategies to address racism in schools. The collective voices of racialized parents and youths that have first-hand experience of racism, together with the contributions of the school workers, have provided the following recommendations.

Recommendation #1: Ensure diversity among school staff

Participants emphasized the need for diversity in the school teaching and administrative staff. They echoed that seeing themselves represented in the school system will be empowering for them and also serve as an inspiring symbol of success.

I would love to see more diverse teachers. Just have a bit more diverse teachers would help paint a picture that the people of authority also represent the Mosaic Turtle Island is, so I would like to see that (A youth participant).

Cultural brokers in school are necessary to help new students to Canada pull through the system (A parent participant).

Recommendation #2: Involve school administrators, teachers and students in anti-racist education

Participants highlighted the importance of educating students and school staff on the issues of racism in the school system. They feel that this will go a long way to address racism in the school system. While equitable hiring procedure will play a significant role in addressing racism in schools, teachers' training and professional development on the issues of racism in schools and cultural competence are equally important.

More training for teachers and adopting more intercultural skills and language. This will help minimize assumptions and discriminations and broaden their

perspective and not assuming that just because I belong to this specific racial group and places stereotypical views just because I belong that group (A youth participant).

Usually the teachers just don't get it sometimes. They just don't understand or they're blind to it or they just don't understand what the actual problem is. These teachers need to be educated. The teacher that I had for social class shouldn't be teaching social class if she's talking about me going back to my country or that my culture doesn't belong in the classroom, you shouldn't be teaching (A youth participant).

Educate people because education can be a form of advocacy and if you take that away then a lot of the students will never learn (A parent participant).

More education on racism for students, teachers and principals. They need to learn how to control their bias because some people don't just know. More education on tolerance and focus on diversity that is here (A parent participant).

Recommendation #3: Address biased treatment against Black students

Black participants especially clamoured for equitable treatment within the school system. They emphasized that punishments should not be handed out unjustly.

I recommend the school to treat us equally. I want them to see us as people and not as aggressors. (A youth participant)

The teachers need to learn how to treat us like actual people because they don't. They don't speak to us like the same way they speak to other kids. They don't look at us the way they look at other kids. They think that we are not going to listen, that we don't want to be in the class but we actually do. There are so many smart and passionate Black kids at school, there are so many intelligent people that I know will do well but the teachers are not paying enough attention to them and they're not giving them enough. They are not giving them the power they need to succeed. They are not asking them questions. They are pulling us aside and they are looking at us like we are nothing (A youth participant).

Recommendation #4: Acknowledge, investigate and deal with racist incidents

Participants want the school system to be more sensitive to the issues of racism. They want to be taken seriously when they report incidences that affect them.

I also wish that the counsellors at the school could pay more attention to what students say (A youth participant).

The teachers need to understand how much important it is to pay attention to what a student is going through cuz if a student tells you something is wrong then something is wrong. They are not going to make up something just to make a drama out of it. They are never going to do that because they know how much trouble they can get in and they get nothing from making up stuff and they will never make up stuff to you. You have to help them up because if you don't believe them it might be too late. If the teachers don't help, it is their fault because they had the chance to stop something bad happening (A youth participant).

If the kids are coming to you and telling you that they feel left out and that they feel like they're being racially targeted and they're feeling like they aren't a part of anything, you should look more deep into that instead of pushing it aside and forgetting about it. Try to understand where they're coming from instead of thinking that it's that it's not a big deal cuz it is and it affects them and it makes them feel like no one will care about what happens to them at all. No one would care about it that someone is being racist towards them. It's not fair that other kids have better opportunities speaking to them, have better experiences at school and the Black kids are the ones who are always singled out, always left out, always treated disrespectfully for doing nothing. They just need to understand that we are people too, the same as other kids (A youth participant).

Recommendation #5: Offer opportunities for open dialogues

Participants emphasized the need for open conversation. They told us that it's high time the school system began to lead discussions around racism and their views should not be seen as an anathema.

I feel like you can have an open discussion like a conversation on how racism happens and how do we can stop it from happening (A parent participant).

Have open conversation. I think in Canada a lot of the times you are afraid to just call it racism as it is and put a name to it because the idea that Canada is a very diverse country, we celebrate multiculturalism but they're not really talking about it, these people are afraid to name racism as it is. So if you don't name the issue, you can't work towards the Issues (A parent participant).

I wish they'd be more open with the kids. Talk to the students about how they could treat us better and speak openly about racism instead of making it seem like it's an uncomfortable conversation. It may seem like it but everyone needs to learn, everyone needs to know about things that happened in school, you can't

hide it and that's often what they do. They speak so much about other issues like bullying and I feel like they should speak to the students more about bullying towards races as well and how it affects every single one of them because when we speak about race at school it's always extremely uncomfortable. Students always look towards the one person in the class that is of a different race and they need to stop being oblivious of towards the situation that happened to the Black kids at school because like at some point we're all going to give up and stop talking about it (A youth participant).

Recommendation #6: Develop inclusive curriculum

Participants stressed the need to have inclusive curriculum in the school system. They want the curriculum to reflect the kind of diversity that exists in their classrooms today.

If you have kids that are from different countries, you want to still be able to engage them. Let us look at African countries and their slave trade, Indian countries and their history ... It is just predominantly white history that is constantly being learned. I feel like if they are able to incorporate more things and people see how bad it was back then and what actually happened, then there would be more sensitivity towards racism (A youth participant).

I think changing the curriculum of schools is very important (A parent participant).

There is a need to update and create room in the school curriculum for kids to learn other cultures (A school worker).

I would say that the most important thing is to start by breaking down some of these old stereotypes, so, that means at the provincial level revamping the curriculum (A school worker).

Recommendation #7: Provide anti-racist education early

Participants reported that racism starts as early as in elementary school. So, they see the need to engage on this subject in the early school life.

The biggest thing I will say is start young. Children are lot more willing to change than adults are. Getting people with an already set view to change will be challenging than getting a child that is still experience the world and getting them without forcing them (A youth participant).

Recommendation #8: Empower immigrant and racialized parents

Participants highlighted the need to give immigrant and racialized parents a sense of belonging. Often, financial burden, language barriers and issues around settling down in their new environment prevent them from fully participating in their children's school life. There is a need to support them, empower them and give them a voice in the school system.

Parents of racialized youth need to understand they have a voice and they need to use that voice to challenge racism and affect changes. We need to recognize that our children need support. I feel most racialized parents feel disempowered. It's a systemic thing. So you don't know the system, you don't understand the system, so you don't get involved in it. Parents of racialized youth are not represented on school council and then you don't have a voice. So parents should be more involved in the school (A parent participant).

I wish my parents know what I was going through. They didn't know how they can help me. I wish I had extra help from my parents, because of language barrier, they couldn't help (A youth participant).

Put in some kind of system where people who do feel uncomfortable can talk to someone (A youth participant).

Recommendation #9: Reassess the current ESL placement system and ensure accountability of its funding.

Participants stressed the need for re-evaluation of the ESL programs offered in schools. They believe that racialized students should not automatically put in the program without assessing them for its need.

ESL should be for those who truly need it (A youth participant).

Recommendation #10: Develop clear procedures for reporting racist incidents

Participants also see a need to define racism clearly so that when it happens, it is easy to call out. They also aired that they will feel more supported if there are obvious procedures for reporting racism in the school system. This includes clear accountability to whoever is involved in the acts of racism within the school system.

Alberta educational institution in general has some specific guidelines that talks about discrimination. I believe that racism and discrimination should be separated

entirely just because discrimination is really general. You can talk about so many different things under discrimination. You could talk about gender, racial, height, weight, religion discrimination. You can talk about so many things but its just not detailed enough. It is not saying these comments are racist, don't say them, these things are bad, don't do them. NO, it just says don't be discriminatory towards another. What does that mean? What is the extent of discrimination? What is the range of how discriminatory I can be? I think that the definition of discrimination needs to be broadened and specified to fit certain contexts (A youth participant).

If someone witness racism, it will be nice to have a procedure and policies where there will be consequences. There should be more awareness of resources to support student (A parent participant).

Recommendation #11: Include racialized community members in assessing policies and making reforms within the education system

Participants emphasized that there is a need to engage racialized people in the school system's policy formulation.

We should be involved in the decision-making and issues that relate to us (A youth participant).

If accepted and implemented, these recommendations will contribute significantly to the creation of an education system that respects and recognizes all students and parents. This will be a strong indicator of a very inclusive environment where the contributions of all stakeholders will be valued.

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