# Interrogating Race: Black Youth and Education in Montreal

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## Table of Contents

**ABSTRACT**

An overwhelming majority of Black students in Québec (87.4%) attend school in the French sector, while 12.6% go to English schools. Accordingly, the majority of what we know about Black youth in the province is informed by the French language literature, which tends to emphasize these youths' educational trajectories in relation to their immigrant status, despite what for many are long family histories in the province. This literature signals that a significant number of Black students experience academic delays or drop out, and that many complete their high school studies in the adult education or vocational sectors. The few studies involving first person perspectives from Black students describe experiences of discrimination at school from peers and low academic expectations from school staff. The small English language research on Black youth in Québec speaks more consistently to the implications of race and is often informed by first person perspectives from Black youth, who identify low teacher expectations, lack of academic support, and poor treatment from teachers as the main obstacles at school.

This qualitative research study builds on this research to help fill in the gaps in understanding why Black students in Québec experience academic difficulties, derailment, and attrition, and how race is implicated in teachers' and administrators' poor perceptions and negative treatment of their Black students. Employing a Critical Race Theory in Education discursive framework, I conduct a race analysis of data from focus groups with Black youth, Black and White teachers, and individual interviews with Black and White principals at three Montreal high schools, in both linguistic sectors. This data was obtained as part of the Black Communities Demographic Project's (BCDP) education research. The BCDP was an extensive initiative that endeavored to better understand Montreal's Black communities in areas including faith, immigration, criminal justice, and education. The youth focus group data-gathering process was informed by Youth Participatory Action research methodology (YPAR), wherein the BCDP youth researchers had central roles in co-designing the interview protocol and conducting the youth focus groups, as well as co-analyzing and co-disseminating the data.

In this study I examine the strengths and limitations of YPAR methodology in the context of the BCDP. I look at what the Black youth focus group participants have to tell us about their schooling experiences, and how race, racism, and racialization figure in their perspectives. I also look at how race is deployed to discuss and identify the obstacles to Black students' school

success in White versus Black adult participant reflections. The data makes evident the differences and contradictions between what Black students and Black teachers identify as the obstacles to school success and what White teachers and principals say about this topic. Black teachers and Black administrators identify the same barriers to Black student school success as Black students. This study also describes how race over-informs how White teachers and principals in both linguistic sectors perceive and treat their Black students.

**Resumé**

Une majorité importante des élèves noires au Québec, soit 87,4 %, fréquentent des écoles de langue française, tandis que 12,6 % fréquentent des écoles anglaises. Par conséquent, la plupart des renseignements disponibles sur les jeunes noires de la province découlent de recherches effectuées en français. Or, ces études ont tendance à mettre l'accent sur la trajectoire scolaire de ces jeunes par rapport à leur statut d'immigrant, malgré le fait que plusieurs sont issues de familles qui sont au Québec depuis longtemps. Ces rapports indiquent qu'un nombre important d'élèves noires présentent des retards scolaires ou abandonnent leurs études, et que bon nombre d'entre eux terminent leurs études secondaires dans des programmes d'éducation des adultes ou de formation professionnelle. Les quelques études qui mentionnent des témoignages directs d'élèves noires décrivent des incidents de discrimination en milieu scolaire de la part de leurs pairs et rapportent les faibles attentes du personnel scolaire à leur égard. Le peu de recherches qui existent en anglais sur les jeunes noires au Québec traitent plus systématiquement des implications et du vécu de personnes racisées et s'appuie souvent sur le point de vue de jeunes noires, qui identifient les faibles attentes des enseignantes, le manque de soutien scolaire et leur mauvais traitement par des enseignantes comme les principaux obstacles auxquels ils et elles font face à l'école.

Cette étude qualitative s'appuie sur cette recherche pour aider à combler les lacunes et identifier les raisons pour lesquelles les élèves noires du Québec éprouvent des difficultés scolaires et présentent des taux élevés de décrochage, et pour mieux comprendre comment la racisation affecte la perception négative et le traitement négatif des élèves noires par les enseignant·e·s et les administrateur/trices. À l'aide du cadre discursif de la Critical Race Theory in Education, j'effectue une analyse raciale des données de groupes de discussion avec des jeunes noires, des enseignantes noires et blanches et des entrevues individuelles avec des directeurs noires et blanches dans trois écoles secondaires de Montréal dans les deux secteurs linguistiques. Ces données ont été recueillies dans le cadre de la recherche sur l'éducation du Projet démographique de la communauté noire (Black Communities Demographic Project – BCDP), une initiative majeure qui visait à mieux comprendre les communautés noires de Montréal dans des domaines comme la religion, l'immigration, le système de justice pénale et l'éducation. Le recueil des données de groupes de discussion des jeunes a été effectué en utilisant la méthodologie de recherche Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) par laquelle les jeunes chercheurs du BCDP ont joué un rôle central dans la conception collaborative du protocole d'entrevue et l'animation des groupes

de discussion des jeunes, ainsi que dans les processus collaboratifs d'analyse et de diffusion des données.

Dans cette étude, j'examine les forces et les limites de la méthodologie YPAR dans le contexte du BCDP. Je me penche sur ce que les participantes des groupes de discussion de jeunes noires ont à dire au sujet de leurs expériences en milieu scolaire et sur la façon dont la race, le racisme et la racisation figurent dans leurs perspectives. J'examine également la façon dont la race est déployée pour discuter et identifier les obstacles à la réussite scolaire des élèves noires dans les réflexions des participantes adultes blanches et noires. Les données soulignent les différences et les contradictions entre ce que les élèves noires et les enseignantes noires identifient comme étant les obstacles à la réussite scolaire et ce que les enseignantes et les directeurs blanches disent à ce sujet. Les enseignantes et les administrateurs noires identifient les mêmes obstacles à la réussite scolaire des élèves noires que ceux que nomment les élèves noires. Cette étude décrit également l'influence démesurée de la race sur la façon dont les enseignantes et les directeurs blanches des deux secteurs linguistiques perçoivent et traitent leurs élèves noires.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Bella and Léon Celemencki, the hardest working people that I have ever met, whose love for their children and grandchildren is boundless.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Locating this Study

The most comprehensive quantitative study to date on the educational outcomes of Black[1] high school youth in Québec is McAndrew et al. (2013), which asserts that students of Caribbean origins attending school in the English language sector have the highest dropout rates of any demographic group identified as being of "immigrant origins". This research also reveals that Black students from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa combined in the English and French language sectors are also more likely than other youth of so-called immigrant origins to be labeled with "special needs, learning difficulties and social maladjustment" (Balde, 2013, p.4).

The majority of what we know about Black youth and education in Québec from the peer-reviewed research is published in French and often emphasizes the academic delays and challenges experienced due to the so-called challenges of "integration" and immigration (Magnan et al., 2016; 2017; McAndrew and Ledent, 2007; McAndrew et al., 2013; Potvin et al., 2014; Steinbach, 2015). With its distinct laws and policies governing language and education, separate French and English language school boards, the welcome class and the CEGEP system, the province of Québec and its concomitant education system is unique and differs significantly from those in the rest of the country.

Black students' lived schooling experiences in Québec – including relationships with teachers, classroom dynamics, and overall school environment - are less frequently discussed in

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[1] Throughout my dissertation I capitalize the B in Black when the goal is to identify race and racial location, as opposed to simply skin colour. Similarly, later, when referencing the words White and Whiteness, I am referring to race and racial location.

the literature. Similarly, we know very little about what Québec teachers of Black students identify as the obstacles to these students' school success. In comparison, in the wider Canadian context, research that draws upon first-person perspectives from teachers of Black students indicates that some teachers illustrate racist thinking about their Black students, for example, in lowering their academic expectations for Black (versus their White) students, and that Black students are often perceived as disruptive in class (Dei et al., 1997b; Shroeter and James, 2015).

Race is often not discussed in the peer-reviewed, French language research about Black youth and education in Québec (Livingstone and Weinfeld, 2017). This omission is curious, given that - as Livingstone, Celemencki, and Calixte (2014) assert - Black Québec youth are "deeply troubled by the realities of racism" (p.12) at school. As Torczyner (2010) suggests, one reason for this oversight in not identifying race as a factor that shapes Black students' schooling experience in Québec is that the correlation between their academic performance and the implications of racism in Québec high schools remains, as he claims, "shrouded in fear and incomprehension" (p. 23).

However, a small but growing body of mostly English language research in Québec highlights Black youths' first person experiences at school, including how low teacher expectations, lack of academic support from teachers and school administrators, and racial discrimination at school can make school difficult (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Eid et al., 2011; Estimable, 2006; Hampton, 2016; Howard, 2014; Livingstone, Celemencki, Calixte, 2014; Livingstone and Weinfeld, 2017; Potvin, 2008, 2012). In this dissertation, I build on this research to fill in some of the gaps of what we know about Black youth and education in Québec. I do this by conducting a race analysis of data from focus groups with Black youth, Black and White

teachers, one school social worker, and individual interviews with Black and White principals at three Montreal high schools. The data stems from the Black Communities Demographic Project.

**The Black Communities Demographic Project**

At the beginning of my doctoral studies I was hired to work as a research assistant for an educational research project that focused on Montreal's Black communities, with an emphasis on Black high school youth in particular. This project was commissioned as part of the Black Communities Demographic Project (BCDP); a citywide research initiative entitled *Demographic Challenges Facing the Black Communities of Montreal in the 21st Century*[2]. A joint collaboration between researchers from McGill University's School of Social Work, the Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training, and McGill's Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning, small research teams explored a number of issues in order to better understand the city's Black communities, including: faith, immigration, criminal justice and employment, the elderly, and education. The results from this collective research project appear in summative form, in the BCDP executive summary (Torcyzner, 2010).

The BCDP discussed above was a follow-up to a 2001 study undertaken by the same organizations mentioned and was entitled *The Evolution of the Black Community in Montreal: Change and Challenge.* The results from the 2001 study revealed that Black high school students in Montreal had slightly higher attrition rates than the general population (Torczyner and Springer, 2001). Endeavoring to do a follow up on these important findings, the purpose of the 2010 BCDP education research was to a) examine developments in school policies and practices to support Black students' school success since the 2001 study, and b) to gain a better

[2] See document: https://www.mcgill.ca/mchrat/files/mchrat/ExecutiveSummaryBlackDemograhic2010.pdf

understanding of the experiences of Black students in school in response to such policies and practices.

The BCDP education research employed a combination of research methods to get both a broad and detailed view of existing policies and programs in some Montreal schools, and to understand their impact on Black students in particular. The methods consisted of: a) interviews with key informants, namely school principals, government and school board representatives, and directors of Black community organizations; b) focus group discussions with teachers and parents, and; c) a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) project involving Black high school students from across Montreal. The findings from this research are summarized in two separate reports: one analyzes changes in public and community-based programs since 2001, and the second discusses results from the participatory research project with youth (Torcyzner, 2010; Livingstone, Celemencki, et al., 2010).

For the YPAR project mentioned above, my colleague Anne Marie Livingstone (project lead) and I recruited a group of twenty Black students from four Montreal high schools to be co-researchers and to facilitate focus group discussions with other Black youth at their schools. This work was in service of responding to the participatory project's central research questions:

1. What do Black students view as the factors that influence their successes and challenges in school?
2. To what extent are schools and community-based organizations addressing the needs of Black students, and in what ways do they promote their academic success?
3. What can schools and community organizations do to promote the success and graduation rates of Black high school students?

The findings from the youth focus group discussions that were facilitated by the BCDP youth researchers revealed that help from community-based organizations, positive relationships with school staff, more diverse curricula reflecting a varitey of Black students' histories and experiences, are all factors that improve Black youths' school engagement. The youth participants also identified the challenges to school success, such as how low expectations and lack of support from teachers discourage them. This last piece, while critically important, was a very small part of the final project report and did not contain perspectives from teachers or school principals regarding what they identify as the obstacles to their Black students' school success (Livingstone, Celemencki, et al., 2010).

The second component of the BCDP education research was to understand what the adult research participants (school teachers, principals, administrative staff, parents, and staff from Black community groups) identified as existing policies and programs that help to support Black youths' school success, while assessing the impact of such initiatives on Black students. For this part of the project I participated in co-facilitating focus group discussions with Black and White teachers, and individual interviews with Black and White principals from the four participating schools. The findings from the adult participant data were discussed in the BCDP executive report, alongside some key conclusions from the youth participatory research project mentioned above (Livingstone in Torcyzner, 2010). The data from all of the interviews conducted for the BCDP education research were not cited directly in the executive report, but rather referenced in terms of key themes identified in participant perspectives.

In discussing the adult participant data, the BCDP executive report emphasized the importance of continued services for Black students offered by Black community groups, such as after school programs that provide academic and emotional support (Livingstone in Torcyzner,

2010). The summary also indicates that programs such as homework aids and summer school do not remove the socio-economic barriers which prevent Black youth in poverty from succeeding and graduating from school, while also speaking to the importance of helping Black students and their families to "overcome the challenges" associated with many systemic factors, including racism (Livingstone in Torcyzner, 2010).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, discussions about race are scant in the majority of literature about Black youth and education in Québec, much of which is published in French. This omission is especially curious, because race is discussed very clearly in the Canadian literature in terms of how it informs negative perceptions of Black students (Briggs, 2017; Codjoe, 2001; Dei, 2017; Dei et al., 1997; Henry, 2003, 2017; James, 2012; James and Samaroo, 2017). The BCDP executive summary helps to fill this gap in our understanding about the centrality of race in Black youths' schooling experiences in Québec by noting that Black youth participants and some school staff members (without specifying which staff members, nor their racial location) indicate that racism and prejudice remain persistent and pervasive problems at school (Livingstone in Torcyzner, 2010).

**Situating this Study**

More needs to be done to break the relative silence about race in the literature about Black youth and Québec overall. Therefore, in this dissertation, I will conduct further analysis of the BCDP education research data from Black youth participants and their Black and White teachers and principals. I will pay particular attention to what the youth participants say about their schooling experiences, and what their teachers and principals say about their Black students. My study is, in this way, distinct from the BCDP education research, which took a

programmatic and policy approach, looking at the school supports for Black students, and emphasizing how schools and programs can best help Black students to succeed at school.

In order to better understand the centrality of race in participant perspectives, in this original analysis and synthesis of the BCDP education research data from youth, teacher and principal participants, I will do a race analysis of the data, in which I emphasize the salience of race in participants' perspectives. Whereas the main emphasis of the BCDP education research was to identify the supports for Black student success at the participating schools, my central research questions in this dissertation are as follows:

1. What do Black youth say about their schooling experiences? How do race, racism and racialization figure in participant perspectives?
2. What do White and Black teachers and principals identify as the barriers to their Black students' school success? How do race, racism and racialization figure in participant perspectives?

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In chapter two, I discuss the conceptual framework that will inform my race analysis of the data, Critical Race Theory in Education. Here I also define and discuss the terms central to my study, such as racism, culturalized racism, Whiteness, and "acting White" (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In chapter two, I also discuss multicultural education and antiracist education, two frameworks employed by Canadian educators and researchers when talking about race in schools, the latter of which also informed my analysis of the data in chapters six and seven. In chapter three I discuss the peer-reviewed literature about Black youth and education in Canada and Québec. I look at how Canadian researchers talk clearly in terms of race when talking about Black students, while (Francophone) Québec researchers often discuss these youth in relation to

their immigration pathways and integration in Québec school contexts. I underscore what I identify as the gaps in the Québec literature, thereby giving context to the relevance and importance of my study, for further understandings about Black youth and education in Québec.

In chapter four (Methodology), I discuss three research methodological frameworks that informed the data gathering methods for the data discussed in chapter six: Action Research, Participatory Action Research (PAR), and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). In chapter five (Methods) I discuss the operational aspects of the BCDP education research, while again clearly distinguishing my study from that research. As part of this latter effort, I explore some of the benefits and challenges of YPAR in relation to the BCDP education research, while also providing some contextual information for framing the presentation and analysis of the youth focus group data in chapter six.

In chapters six and seven, I present the findings and analysis of the data for my study. I discuss data from focus groups with Black youth participants in chapter six, and White and Black teacher and principal data in chapter seven. In the final chapter (eight), I offer closing remarks regarding implications of my research in the field for understandings about Black youth and education in Québec, as well as the benefits and challenges of doing YPAR research.

# Chapter 2

## Theoretical Frameworks

### Introduction and Chapter Overview

The emphasis of the previous chapter was to introduce and situate my study in relation to the BCDP education research and demonstrate how it responds to what I identify as the gaps in our knowledge in the research about Black youth and education in Québec. The function of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical frameworks that I will use in my analysis of the data, Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education and antiracist education. I will also discuss the key terms and concepts central to these frameworks and to my study, such as: *race, racism, culturalized racism, Whiteness*, and "*acting White*". These frameworks and the concomitant terms and concepts discussed in this chapter also figured prominently in my discussion of the literature about Black youth and education in the following chapter.

### What Do We Mean When We Use the Word Race?

The frequent use of the word race across academic, legal, political, social and cultural platforms makes it difficult to pin down a precise definition of the term applicable in all contexts. *Race* is a word used to both depict and distinguish individuals and groups of people as minorities, or *other*, based on so-called biological distinctions. These so-called distinctions are used as a justification by (primarily) White individuals to assume a hierarchical positionality - based on their so-called racial superiority – for mistreating, marginalizing, oppressing or torturing those individuals or groups of people identified as racially inferior, or racially impure.

In his landmark talk "Race, the Floating Signifier," Hall (1997) asserts how the tendency to classify and differentiate human traits into distinct categories is a "cultural impulse", and that this impulse is how we make sense of and give meaning to the world. Where this "impulse"

becomes problematic, however, is when so-called differences are employed so as to legitimate the marginalization of the *other*, for example, in attempting to predict behaviours and other social factors based on phenotype.

Hall (1997) also asserts that physical differences such as skin colour, hair and facial features form the basis for claiming alleged racial differences, for, as he claims, they are visible to the eye and are therefore easily employed to distinguish between one group of people versus another. However, the notion of "racial groups" is a social construction, and, as Howard (2014, 2018) asserts, the use of phenotypic characteristics is a means for creating false divisions between individuals and groups of people and has no basis in reality for predicting the neither behaviours nor intelligence of people. In fact, as Howard (2014) asserts, the very notion of race is racist.

**Racism and Racialization.**

In defining *racism*, Thompson (1997) asserts that it is a *system* of privilege and oppression, a network of traditions, legitimating standards, material and institutional arrangements, and ideological apparatuses that, together, serve to perpetuate hierarchical social relations based on race (p. 9). Building on this definition of racism, Eckmann and Michèle (2005) assert that one of the central features of racism is "the use of differences against the other", and how such alleged differences distinguish the so-called *other* from those who assume 'racial authority' (p.2). Solorzano (1997) adds that racism gains traction when so-called "racial authority" is mobilized in order to justify the dominance of one (so-called) race over another (p.16).

Tator and Henry (2010) emphasize how 'racial authority' by those who perceive themselves as racially superior (often, though not always, White individuals) is used as a

justification for differential treatment of those deemed "other" (p. 76). This, in fact, is *racialization,* which is the creation of or the belief in social divisions based on so-called racial differences. Adding further dimension to our understanding of racialization, Ying (2008) explains how it operates in the world:

> In societies in which "White" people have economic, political, and social power, processes of racialization have emerged from the creation of a hierarchy in social structures and systems based on "race." The visible effects of processes of racialization are the racial inequalities embedded within social structures and systems (p.80).

Racial stereotypes are often deployed as a legitimization for negative or differential treatment of Black youth at school (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Dei et al., 1997; James and Turner, 2017; Shroeter and James, 2015; Zamudio et al., 2011). Moreover, as many prominent Canadian scholars argue, racist thinking about Black students is made evident by school policies and practices that limit, put into question, or completely derail these youths' academic trajectories (Briggs, 2017; Collins and Magnan, 2018; Howard, 2014; James and Samaroo, 2017; Shroeter and James, 2015).

**Unpacking Whiteness.**

Popularized in late twentieth century scholarship in the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies and Education, *Whiteness* refers to the ways in which White people benefit from being White, and the accordant social, political and economic gains as such. Whiteness is also the manifestation of the racial dominance of White people, and – as Howard (2009) adds – the ways in which "White supremacist societies are deployed and maintained" (p.45). As Dei et al. (1997) assert, when talking about Black youth in Canadian schools we must carefully consider the ways in which *Whiteness* operates as a means for White people to maintain

"material, political and symbolic advantage over the Black race" (p. 67). For example, as the discussion of the relevant literature in the following chapter will help to illustrate, Black students are often subject to racist school policies and practices that limit their educational opportunities, while White students are not subjected to the same kinds of critiques, questioning regarding their academic capacities, and disciplinary measures (Dei, 1997a; Henry, 2017; James, 2012; 2017).

Whiteness refers to "a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced" (Frankenberg, 1994, p. 6). Accordingly, the assumed racial superiority of White people is in part what enables the subjugation of Black students in Canadian schools – while also promoting the advancement of White students – because within this paradigm White people are perceived as idealized subjects. "White superiority" as a means for legitimizing the discriminatory treatment of racialized individuals and groups of people is one of the major ways in which Whiteness is most visible in society. For example, as Howard (2002) explains, Black students are racialized by society, and their White teachers and other school staff treat them accordingly in racist ways. As I will argue in my study, we cannot talk about Black youth and education in Québec without clearly understanding what teachers and other school staff say about these students' behaviours and academic capacities.

Understanding how teachers perceive of and treat their Black and other racialized students also enable us to better understand the many ways in which Whiteness is at play in the classroom. For example, as Kailin (2002) explains, White teachers can be "tone-deaf" in their pedagogical approaches, for example, by emphasizing the 'folkloric' aspects of certain cultural or ethnic groups. As I will discuss later in this chapter, reducing discussions about race to cultural and ethnic stereotypes is in part what is so problematic about multicultural education

frameworks popularized in mainstream, Canadian classrooms. Some teachers emphasize race in ways that caricaturize their racialized students, others ignore the realities of race and racism altogether. As Niemonen (2007) explains, when White teachers employ "colour-blindness" to supposedly 'neutralize' the classroom, they perpetuate the racialization of Black students by ignoring the centrality of race in their everyday lives both in and outside of school contexts (p. 161). Moreover, White teachers with intentions of creating inclusive, equitable classrooms who explicitly choose to *not* see their non-White students through the lens of race are in fact enacting Whiteness (Cho, 2009).

As discussed above, a way in which White teachers maintain their racial dominance is by deciding that race does not matter in the lives of their Black students. As Dei and Calliste (2000) explain, by emphasizing the alleged "racelessness" of their racialized students, and by perceiving a White, Eurocentric curriculum as "normal" (p.26), we see how Whiteness is so powerfully entrenched in White Canadian teachers' beliefs. Moreover, Dei et al. (1997) assert how some teachers normalize the racist treatment of Black students at their schools by minimizing the negative impacts of racist comments made by White peers.

**"Acting White".**

In the educational literature from the United States and Canada there exist numerous theories of why (some) Black high school students experience academic difficulties or drop out of school altogether. Many of these theories were first coined and discussed by American scholars. For instance, as I will illustrate in my discussion of the relevant literature in the following chapter – and in my study – Canadian and Québec researchers draw on theories of acting White in order to talk about Black students in Canada and Québec. I first define and discuss theories of acting White here, as a preface for discussing the literature in chapter three.

One of the most well-known (and controversial) theories, developed by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and later, others, is the notion that some Black students are ambivalent about succeeding at school because they have internalized their White teachers' and peers' racialized perceptions of them and have thus come to believe that academic success is a so-called "White people's prerogative" (p.179). Further, as the research suggests, consistent barriers such as racial discrimination and low academic expectations from teachers account for why Black students drop out of high school far more frequently than White students (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Speaking more recently to this theory of acting White, Ogbu (2004) discusses how Black students may feel pressured to perform or act White as a response to experiencing racial discrimination at school, and that such pressures can trigger low self-esteem in these individuals (p.12).

Such theories about Black youth and the pressures of "acting" or "performing White" posit some reasons why some Black youth drop out or experience difficulties at school. While such theories continue to inform educators' and researchers' perceptions about Black student disengagement in the United States and Canada, such ideas are also controversial and have been critiqued and nuanced by other scholars. Missing from such discussions is key information about the school and classroom contexts - as well as relationships with teachers and other peers - that gives rise to such alleged behaviours amongst Black youth, thereby placing the burden of underachievement solely on the youth.

As Tyson et al. (2005) point out, Fordham and Ogbu's (1986) oft-cited discussion regarding the so-called burden of acting White experienced by Black students is in fact not substantiated by the empirical, social science research (p. 583). This is problematic since, according to Tyson et al. (2005), the acting White theory continues to have a significant

influence on how schools interpret and respond to the challenges of Black student underachievement, including the perspectives from White teachers and principals that I will discuss in chapter seven of this dissertation. In discussing why the acting White theory is so problematic, Fryer (2006) asserts that while the expression might often be employed by minority adolescents in order to, as he claims, "ridicule their minority peers for engaging in behaviours perceived to be characteristic of Whites" (p.54), an emphasis on this tendency begs the following question: What are the social and educational contexts that help give rise to such engrained and detrimental perceptions about Black youth and their academic capacities that shape the ridicule?

**"Culturalized" racism.**

In discussing the educational research about South and East Asian students in North America, Razack (1995) explains that culture and cultural differences are frequently cited when discussing the under and "over-achievement" of racial minorities (p. 68), adding that "culture is very much the issue in an environment of culturalized racism" (p. 78). Citing cultural differences to frame the alleged deficiencies of racialized people deflects attention away from the "structural relations of domination and subordination" (Razack, 1995, p. 72), which are responsible for sustaining systemic racism. As I will discuss in the following chapter, Black Canadian students are subject to culturalized racism enacted by their peers, teachers and school principals.

As Ladson-Billings adds (2005), even when White teachers are committed to antiracist pedagogical approaches they may still marginalize their racialized students, for example, when interpreting some behaviours – such as not making eye contact with teachers – as having to do with cultural differences (p.8). Interpreting Black and other racialized students' classroom behaviours through a deficit lens is highly problematic. Collins and Magnan (2018) add that White teachers and other White school staff in Montreal tend to perceive their Black students

through a deficit lens, blaming academic difficulties on cultural difference, adding that White superiority informs such false and racist perceptions. In my study – which was also conducted in Montreal - I will pay close attention to how White teachers and principals interpret their Black students' classroom behaviours and academic difficulties at school, and whether or not cultural differences are cited as reasons for Black students' academic difficulties. Having defined and discussed some of the key terms and theories that will inform my study, in the next section of this chapter I explore these concepts again by illustrating how they are made important through Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Theory in Education.

**Critical Race Theory – Introduction**

What we now refer to as Critical Race Theory in Education evolved out of Critical Race Theory (CRT). At the intersection of law, Critical Theory, and Civil Rights scholarship, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework for analyzing law and legal traditions through the historical and contemporary experiences of racial minorities (Brooks, 1994, p.30). Bell Jr. (1980) admonished civil rights legal scholars for not addressing racial disparities in public education in America in the 1970s and 80s, where White students were transferring out of schools with high Black student populations. This trend ultimately magnified the ways in which the public school system in the United States was polarized along the lines of a clear racial divide (Bell, 1980, p.520).

Bell (1980) also discussed the failure on the part of the American legal system to properly prosecute the individuals and institutions responsible for continuing to discriminate and segregate Black people in the United States in society at large, while at work, and most importantly while attending school (1980, p. 530). During the early 2000's the definition of CRT incorporated an intersectional analysis that considered sexism, classism, and other ideologies and

practices that oppress minoritized individuals in a particularly integrated fashion. Such a nuanced framework enabled scholars and educators to unmask some of the complexities of how White privilege operates in legal, educational, and social circumstances, compounding other modes of marginalization to discriminate against people of colour, thereby challenging the notion of a colourblind or supposed *value-neutral* society.

**Critical Race Theory in Education.**

CRT in Education emerged almost three decades ago as scholars in the field wished to build on CRT in order to address issues specific to Black youth and education in America, such as academic underachievement, dropout, and the racialization of these youth in White-majority schools. A central tenet that underscores a CRT in Education framework is the presumption that racism exists in school and broader social contexts (Ladson Billings, 1998, p. 55). A CRT analytical lens, therefore, enables us to better understand how structural and institutional racism is so embedded in the school policies and practices that govern Black students' lives at school.

As I will explore in my discussion of the literature about Black youth and education in Canada and Québec in chapter three, first person perspectives from Black students and their teachers enable us to better understand how racism operates in these school contexts, for example, through teachers' low academic expectations for their Black students, and in streaming Black students in particular towards vocational – as opposed to academic – trajectories (Briggs, 2017; Collins and Magnan, 2018; Dei et al., 1997; Dei and Calliste, 2000; Eid et al., 2011; James, 2012; James and Samaroo, 2017; Livingstone, Celemencki, Calixte, 2014; Shroeter and James, 2015). Moreover, the claims made in this chapter thus far - that I will also develop in the next chapter and in my study – illustrate the extent to which schools are in fact microcosms for the kinds of systemic inequalities that exist in *all* sectors of society (Choi, 2008).

As Ladson-Billings (2005) explains, from a very young age, Black children (in the United States) are acutely aware of how race operates in the world around them. By emphasizing what Ladson-Billings (1998) refers to as "naming one's own reality with stories" as a core principal of a CRT in education framework, we privilege the first-person voices of, for example, Black students – as opposed to adult researchers - to best inform us of their schooling experiences. A CRT in Education framework can provide Black students with opportunities to openly speak about their schooling experiences in ways that positivistic approaches to qualitative data gathering do not provide (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

As I will highlight in my discussion of the literature about Black youth and education in the Québec context in chapter three, we know very little about what Black youth say about their schooling experiences because the majority of research about Black youth and education in the province does not include first person, qualitative data. And, as I will illustrate in my study, first person perspectives from Black students – as well as from their White and Black teachers and principals - help fill our gaps in understanding about Black youth and education in Québec by elucidating the extent to which racist perceptions of Black students, Whiteness, and theories of acting White are echoed in participant reflections.

***CRT in education – implications for research and teaching.***

As mentioned above, a CRT in Education framework emphasizes the importance of understanding the inequities faced by racialized students in educational institutions, from their first-person perspectives (Lynn & Dixson, 2014). This framework also enables educators and educational researchers to better contextualize, identify and discuss the problems reported by racialized students, such as having their academic capacities underestimated by their White teachers, and not seeing their histories reflected in the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2005).

Yosso (2002) illustrates how to apply a CRT in Education framework in the classroom, urging teachers to: 1) Interrogate their own racist and classist judgments regarding their students; 2) Incorporate interdisciplinary teaching methods to engage students with diverse learning styles and from differing cultural backgrounds; and, 3) Emphasize social-justice oriented curricular goals (p.7). The tips proposed prompt teachers to merge self-reflective, internal work alongside interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum design and teaching, thereby enabling them to make classroom learning more inclusive and responsive to the diversity of student needs. These are important guidelines for CRT in education-informed teaching, because as Howard (2002) asserts, even those teachers with the best intentions are guilty of perpetuating "White racism" through, for example, curricular omissions and the emphasis on Eurocentric curriculum.

Zamudio et al. (2011) discuss how a CRT in Education emphasizes the importance of employing self-reflexivity as a tool when critically reflecting on curricular decisions (2011). Accordingly, if White teachers are to eradicate the systemic racialization of their racialized students, they must begin by interrogating how their personal views inform their treatment of such students (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Given that my study takes place in the context of schools, another key theory shaping my data analysis is antiracist education, a framework employed by many Canadian teachers and researchers in order to discuss race and racism in Canadian classrooms.

**Antiracist Education**

A report published by the Québec Human Rights Commission defines an antiracist education approach as one that identifies and actively seeks to change the educational practices, policies, attitudes and behaviours which perpetuate the racialization of minoritized students in school contexts (Eid et al., 2011). Much like CRT in Education, an antiracist framework also

underscores the importance of identifying the extent to which racism in school settings is representative of larger, more systemic racism in all levels of society.

Antiracist education frameworks provide scaffolding for educational researchers and teachers who also wish to emphasize "educational and political strategy for institutional and systemic change", when addressing issues of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and ableism therein (Dei and Calliste, 2000, p.13). The cornerstone of an antiracist approach therefore emphasizes the importance of teachers critically examining their teaching practices and curricular choices in order to ensure an environment that enables all students to feel respected and seen, so that they may thrive academically (Blakeney, 2005).

An antiracist education framework also provides tools for teachers to think through how they can eradicate the racialization of minoritized students through best classroom practices (Carr and Lund, 2009). However, as Dei and Calliste (2000) argue, an antiracist education framework must also confront key questions about how schools operate that go beyond the fundamentals of teaching, learning, and administrative functions (p.162). Part of this work involves moving out of the "colourblind" paradigm discussed earlier, in order to work with different models of equity and justice, such as the more critical, analytical lens of CRT in education.

Canadian antiracist frameworks are in part a response to the more generalized, multicultural education frameworks designed to address so-called difference through school policies and practices. As James (2017) explains, Canadian antiracist educational discourses can echo some problematic traits of the multicultural education approach, by what he describes as an emphasis on cultural differences, cultural neutrality, and colourblindness (p.52). Notably, James (2017) also asserts that the way Canadian antiracist education is conceptualized and practiced in

schools is "ineffective in bringing students and educators to an appreciation of the relevance and significance of antiracism" (James, 2017, p. 54). A CRT in education framework shares some of the same concerns articulated in an antiracist education framework, such as the importance of critically interrogating and exposing the extent to which racist teacher attitudes and racial discrimination of racialized students operate in the classroom. In emphasizing the first-person perspectives of Black students – and their Black and White teachers and principals - a CRT in education lens will enable me to look closely at how race, racism and racialization figure in their perspectives.

**Conclusion**

The concepts of acting White, Whiteness, and racism shape my discussion and analysis of what Black and White teachers and principals in Québec identify as the obstacles to their Black students' school success. I will also explore how both antiracism in education and CRT in education theories provide a means for thinking about how schools might operate differently, for example, to better serve the needs of Black students, both in my discussion of the data and in my concluding chapter. Finally, in my race analysis of the participant data, I will underscore what such first-person perspectives have to tell us, overall, about Black youth and education in Québec that the existing research – in my opinion – does not adequately address.

The concepts and theories discussed in this chapter will provide me with an intersectional lens for analyzing and discussing the data that considers the confluences of culture, history, politics and racist school culture which inform Black students' schooling experiences, as well as what their White and Black teachers identify as the obstacles to their school success. In the following chapter, I first discuss the literature about Black youth and education in Canada, followed by a more in depth look at the Québec context. Existing research frequently references

the concepts and theories discussed in this chapter, and, as I will illustrate in my discussion, we cannot talk about Black youth and education in Québec and *not* talk about race.

# Chapter 3

## Literature Review: Black Youth and Education in Canada and Québec

### Introduction and Chapter Overview

Over twenty years ago noted scholar George Sefa Dei urged Canadian researchers and educators to examine the centrality of race in Black youth's schooling experiences (1997b). More recent research about Black youth and education in Canada and Québec echoes this charge and illustrates how these youth experience numerous challenges at school - including low teacher expectations and differential treatment - which negatively impact them (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Dei, 2016; James, 2017; Kanouté et al., 2016; Potvin and Lafortune, 2014; Schroeter and James, 2015.).

The function of this chapter is to help situate my study within the larger context of scholarly literature about Black youth and education in Canada, with a particular emphasis on the Québec context. In the first part of this chapter I discuss some of the key findings from the Canadian literature, such as how low teacher expectations and "streaming" practices are limiting factors at school for Black students. In the second section of this chapter, I discuss the peer-reviewed literature about Black youth and education in Québec, exploring key themes such as how the special school requirements dictated by restrictive language laws impact Black youths' schooling trajectories, as well how some Black students feel they must disprove their teachers' negative perceptions of them.

Throughout the last chapter section on Québec, I underscore the ways in which race informs how Black students perceive poor treatment from their teachers, but that in fact we know that we know very little about the extent to which – if at all – race may inform teacher and principal perceptions of their Black students. Underscoring the above-mentioned gaps in the

literature about Black youth and education in Québec locates the importance of my study, in which I will look at how race, racism and racialization figure in Black Québec youths' reflections about their schooling experiences, and in reflections from their Black and White teachers and principals regarding what they identify as the obstacles to school success for their Black students.

## Canada

### Understanding Race in Canada: Multiculturalism and Interculturalism

This section provides some contextual information about current and historical discussions and critiques regarding the concept of Canadian multiculturalism and Interculturalism (Québec). The critiques and discussion in this section help orient the reader to how differing (and divergent) historical and socio-political contexts in (English) Canada versus Québec are also replicated in the Canadian versus Québec literature about Black youth and education discussed in this chapter.

Canada's Multicultural policy was adopted in 1971 with implications for education in the form of policies designed to encourage awareness of, sensitivity to, and tolerance of ethnic minorities (James, 2017). The ultimate goal of the policy was to better integrate ethnic minorities into the educational system, in part, by *celebrating* diversity through emphasizing the folkloric aspects of different cultural groups such as foods, clothing and holiday celebrations. This included ensuring that multicultural education curricula represented the countries' diverse demographics, both in policy and in classroom practices (James, 2017). Despite such attempts to diversify school curricula to better reflect the realities of all students, low achievement and high dropout rates of racialized students continued. As James (2017) explains, persistent disparities in the graduation rates of Black and other racialized students versus their White peers – in addition

to clear evidence of economic disparities and employment opportunities for Black versus White people - produced what we now refer to generally as "race relations" (p.43).

Digging deeper into other ways in which Multicultural policy is in fact divisive, Walcott (2014) suggests that it is responsible for perpetuating the notion that French and English/British-Canadians are without culture, race or ethnicity. The attribution of culture and race in Canada to non-White individuals and groups only means that Black and other racialized individuals and groups of people are perceived as having culture or race, whereas White people are perceived as "neutral" and without culture or race (Walcott, 2014). Much like Walcott (2014) and Howard (2018), Thobani (2007) explains how problematic Multicultural policy is for institutionalizing the notion that so-called *difference* is personified exclusively through "people of colour, as politically identifiable by their cultural backgrounds" (p. 145). The common practice of correlating culture and difference (or lack thereof) with skin colour in Canada, configures culture and cultural identity as synonymous with political identity (Thobani, 2007, p.145).

It is important to consider the implications of Multicultural policy on Canada's Black communities, whereas Howard (2018) discusses, the racialization of Black people persists despite *postracialist* claims of egalitarianism. Howard (2018) asserts that Canadian racist discourses are legitimized through, for example, so-called humorous renditions of blackface (p. 844). In referencing Canada's multicultural policy - and more recently the Multiculturalism Act[3] - Howard (2018) also claims that such policies and laws ensure that Black and other racialized groups are positioned as having "tenuous claims to citizenship" and thus, claims of racism

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[3] The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed as a law in 1988 and aims to "preserve and enhance multiculturalism" in Canada (pier21.ca).

against the state and its charges by such individuals and groups are not taken seriously nor perceived as legitimate (p. 851). Another legacy of multicultural discourses is that Black Canadian youth are consistently given the false impression that, with the right attitude and effort, they can achieve whatever they set out to do (Carr and Lund, 2009, p.3).

Despite more than forty years of official multicultural policies which attempted to institutionalize respect for the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of Canadians, Black students in Canada face many obstacles at school that illustrate how so-called "respect for diversity" – as purported by Canadian Multiculturalism – is not in fact actualized in many school contexts (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Livingstone, Celemencki, Calixte, 2014;) Instead, as this dissertation explores, Black youths' academic trajectories are often derailed by school policies and practices that scream of systemic racism.

**Interculturalism in Québec.**

Whereas Multicultural policies are problematic in English Canada, they are comparatively absent in French Canada, where "interculturalism" has been adopted instead. Demographically speaking, in Québec, the majority of people in the province are White, Francophone Québécois. Bouchard and Taylor (2008b) describe interculturalism as a "policy or model that advocates harmonious relations between cultures based on intensive exchanges centred on an integration process that does not seek to eliminate differences while fostering the development of a common identity" (p. 287). As I will describe in my discussion of the Québec literature later in this chapter, the emphasis on Black students' immigrant trajectories and specifically, the 'integration' process in Québec's schools can in fact be quite alienating and difficult for many Black youth in the province.

In discussing Multicultural policy, Thobani (2007) asserts that the (false) notion of a common unifier or collective identity based on alleged shared values is "excessively ambiguous and internally contradictory" (p. 145). I argue that this critique can be also be applied to Québec interculturalism – which though not an 'official' policy like Multiculturalism (Nugent, 2006) has as its aim to affirm Québecers' positionality as a (linguistic) minority within English Canada, thereby diminishing the visibility of the struggles experienced by racialized and minoritized individuals and communities in the province (Walcott, 2014).

As Chiasson and Howes (2012) point out, central to Québec interculturalism is the notion of a "reciprocal engagement between the Québec majority and the province's 'cultural communities'" (p.2). I argue that Québec interculturalism is therefore problematic because it portrays and separates those from minoritized and racialized communities as *other* in relation to White, Francophone, Québécois majority. The discussion later in this chapter makes evident the ways in which Black students in Canada are othered by teachers and peers.

Whereas Multicultural policy (allegedly) advocates for the importance of respecting and honouring the *mosaic* of Canada's diverse peoples – by respecting differing linguistic and cultural practices and identities - Québec interculturalism emphasizes the importance of "social cohesion and integration through communal values" (Chiasson and Howes, 2012), wherein the French language remains at the center of a so-described common identity amongst Québecers (Leroux, 2010). Despite increasingly diverse demographics in the French school system that emerged as a result of the language legislation - instituted in 1977 - it was only in 1995 that intercultural awareness initiatives were introduced into the province's teacher training programs in order to help mostly White teachers be better equipped to teach a diverse clientele (Potvin, 2008).

Notably, in 1998, major reforms to Québec's education program included a component about inclusive curricular practices in response to increasing diversity in the larger student body (Magnan et al., 2016). However, despite such important inclusions, the research revealed that first (and to some extent second) generation Black Québec youth were much more likely - than their non-Black peers with longstanding roots in the province - to experience graduation delays, and in many cases, dropout (McAndrew et al., 2008). Subsequent quantitative research produced similar results (McAndrew et al., 2013), while the qualitative research identifies many factors such as racial discrimination at school as a systemic problem facing Black students in the province (Eid et al., 2011).

## Black Youth and Education in Canada

### "Streaming"

As the discussion in this section helps to illustrate, a lot of what we know about Black youth and education in Canada is located in the Ontario context. A historical look into the schooling experiences of Black Canadian students from across the Toronto area illustrates how approximately 90% of the participants discussed how streaming[4] practices – which the authors refer to as "colour coding" - were a significant factor contributing to their academic disengagement (Dei et al., 1997). Further, such streaming practices were defined as the tendency to place Black students in low-level academic courses, and to direct them to vocational and technical schools, despite these students' desires to pursue conventional academics (Dei et al., 1997, p. 104).

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[4] James and Turner (2017) define "streaming" as grouping students according to perceived or demonstrated schooling abilities.

In discussing the schooling experiences of Black Canadian youth nearly two decades later, Henry (2003) claims that overall, they remain underserved by their schools. Citing, in part, the 1988 Toronto School Board of Education's report on Black students, Henry (2003) identifies the gap in that research in not discussing the extent to which schools and teachers from the "dominant group" are responsible for not "challenging institutional practices and social relations" that racially discriminate against Black students (p. 208). Henry (2003) asserts that not much has changed since the 1988 report, and she is critical of the ways in which Black Canadian youth continue to be streamed into vocational or basic level programs, thereby illustrating the extent to which their academic capacities – and their school aspirations - are underestimated and undermined.

Giving traction to the discussion of streaming thus far, significantly more recent findings from the collective results of numerous reports about Black students in the Toronto area underscore the tendency for teachers and guidance counsellors to discourage Black students from pursing post-secondary education (James and Turner, 2017). Further, as James and Turner (2017) discuss, the streaming of Black students reflects the consistently low expectations that their teachers and other school staff have of them (p. 41). The overarching message communicated through such streaming practices is that Black students do not have the capacity to succeed, or do not belong, in academic courses. As I will discuss in my study, the tendency to stream Black students into vocational programs and away from post-secondary education is also a problem in Québec schools.

**Black youth report differential treatment from their teachers and lack of support.**

Interested in understanding the first-person perspectives of Black Canadian youth, Briggs (2017) employed a CRT in education framework to discuss and analyze data from interviews

with Black, male, Caribbean youth in Toronto. Briggs (2017) shares how a number of his participants reported feeling "abandoned" by their teachers. Further, Briggs' participants felt that their teachers did not provide support for, and nor do they seem to care about Black male students' desire to achieve academic excellence (p.12).

In another study highlighting the first-person perspectives of Black, Canadian youth, participants described how they feel uninspired and frustrated by curricula that emphasizes the experiences and histories of White people (Dei and James, 1998). Another key point made by the youth participants - a point also echoed by Henry (2003) - was that not having Black teachers reinforces their sense of marginalization at school, making them feel as though they have no one to go to for support and encouragement (Dei and James, 1998).

Much like Briggs (2017), Shroeter and James (2015) also employed a CRT in education lens for analyzing the first-person perspectives of their French-speaking, African-Canadian, Black youth participants and their teachers of varying backgrounds. Notably, this study was located in large city in Western Canada, a part of the country that has not produced much research about Black youth and education. Interestingly, when speaking about the data from discussions with their Black youth participants, Shroeter and James (2015) asserted that race was mentioned only a few times when speaking about their challenges at school, such as low teacher expectations and lack of academic support (p.32). The authors surmise that the Black student participants were perhaps reticent to assert that poor treatment from teachers was indicative of racist views about their Black students (Shroeter and James, 2015). This claim is consistent with what other researchers in the field have said regarding the fact that Black students are more likely to identify racist treatment as (more generally) poor treatment from White teachers, and

that Black students perceive that White students are not penalized in the same ways when misbehaving in class. (Dei et al., 1997; Dei, 2017; Howard, 2002; 2014).

Other research also explores the extent to which Black youth report negative and differential treatment from their teachers as compared to their White peers. In a longitudinal (and seminal) study exploring the first-person narratives of Black youth – as well as with key actors in their school and everyday lives in Toronto - participants expressed frustration in response to what they identified as differential treatment towards Black students from their teachers (Dei et al., 1997). The youth participants also spoke about how teachers and principals often single out Black students for allegedly disobedient and disruptive behaviours, while claiming that White students who use "racist language or activity" have no consequences from these same teachers (p. 87).

In discussing the schooling experiences of racialized and minoritized, Canadian high school students, Ruck and Wortley (2002) explored questions about differential treatment, posing the following question to their youth participants: Do you think that teachers at your school treat students from your racial group better, worse, or the same as students from other racial groups? (p. 188). Black youth participants in particular expressed feeling as though their White teachers were more severe in their disciplinary interventions with Black students, versus their White peers or other visible minority groups or individuals (Ruck and Wortley, 2002). These kinds of reflections from Black youth participants are also consistent with some of the research discussed earlier.

In a study with more positive findings, Smith et al. (2006) were interested in underscoring Black students' capacity for academic excellence and discuss the schooling experiences of Black youth living in Halifax and Toronto, respectively. The findings revealed

that overall, the youths' schooling experiences were very positive, with the majority articulating ambitious career aspirations (Smith et al., 2006). The findings also revealed that the Toronto cohort - nearly a third of whom were first generation Canadians - reported experiences of racial discrimination at school much more frequently than their peers in the Halifax cohort, the majority of whom who were second or third generation Canadians, living in a place with a long-standing Black community that dates back several generations (Smith et al., 2006). The Halifax cohort attributed their resilience to racial discrimination to their parents' persevering attitudes in response to such adversities (Smith et al., 2006, p. 356). Notably, both cohorts acknowledge their experiences of racism in school, though they respond to it quite differently.

Particular attention in the research has been paid to Black, male youth learners in Canada, who are frequently referred to as "at-risk" (James, 2012). As James (2012) and Henry (2003) argue, if we want to better understand the tendency to label Black male youth as at-risk, then we need to look more specifically at how race and racism are deployed by teachers and principals in their treatment of such students. We also need to look at how, as James (2012) explains, the at-risk designation reflects the convergence of racial stereotypes about Black youth in perceiving them as "immigrants, fatherless, athletes, troublemakers, and underachievers" (p.474). Finally, James and Samaroo (2017) urge teachers and principals to debunk their own racial stereotypes regarding their Black students, while urging for better supports for Black boys, including high academic expectations (p. 486). Deficit views about Black youth underachievement that blame the students for the academic difficulties do not account for how racial discrimination and low teacher expectations negatively shape their schooling experiences.

In discussing the much-fewer known perspectives of teachers, Dei et al. (1997) provide some important perspectives regarding what these participants say about the so-called "hidden

curriculum" at their schools. Specifically, the teacher participants – whose racial location were not identified - noted the tendency for White teachers in particular to dissuade Black students from pursuing maths and sciences (Dei et al., 1997, p. 90). These teacher critiques illustrate how such teacher perspectives enable us to better identify how Black youth are racialized and underserved at school.

**The pressures of combatting negative stereotypes and "acting White".**

As the discussion about Black youth and education in Canada highlights thus far, school can be a site of racial tensions and unmet academic needs for Black students. We also know from the discussion in chapter two that Black youths' school success or difficulties are often framed in terms of "acting or performing White" (Fordham and Ogbu, 1996; Tyson et al., 2005). As I will illustrate in this chapter section, Canadian researchers also draw on theories of acting White (and performing Black) when discussing Black youth and education in Canada. As Dei et al. (1997) discuss, Black Canadian youth sometimes feel as though they must act in a certain way in order to 'fit in'. As one participant in this study notes: *"*So you had to be like they be, or else you're a troublemaker, again, or you're the strange kid that's got this, you know, psychological problem*"* (p. 247). By 'they' we can infer that perhaps this individual is referring to his White peers or teachers.

That school success is – for many Black Canadian youth – equated with fitting in by acting White is also discussed by Yon (2000). A Black youth participant from Yon's Toronto-based study (2000) discusses the pressures of feeling hedged in by expectations of how he should act – (though according to whom, he does not say) as he explains:

I'm not, well, I don't want to be perceived that way. Like you see them walking around. They have a certain walk, certain clothes. If you say the wrong thing they'll turn round

> and start arguing. I don't like to categorise myself. There are days when I feel like "normal", whatever "normal" is. I don't categorise myself in a way that I have to wear this, this, or this, or else I'm not Black" (Yon, 2000, p. 85).

This passage reveals some of the complex identity negotiations faced by this young man. I infer from the quote that by "they", he is referring to his Black peers, and thus, how peer-pressure from other Black youth to 'perform' Black weighs heavily on him. Expanding on 'performing Black' and the accordant stresses that go along with this, this young man is perhaps resisting living up to his Black peers' rigid notions of Blackness. The quoted passage above also illustrates the struggles the young man encounters in desiring to be his authentic self at school, raising the question of whether or not Black youth face more pressure to conform to self-limited or externally limiting, culturally-specific identity constructs than other visible minority youth, or White youth, and how such pressures come to bear on these youth's overall school engagement and academic outcomes.

As mentioned earlier, much of what we know about Black youth and education in Canada emerges from the Toronto context, where there is the country's largest Black population. In soliciting the first-person perspectives from Western Canadian teachers (mixed demographics) regarding their Black students, Shroeter and James (2015) help to illustrate how some deploy culturalized racism when talking about their Black students. For example, some of the teacher participants interviewed discussed how they perceive some of their Black male students' alleged identification with hip hop (because of their clothing such as baggy pants and oversized t-shirts) as negative. Such perceptions are also consistent with other findings about Black youth in schools, asserting that Black boys are perceived as "troublemakers" (James, 2012, Yon, 2000).

Collectively, such discussions also help to illustrate how some Black Canadian youth experience pressures in conforming to certain ways of dressing, acting, and of 'being' Black, from their Black peers, while at the same time, realizing that the standard according to which they are judged and judge themselves, is Whiteness (Dei, 1997b; Yon, 2000). As I will illustrate in my study, understanding how Black students interpret poor treatment from their teachers – and how their White teachers and principals perceive them - tells us a great deal about the school and classroom contexts that shape Black youth's schooling experiences in Québec.

**Culturalized racism.**

When discussing what teachers from White, European backgrounds say about their racialized students, Dei et al. (1997) assert the tendency is to interpret these students' classroom behaviours by deploying culturalized racism. As Dei et al. (1997a) also discuss, White teachers often cite cultural deficit as the reason for some Black students' academic difficulties and behavioural problems. Howard (2018) adds that the results of racist structures are often passed off as differences in culture, and we see this clearly in Dei et al. (1997), and others' discussion of White teacher perceptions of their Black Canadian students (Briggs, 2017; Henry, 2017).

As Codjoe (2001) discusses, one of the ways in which the false notion that "people of African origins" lack the interest or capacity to thrive at school is perpetuated with claims that they perceive academic success as a form of acting White, which illustrates how culturalized racism is deployed when discussing Black student achievement (p. 346). In attempting to debunk the notion that Black students do not value or are not capable of academic success, Codjoe (2001) sought to emphasize the first-person perspectives of high-achieving, Black students in Alberta. Codjoe (2001) underscores that the participants found it difficult to identify the in-school factors that contributed to their successes, because the negative impacts of racism and

racial discrimination figured so prominently in their schooling experiences which they identified as: low teacher expectations and differential treatment, racial stereotyping, and a hostile school environment (p. 349).

Black youth participants also spoke about how positive support from parents, and support from their Black peers, help to counter what they described as feelings of humiliation and defeat in response to racial discrimination from teachers and White peers at school (Codjoe, 2001, p. 353). Codjoe (2001, 2006) also emphasizes how pride in one's heritage and knowledge of one's culture helped to reinforce Black identity in a positive light, which he cites as a contributing factor to his participants' academic successes.

A deficit view of Black student achievement underscores how structures harm Black and other racialized students, while simultaneously enabling teachers and principals from owning and eradicating their racist beliefs. Moreover, when teachers pass off as cultural difference or cultural incompatibility (with White, European perspectives) - while not taking responsibility for how their Whiteness enables them to make such claims – they perpetuate what Dei et al. (1997) refer to as the "politics of exclusion" (p. 104). As the discussion in this chapter section has thus far helped to illustrate, Black youth suffer from such exclusions that are driven by systemic racism in their schools.

In the culminating discussion below, we can see what some researchers identify as the factors that are critical to ensure the school success of Black students. In a discussion of Toronto's Africentric Alternative school, Howard and James (2019) discuss how it emerged from the efforts of members from Toronto's Black communities who pressed the necessity of creating a school where the "diverse realities" of Black students would be valued, a place that would also help to combat the racism experienced by these students (p. 7). Some of the findings

from interviews with teachers and administrators from this school illustrate the importance of positively affirming Black students' identities, while also ensuring to preserve the "humanity and dignity" of the students and their parents (Howard and James, 2019, p.10). This holistic approach to Black youth and education considers the importance of providing academic *and* emotional support for Black students, in part, to counter previous experiences of racism experienced in other school contexts. Earlier research also illustrates that Black teachers are often able to better support their Black students' progress, by recognizing and praising their efforts (Henry, 1996). Henry (2017) also notes that having Black teachers is central to engaging Black learners in both primary and secondary school, places where these students often feel underrepresented and marginalized by their teachers, who are most often White.

**Section Summary**

The discussion about Black youth and education in Canada in this section helps us to understand the schooling contexts and specific experiences of Black Canadian students, such as: the pressures of acting White, and (the negative impacts of) culturalized racism enacted through teachers' low expectations and negative perceptions about their Black students. The discussion also illustrates how Black youth feel as though they are subject to mistreatment from teachers more frequently than their non-Black peers, and that Black teachers are instrumental in providing support and encouragement for Black students (Henry, 2017; Howard and James, 2019; Smith et al., 2006; Ruck and Wortley, 2002).

In the remainder of this chapter I discuss the literature about Black youth and education in Québec, emphasizing the uniqueness of the context while pointing out the similarities and differences between the Canadian and Québec literature.

**Black Youth and Education in Québec**

Québec's Black communities are extremely diverse, including (but not limited to) individuals from both the English and French speaking Caribbean, as well as from English and French speaking Africa. Collectively, Québec's Black communities are also the largest visible minority in Québec (Statistics Canada, 2016). The most recent demographic information about Québec's Black population from the 2016 Statistics Canada National Household Survey indicated that there was a total of over 245,000 Black people in the province, and that the largest concentration of these individuals lives in Montreal. In the French language literature in Québec, Black and other racialized youth are often referred to as "youth of immigrant origins", despite what are for some, long standing roots in the province. Accordingly, the so-described importance of – and accordant difficulties with – "integrating" into Québec society are often emphasized when discussing Black and other racialized youth of immigrant origins (Kanouté et al., 2016; Lamarre, 2003; McAndrew, et al., 2013; McAndrew et al., 2008).

I interpret the tendency to emphasize Black youth's educational challenges or successes in terms of their generational grouping as reductive, because it suggests: 1) That these individuals are implicitly 'other' based on their immigration trajectories that can be traced back, in some cases, to their parents and grandparents' emigration; and 2) That some Black youth – despite being Canadian-born or having done a majority of their education in Québec, for example, do not possess the 'right' kinds of cultural capital (language, cultural practices, past educational experiences or training, etc.) for life in Québec. However, while I remain critical of the "youth of immigrant origins" designation when talking about Black and other racialized youth in Québec, I will defer to the authors' referencing of generational grouping in some instances, in order to clearly identify whom these authors are referring to.

As I will explore in my discussion in the remainder of this chapter - the realities of immigration and accordant challenges with the French language do indeed impact many Black students in the province. However, in emphasizing these aspects of some Black students' experiences, much of French language research about Black youth and education in Québec avoids talking in clear terms about the ways that race and racism are also part of Black students' school experiences – as it is for their Canadian peers.

The discussion in this chapter section provides some key information regarding the challenges that Black youth face at school that have to do with language issues, higher dropout rates amongst students of Anglo-Caribbean origins in the English sector, and differential treatment from teachers. In further exploring these key themes in the remainder of this Québec section, I will also emphasize the research that includes the first-person perspectives of Black students, perspectives that I argue are critical for enabling us to better understand their schooling experiences and what they identify as obstacles to their school success.

**The Québec education context**

The minority language status of French Québecers within the rest of English-speaking Canada prompted the establishment of specific laws governing education and language of instruction in the province. Bill 101 was passed in Québec in 1977 and contains numerous laws to ensure the primacy of the French language in areas such as: government institutions, the consumer retail industry, and specific admissibility criteria dictating who has the right to access English language schools. The application of Bill 101 in Québec schools is rigorous and has many implications for first and second generation Canadian youth in particular. An overwhelming majority of Black students in Québec (87.4%) attend schools in the French sector, while 12.6% go to English schools (Balde, 2013). People from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan

Africa represent 19.5% of the immigrants admitted to Québec between 2007 and 2011 (Balde, 2013). To put some of this information into context, one in eight members of the city's Black communities is a unilingual Anglophone (Torczyner, 2010).

**Classe d'accueil.**

The majority of first-generation Canadians who arrive in Québec at high school age - and who are not fluent enough in the French language to follow the regular classes - begin their formal Québec education by spending time in the *classe d'accueil* (welcome class), before attending classes in the regular stream (Kanouté et al., 2016; McAndrew et al., 2013; McAndrew et al., 2006). For many young people in Québec, having limited knowledge of the French language is one of the central obstacles at school.

Conceived in 1969 as a response to increasing numbers of non-Francophone students entering the French school sector in Québec, the ultimate goal of the welcome class was and remains to facilitate linguistic and so-called cultural integration for first generation Canadian immigrants, ensuring the eventual assimilation of these students into the regular stream, both at the primary and secondary levels (McAndrew et al., 2006). The welcome classes are separate from the regular school classes and are composed of students with differing mother tongues, and varying knowledge (including none at all) of the French language. It is also common to have students from different grade levels in the same class as they may be at the same level in the French language (Potvin and Leclercq, 2011b).

The amount of time that a student spends in the welcome class varies; some may be transferred into the regular stream after a few months, while others may spend years in the interim program (Potvin et al., 2014). Moreover, many students who attend the welcome class – including large numbers of Black youth from various countries – incur academic delays that have

major consequences upon their educational trajectories; some drop out of high school altogether, or they complete their remaining high school credits in the adult education sector (Potvin, 2012). Notably, Eid et al. (2011) assert that the welcome class – while designed to aid new immigrants at integrating into Québec society – does not adequately cater to the diversity of linguistic and culturally different backgrounds of the students, and because of this oversight, Black and other racialized and minoritized students often encounter discrimination from their teachers through this mandatory school process (p. 67).

**The statistical portrait: Black youth in Québec**

This dissertation began with a mention of the quantitative study by McAndrew et al. (2013), which is often used as a reference point, overall, for talking about Black youth education in Québec. In tracking the schooling trajectories of first and second generation Québécois students of immigrant origins[5] in both linguistic sectors - who began high school in 1998 and 1999 - this research provides a detailed, quantitative account of key indicators such as: schooling delays accumulated two years after commencing high school; retention and graduation rates, as well as drop out (McAndrew et al., 2013). The data from the first and second generation Canadian groups (identified in part in footnote 5) were compared and contrasted with the same data from students of these groups who were identified as third generation Canadians. Those students identified as Black in this study were divided into two groups - Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, respectively, with students from numerous countries represented in each group (McAndrew et al., 2013).

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[5] In this study, those who were born abroad, or who have at least one parent born abroad are referred to as youth of immigrant origins. Third generation Canadians are those whose parents were born in Canada, but may have other family members, such as grandparents, born abroad. To add, numerous groups identified under these terms participated in this study, including (though not limited to) youth from: East Asia; North Africa and the Middle East; Eastern Europe, and Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In comparing the data on the completion and dropout rates amongst the entire target group, overall dropout rates amongst first and second generation participants were 23.7%, versus 32.9% for Black students (McAndrew et al., 2013). The findings from this research also highlighted the fact that – of the 1998-1999 cohort attending English[6] language schools - Black youth of Caribbean origins had significantly lower graduation rates than their peers of African origins (59.9% versus 86.5%). Another key finding from this study indicates that approximately 1/3 (37.4%) of participants from the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa attending school in the French language sector were identified as having special needs, including learning and behavioural difficulties, as compared to, for example, 12.2 percent of youth of East Asian origins who received these labels (McAndrew et al., 2013, p.41). The research also revealed that overall, Black youth participants from the English language sector - more than any other group studied - were more likely to receive their high school diploma from an adult education centre (one out of every ten students) (Balde, 2013).

As the report summary above signals, Black youth in Québec are experiencing challenges at school; however, while clearly identifiable, these challenges cannot be properly understood through quantitative research alone (Balde, 2013). Accordingly, in the qualitative data obtained from public consultations and discussions with over 150 participants from Québec's racialized communities (including youth participants, parents, experts and representatives from community groups), Eid et al. (2011) produced many relevant insights regarding Black youth and education in Québec that help fill the gaps in our understanding regarding factors that contribute to their schooling difficulties as signaled by McAndrew et al. (2013).

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[6] It is important to note here that findings regarding the trajectories of Caribbean and Sub-Saharan African youth attending schools in the French language sector were not disaggregated as they were for the English language sector.

Much like McAndrew et al. (2013), Eid et al. (2011) conclude that Black youth are overrepresented in special education classes and that they are more likely than other racialized youth in Québec to be labelled 'at-risk'. As a result of public consultations held with numerous experts from the education sector, Eid et al. (2011) assert that evaluation and categorization processes for conferring students with such labels could be "tainted by racial profiling" (p.65). Eid et al.'s findings also illustrate that overall, Black youth participants report receiving more extensive, school disciplinary measures (detentions, suspensions, sent to school office) than the other youth participants (2001, p.60).

When attempting to explain the reason for such conditions facing Black youth at Québec schools, Eid et al. (2011) point to systemic, institutionalized racism, adding that institutions such as school boards and schools "although appearing to be neutral, are not adapted to the needs of certain groups or are clearly harmful to them" (p.52). Eid et al. (2011) also correlate the previously mentioned factors as having direct implications on academic disengagement and dropout of Black students in Québec (p. 63).

**Challenges of cultural and linguistic "integration".**

As mentioned earlier, Black and other racialized and minoritized immigrant youth may experience difficulties integrating in Québec school contexts, in part because of language difficulties *and* the divisions amongst students that differentiated instruction produces. Potvin (2008) identifies the pressures of linguistic and so-called "cultural integration" as exercising a significant impact on Black youth of immigrant origins. In discussing the lives of second-generation Haitian-Québécois youth, Potvin (2008) asserts how their collective experiences in social and educational settings dictate a clearer sense of *belonging* than their first-generation Canadian parents and their first generation peers (Potvin, 2008). However, Potvin (2008) also

suggests that as visible minorities, first and second-generation Haitian-Québécois youth experience barriers to full inclusion in Québec society, that, as she explains, are "built by and around racism and social determinisms arising from an immigration process that they did not initiate" (p. 100).

First and second generation Haitian Canadian youth in Québec cite that being Black prevents them from being able to be fully accepted in Québec society (Potvin, 2008). Pegram (2005) argues that this is especially true for those individuals living in White-majority suburbs, and that negotiating the realities of racism - in addition to what Pegram (2005) asserts are existing feelings of *homesickness* for first generation, Haitian-Canadian youth - makes living in Québec difficult for some. Adding additional perspective to this discussion, a first generation, Black student attending the welcome class in Estrie asserts "I just hang out with my Black friends" (Steinbach, 2015, p.81). When asked why this was the case, this student claimed that he didn't like the "Québécois" (Steinbach, 2015, p. 81). Another Black, female participant spoke about how Black female students are often harassed at school (Steinbach, 2015). Steinbach (2015) also discusses the fact that Black and other racialized participants experience discrimination frequently at school, and that this creates a substantial barrier – along with – as the author claims - other institutional issues – to Black students' sense of inclusion at school (p. 81).

While second generation Black Canadian youth may experience challenges related to the fact that they carry dual or multiple linguistic and cultural identities, Labelle and Salee (2001), and Pegram (2005), assert that first generation Canadian youth have the added caveat of experiencing "emotional instability" due to a sense of geographical and emotional displacement, something that second generation youth likely do not experience because of the fact that they

were born in Canada. Labelle and Salee (2001) refer to such discordant feelings experienced by first generation Canadians as an "ideology of return" (p.10). It might also be that these youth experience 'emotional instability' because of the challenges experienced at school that – as discussed above - have to do with the difficulties engendered by attending the welcome class, including discriminatory treatment from their francophone, Québécois peers.

Finally, in a literature review that highlights key points about Haitian Québec youth from the past and today, Potvin and Lafortune (2014) assert how the immigration process has a profound impact on first generation, Haitian youth, and that perhaps because of this, second-generation, Black-Canadian youth do better at school (p. 5). This claim contrasts with what we know about Black youth in Toronto, for example, for whom as James and Turner (2017) explain, the longer they are in Canada (for example, third generation Canadians) the worse their educational outcomes.

**Adult education.**

As noted, many youth who immigrate to Québec while in high school begin their education in the province in the welcome class; a number later transfer into adult education centres in order to complete their high school credits (Potvin and Leclercq, 2011a). Adult education centres in Québec emerged in the 1970s in order to serve a primarily adult clientele, many of whom were missing a few credits to complete their high school studies. However, since the early 2000s, the demographic profile of the Centres has shifted dramatically, the vast majority of students being youth from 16-24 years old, endeavouring to complete their high school studies (Potvin et al., 2014).

Barring some specific criteria[7], the majority of Allophone[8] and Anglophone immigrant youth in Québec must attend school in French, in Québec. One way to skirt the rigours of Bill 101 for these youth is to leave their French language high schools and attend adult education in English, as it is legal to do so (Potvin et al, 2011a). Endeavouring to better understand the profiles of youth attending French and English language adult education centres in Montreal and Sherbrooke, Québec, Potvin and Leclercq (2011a, b.) and their graduate student research team (of which I was a member) conducted over one hundred interviews with mostly first and second generation - as well as some third generation Canadian youth between the ages 16-24 years old.

Most of the individuals interviewed began their high school studies in traditional, French language, Québec high schools, with the vast majority of first generation youth attending the welcome class being placed far below their age and grade-appropriate levels and remaining there from three months (in one case) to two years. These individuals eventually left the welcome class to complete their remaining high school credits in adult education (Potvin and Leclercq, 2011b). For many of the first generation immigrant youth participants, English was their second language learned at school in their home countries, and they had little or no prior knowledge of the French language (Potvin and Leclercq, 2011b). These youth began their studies in (conventional) French language high schools in Québec and eventually transferred into adult education, in order to be able to complete their studies in the English language.

The findings from this study revealed that regardless of their immigrant status, participants reported experiencing immense emotional and psychological stress due to factors such as chaotic family situations, the stress of immigration, and difficulties learning and living in the French

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[7] http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/parents-and-guardians/instruction-in-english/eligibility/#c1818

[8] Allophone is a designation applied to those for whom neither French nor English is their mother tongue.

language, which resulted in an overall lack of interest in school (Potvin et al., 2014). The findings also revealed that: 1) due to poor French skills, allophone immigrant youth are often placed in grade levels far below previously achieved levels in their home countries; and 2) youth report feeling stigmatized by their time spent in the welcome class, and that such feelings of frustration and embarrassment impede their sense of motivation and purpose at school, sometimes leading to dropout (Potvin and Leclercq, 2011b). Potvin and Leclercq (2011b) argue for the importance of implementing proper psychological supports for youth learners at adult education centres in order to ensure their school success.

### Treatment from staff and other students: Negative stereotypes and culturalized racism.

Further contributing to our understanding of the qualitative factors that make school difficult for some Black students in Québec, Howard (2014) discusses the data from interviews with two Black, Anglophone teachers in Montreal. Steinbach (2015) also discusses the fact that Black and other racialized participants experience discrimination frequently at school, and that this creates a substantial barrier – along with – as the author claims - other institutional issues – to Black students' sense of inclusion at school (p. 81).

Emphasizing the centrality of race in the participants' reflections regarding the obstacles to Black students' school success in Québec, Howard (2014) also alerts us to the fact that pervasive racism is a major cause of Black students' academic difficulties in the province, something that Eid et al. (2011) also signal in their research. The research also shows that youth of immigrant origins experience discrimination from their francophone, Québécois classmates. Data from discussions with immigrant youth in Estrie (located approximately 1.5 hours from Montreal's city centre) indicate that attending the welcome class can result in isolation and social exclusion for some students (Steinbach, 2015). A first generation, immigrant youth participant

expressed her difficulties at school because of being in the welcome class: “It’s hard for me to make Québécois friends because they only talk and hang out with other Québécois” (Steinbach, 2015, p.70). As already mentioned earlier, the welcome class is for students with weak or non-existent French language skills attending school in the French sector – thus engendering a separation of first (and sometimes second) generation youth from their francophone, Québécois peers.

The first person perspectives from Black students in Québec help us better understand some of the factors that make school difficult for them. For example, in interviews, first-generation, Haitian-Québécois youth share their feelings of frustration at school that have to do with combatting negative stereotypes about Black students, as one participant claims: “You must do well so as to avoid being noticed” (Lafortune, 2014, p.53). Other participants also expressed feeling the pressure to outperform their White, non-immigrant peers, because they believe that their White teachers have low expectations of Black students (Lafortune, 2014, p.55).

Also endeavouring to understand the perspectives of Black students in Québec, Estimable’s small focus groups with generation 1.5, Haitian-Québécois (e) high school students highlight their difficulties at school because of feeling the necessity to disprove their teachers’ and principals’ negative stereotypes about Black youth who are not born in Québec (2006). For example, one participant revealed that when having her report card from Haiti evaluated, her school principal insisted that levels previously obtained were not concurrent with Québec education standards, without explaining how or why he came to this conclusion (Estimable, 2006). Another student shared a story about how some of her teachers accused her and other Haitian students of falsifying their Haitian report cards that illustrated good grades (Estimable, 2006, p.121). Several of Estimable’s participants also explained how they experienced negative

treatment from White teachers that they perceived as discrimination, as well as low academic expectations (Estimable, 2006). The claims of low teacher expectations from the Black youth participants discussed here also echo what we know about Black Canadian student experiences (Briggs, 2017; Dei et al., 1997; James, 2017; Shroeter and James, 2015).

Collins and Magnan (2018) also emphasize the rich insights that first person perspectives from Black students in Québec provide for bettering our understanding of what they identify as the challenges at school, and specifically, teachers' enactment of culturalized racism by perceiving their Black students through a deficit lens. In the quote below, one student recounts a negative interaction with her White teacher:

> First class, the teacher says: "Oh, we have many ethnic communities today! You sir, where are you from?" So I look at her and I tell her: "Well, I was born here" (*laughs*). "So I don't know what you're talking about." And then she says, "Well, you weren't born here in the classroom. (Collins and Magnan, 2018, p. 422).

In the quote above we see that the teacher perceives this Black student as a foreigner, despite what the student tells her about her birthplace. Another participant talks about how his guidance counsellor discouraged him from pursuing his passion for Social Work at CEGEP, telling him that he would be better suited for vocational studies (Collins and Magnan, 2018, p. 426). As discussed earlier in this chapter, Black Canadian students also experience low teacher expectations that result in academic streaming (Dei et al., 1997; James, 2017).

In another study that presented the findings from the "life stories" of youth participants identified as being of immigrant backgrounds – including students of sub-Saharan African and Caribbean origins - Magnan et al. (2017) found that Black youth attending college in Québec frequently experience discrimination at school. One Black youth participant shared a reflection

about how she believes that she and other Black students are perceived negatively by their teachers: “With the Italians, it’s okay. But the Blacks, the Arabs, forget about it. The barriers between the Québécois teacher and the immigrant student are very clear and apparent” (Magnan et al., 2017, p. 217). As we see from the above quote, this student perceives that her and other Black students are treated poorly by their teachers, as compared to other students of immigrant origins who are White. Magnan et al. (2017) conclude that the Québec research does not pay enough attention to documenting the extent to which racialized and minoritized students experience discrimination at school. To this effect, the authors note that teachers and school staff “belonging to the majority group” (without identifying what this means) may be responsible for discriminating their students “of immigrant origins”, but that little is known regarding such perspectives (Magnan et al., 2017, p.219).

As discussed above, some Black students in Québec feel hampered and discouraged by their teachers’ negative perceptions of them (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Estimable, 2006; Lafortune, 2014). In conclusion, there is a real and serious crisis facing Black students in Québec, and the combined effects due to lack of academic support in school, streaming to vocational programs, and limited or zero access to Black teachers, can result in these youth being unreceptive in class, or withdrawing from school altogether (Howard, 2014, p. 501).

**Conclusion**

In the Canadian literature about Black youth and education, race is discussed frequently in relation to, for example, low teacher expectations, differential treatment of Black students, and streaming practices that place Black youth in vocational programs and low-level academic streams (Briggs, 2017; Dei et al., 1997; James, 2012; James, 2017; James and Turner, 2017). In Québec, much of what we know about Black youth and education in the French literature is

explained in relation to the students' immigration trajectories - and ability to "integrate" in Québec school contexts - while not taking into account the salience of race in these students' schooling experiences (Labelle and Salee, 2001; Magnan et al., 2017; McAndrew et al., 2013; Lafortune, 2014; Potvin et al., 2014).

The final section of this chapter explored the literature including first person perspectives of Black youth in Québec, which indicates that they feel their intelligence, as well as their academic capacities and goals, are often scrutinized and underestimated by their teachers, and that they feel it necessary to outperform their White peers to deflect teacher and peers' racist thinking about them (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Eid et al., 2011; Estimable, 2006; Howard, 2014; Kanouté, 2002; Lafortune, 2014; Livingstone, Celemencki, Calixte, 2014).

In attempting to unearth what Black youth say about their schooling experiences – and what their Black and White teachers and principals identify as the obstacles to their Black students' school success – the BCDP project decided that a participatory research model seemed best suited to address its education research goals, because it prompts research participants to co-construct the research and enables first person stories to be central to the project data. As I will explain further in chapter five, the adult participant data was gathered through qualitative interviews that also emphasized the importance of first person perspectives to tell us about, for example, what the participants identified as the obstacles to their Black students' school success, and how race, racism and racialization figure in their perspectives.

In the following chapter I discuss three methodological frameworks that informed the design and execution of the BCDP education research: Action Research, Participatory Action Research Methodology, and Youth Participatory Action Research Methodology. In prioritizing first person perspectives of adult and youth participants, participatory research methodologies

merge well with a CRT in education theoretical framework, which I will use for analyzing my data in chapter six and seven. In conclusion, in unpacking what we mean by participatory when 'doing' participatory research *with* – as opposed to *about* youth – the following chapter enabled me to make sense of the inevitable discord that emerges between methodological approaches to thinking about research, versus what actually happens 'in the field'.

# Chapter 4

## Methodology: What do we mean by Participation when doing Participatory Research?

### Introduction and Chapter Overview

In this chapter I unpack and explore the notion of participation in three participatory-based research methodologies: Action Research, Participatory Action Research (PAR), and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). The two latter frameworks informed the conceptual design and execution of the BCDP education research. Writing this chapter also enabled me to flesh out the methodological concerns I had when working with the youth researchers during the BCDP education research, and later when analyzing, in particular, the data from the youth focus groups discussed in chapter six. I begin with a brief discussion of Action Research, as it inspired the origins of PAR. I then discuss various interpretations of participatory involvement in research, as outlined by a few key PAR theorists. During the first part of this chapter I begin the construction of what I refer to as a methodological roadmap, first mapping out the central tenets of participatory research as discussed and defined in the PAR literature. During the remainder (and majority) of this chapter, I discuss participatory research with youth, including YPAR. I conclude by highlighting the specific challenges inherent to doing YPAR.

### Action Research

Inspired by the work and writings of early twentieth century psychologist Kurt Lewin and employed mostly in North American and European contexts, Action Research (AR) is used primarily in institutional and educational settings, where the emphasis is on engaging in constructive dialogue to identify problems and find solutions for issues in the workplace (Brown and Tandon, 1983). AR is often employed by teaching professionals endeavouring to identify problems and better their professional practices, specifically in universities, faculties of

education, and in high schools (Cornwall and Jewkes, 1995).

AR methodology emphasizes the function of research as a vehicle for learning about one's professional experiences, while also making such reflections accessible to others (McTaggart, 1998). AR also incorporates an amalgamation of data-gathering methods such as ethnography and grounded theory with an emphasis on the fact that if the researcher is not satisfied with the outcome of their research, they reconfigure the plan until they are satisfied (McTaggart, 1991). This reflexive and iterative approach to conducting research also ensures that *learning to learn* is one of the central objectives of AR (Brown and Tandon, 1983).

While PAR and AR overlap in their focus on self-reflexive, iterative and change-oriented processes, their ideological underpinnings are quite different. Whereas professional concerns and interests primarily drive researchers who employ AR methodology, at the heart of a PAR approach is that research collaborations between academics and community members must be the change catalyst for the former individuals (Baum et al., 2006; Dorman, 2002).

**The Origins of Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

The origins of what we now refer to as PAR methodology emerged during the late 1960s from the work of University researchers located in community settings in countries such as India, Brazil, Africa, and Columbia (Hall, 1984). Academic researchers working in "developing world" countries wanted to involve community members in research about the struggles facing their communities, as opposed to parachuting into such communities and leaving with so-called *objective* observations and conclusions about what they had seen (Hall, 1984). Drawing inspiration from Action Research, and the writing of Brazilian social activist and educator Paulo Freire, early PAR researchers conceived of an approach to doing research that merged an action-oriented focus with a social justice orientation (Fals Borda, 1994).

Early PAR researchers set their sights on working with community members who lacked the cultural capital to affect real change in their communities (Grossi, 1981). These researchers also advocated for situating community members at the center of knowledge creation (Hall, 1992). An early example of a PAR project in India emphasized the establishment of literacy programmes for community members, with key needs and outreach approaches identified solely by those community members (Hall, 1984). Another early example took place in Tanzania, where academic researchers and community members analyzed grain storage problems in order to inform the construction of sustainable storage silos (Park, 1993).

At the same time as such developments in PAR were occurring in Africa and India, attendees at the 1977 World Symposium of Action Research in Cartagena, Colombia, discussed the possibilities for research to be an 'open project' informed by numerous participant perspectives. As Hall (1992) suggests, the collaborative efforts of academics and community researchers mean that what counts as data varies according to each specific project. Finally, conceptualizing research as a true collaborative effort, argued Fals Borda (1994), would upend the widely held belief that academic researchers are the guardians of so-called scientific truths (p.32).

**Defining PAR.**

Inspired to a large extent by the writing and activism of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, early PAR researchers imagined a methodology whose purpose was to use research as a vehicle for helping to change the circumstances of the poor and the marginalized; individuals whose authentic input was rarely - if ever – represented in academic research. A unique feature of PAR is that close, collaborative relationships between all partners are established and sustained over a long period of time (McTaggart, 1998). PAR is also distinct from other qualitative research

methodologies such as Ethnography or Case Study, that, according to Creswell (2003), position the researcher as a kind of *voyeur* whereby they study an "intact cultural group in a natural setting over a long period of time" (p.14). A PAR approach also emphasizes transparency about the researcher's involvement and perspective, a feature that is not typically accounted for in other qualitative research methodologies. Such authentic engagement in research means that 'doing' is an iterative process, which necessitates the following cyclical steps: research, analysis, action and reflection (Baum et al., 2006, p. 854).

The notion of "insider" knowledge in participatory methodologies refers to expertise held by community/participant-researchers and is based on their lived experiences in contexts where the research is occurring. Whereas scientific researchers are often referred to as experts in their field, in participatory methodologies such as PAR and YPAR, lived experience and intimate knowledge of the research context and topic is considered 'expertise'. Reflecting on the importance of so-called "authentic" community participation in academic research, McIntyre (2000) emphasizes the reliance on 'insider knowledge' to best understand the problems being looked at. Prioritizing such perspectives – and thus respecting the richness and accuracy of community members' knowledge – also typifies the dialogical process of PAR, whereby the researchers are simultaneously shaping and being shaped by the research (Fine, 2007, p.7).

**What do we mean by Participation when doing Participatory Research with Youth?**

Before the advent of Youth Participatory Research Methodology (YPAR) in the late 90s/early ought's, adult researchers often drew inspiration from PAR when working in collaboration with youth in educational contexts, such as at schools and community centres serving youth populations. As Foster-Fishman et al. (2010) assert, PAR does not account for the kinds of challenges unique to working with youth researchers. We do know, however, that the

findings generated from such adult-youth participatory collaborations provide educators, researchers and policy makers with critically important perspectives that they would not otherwise be privy to. In this section I discuss and map youth involvement in participatory research onto what I refer to as a continuum of participation, beginning with more loosely defined "participatory" research with youth, and concluding with research that refers to itself as YPAR.

**Mapping a continuum of participation in participatory research with youth.**

As the discussion in this chapter section illustrates, what counts as youth participatory involvement in research varies considerably. For instance, in some studies, participation is imagined mostly in terms of consultation. Checkoway and Shuster (2003) solicited the involvement of youth who were working as consultant, partners and directors in community-based organizations that serve youth needs. These youth researchers were recruited after the initial study was designed with particular questions previously identified. These individuals worked with the adult researchers in evaluating several youth-focused services previously identified by the adult researchers, such as: youth correctional facilities, after-school programs, and health services directed at youth populations (Checkoway and Shuster, 2003).

Much like Checkoway and Shuster (2003), Sutton (2007) also worked with youth as researchers in a so-called participatory fashion, similarly soliciting youth perspectives in order to help the researcher to identify and then evaluate the services from a selection of justice-oriented, community-based programs serving the needs of primarily racialized and socio-economically challenged youth. Data gathering methods included holding group discussions with youth using open-ended questions, as well as conducting telephone and print surveys with the youth participants (Sutton, 2007). This form of youth participation ensured that the youth's input was

central to informing the researchers' evaluation of the previously mentioned programs. As in Checkoway and Shuster (2003), youth participation in Sutton (2007) does not extend to research dissemination.

The previously discussed authors contend that research, which solicits youths' perspectives, provides much-needed opportunities for them to help orchestrate positive change in the services directed towards them (Checkoway and Shuster, 2003; Sutton, 2007). I, however, question whether such limited and limiting levels of participation in academic research is – as the authors suggest - ultimately beneficial for the youth, and what they stand to gain from such experiences. Despite such limited involvement throughout the overall research process, the authors contend that such examples of youth participation enable youth researchers to contribute to the "democratization of knowledge" (Checkoway and Shuster, p. 21, 2003).

Another example of youth-informed participatory research favours using research as a vehicle for collaborative learning between adults and youth, and amongst the youth themselves. Working with Maori (New Zealand), and racialized youth from New York City, Tupuola (2006) organized focus group discussions with each group in their respective countries in order to understand the barriers to social inclusion that they experience in school and larger social settings (2006). Aspiring to understand the youths' lived experiences, Tupuola (2006) also used her research project as the platform for enabling youth to articulate the challenges of being a visible minority in their country-specific contexts. Much like the other two authors discussed, Tupuola (2006) is the sole author of the disseminated results from her research in which extensive verbatim passages from the youth pepper the publication and help the reader understand the barriers to inclusion that they experience in their lives.

Moving along the continuum of participation in which we learn about how youth are

stakeholders and key players in the research about their contexts, Powers and Allaman (2012) discuss a project that was driven by the youth researchers' frustrations in having to contend with the limited hours allowed for using school-issued student bus passes for public transportation.

Youth researchers – in collaboration with adult researchers – interviewed other youth affected by these rules, surveyed their transportation needs, and followed up with more in-depth interviews to further highlight the extent of the youth participants' frustrations. In this example of participatory research, the youth participated in each phase of the research – from identifying the problems, conducting the research, and then disseminating the data - alongside the adult researchers (Powers and Allaman, 2012). The findings from the research report produced by the youth and adult researchers resulted in a change in the rules governing the use of bus passes by youth (Powers and Allaman, 2012). Finally, though this project did not refer to itself as YPAR, it employed many YPAR principles, such as enabling youth to identify the problem to be studied, conducting research, and then providing youth with opportunities to suggest solutions to the authorities, based on the research findings.

### From Participatory Research with Youth to Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

#### Introduction

In the past decade, great strides have been made by academic researchers - as well as by social workers, community workers, and educators - to engage with youth as research collaborators, as opposed to research participants (Angod, 2016; Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2013; Guerrero, 2016; Herr, 2017; Scorza et al., 2017; Sydlo et al., 1991). Such adult-youth research collaborations reveal that research can provide empowering and transformative experiences for youth, while also being the catalyst for change in classrooms and schools.

What we now refer to as YPAR surfaced about two decades ago, merging tenets of PAR and the concept of Positive Youth Development (PYD), which is an approach to working with youth that emphasizes the optimization of developmental progress through targeted learning opportunities that focus on their strengths and interests (Lerner et al., 2005). Both approaches endeavour to provide youth with opportunities to be stakeholders and actors in the research about them, while challenging the notion that youth-related issues are problems to be managed (Catalano et al., 2004). YPAR is sometimes described as a form of enacted resistance against policy analysts, researchers, educators, and law enforcement authorities. Cammorata and Romero (2010) assert that YPAR is also a formal pedagogy of disruption, a means by which young people engage in transformational resistance. Implicit in YPAR is a pedagogical emphasis; that is, the research is often driven by problems identified by youth researchers and speaks to things like classroom curricula, school governance, and policy reforms.

While YPAR projects vary in terms of scope, organization and execution, at the core of the methodology are two central tenets:

> (1.) That projects provide opportunities for youth to engage in research that validates their existing skills and knowledge base while expanding such competencies; (2.) That adult researchers use their positionalities to take action in order to promote justice-oriented agendas informed by youth interests and needs (Scorza et al., 2017, p. 144).

Not only does YPAR provide youth with opportunities to design and conduct research on issues of great importance to them – unlike in some of the versions of participatory discussed in the first part of this section – involvement in YPAR projects also means that youth are afforded opportunities to participate as experts of their own research contexts. Such authentic participation in research positions youth to be able to propose the kinds of infrastructural changes

in social, political and educational institutions of crucial importance to them (Cammarota and Romero, 2010).

**Examples of YPAR.**

Working with youth from several different high schools in Michigan, Chezare and Marciano (2018) spent eighteen weeks with the youth as co-researchers on a project in which the emphasis was to push for policy reforms that would benefit (in particular) poor and/or youth of colour attending urban high schools. The research had four goals: (1) to better understand youth's perspectives by highlighting their negative experiences at school (at the heart of which were what they described as racial injustice); (2) to help the youth researchers develop their skills as co-researchers; (3) to provide the youth researchers with opportunities to meet and work with other youth in their city who had similar and different schooling experiences; (4) to promote educational reforms that reflect the youth researchers' own goals, interests, and perspectives (Chezare and Marciano (2018).

Chezare and Marciano (2018) also worked with the youth on a weekly basis in order to help train them in using basic qualitative research methods, and concluded in a public colloquium in which the youth researchers presented the project findings to a public audience (p. 690). In the spirit of transparency, Chezare and Marciano (2018) discuss how part of their motivation in working with youth researchers was inspired by their own interests in exploring the "utility of YPAR for improving youth's academic self-efficacy and community engagement" (2018, p.688). In this respect we see how for some adult researchers, conducting research inspired by YPAR methodology reflects their social justice commitments to improving the lives of the youth researchers.

Scorza et al. (2017) provide further information regarding the pedagogical emphasis unique to YPAR methodology, asserting how youth researchers "teach" their teachers (and other adult researchers) while gathering, interpreting, and disseminating the data (p.139). During this project the youth researchers (with adult mentorship and supervision) collectively developed a survey, which they administered in-person and online in order to elicit the perspectives of over 1,500 students regarding opinions and experiences of schooling conditions in California public schools (Scorza et al., 2017, p. 147). The project culminated with the youth researchers disseminating the results in public conferences and meetings, along with their adult colleagues. In highlighting the strengths that the youth researchers – the majority of whom self-identified as LatinX or African American – brought to the research project - Scorza et al. (2017) assert how YPAR allows youth researchers to assume their rightful position as "public pedagogues who have powerful impacts on others through the processes of conducting research and sharing it with multiple audiences" (p.144).

**The challenges of YPAR.**

What makes YPAR so revolutionary within the context (and confines) of academic research is that youth are involved as much as possible as full participants in determining and acting on research goals as a means for positive change in their school contexts. This differs from other approaches to research on youth such as case study and ethnography, where youth are often viewed as subjects to be observed and written about. Still relatively new on the methodological scene, YPAR is an important and unique methodology for adult-youth research collaborations. Not surprisingly, however, there are numerous challenges inherent to "doing" YPAR. For example, as Chezare and Marciano discuss (2018), contributions from youth researchers during their project required reliable and regular access to computers for sending and

responding to emails during the research project, something that not all youth had regular access to (p.699).

Another perhaps unforeseen challenge when doing YPAR is that inherent in the approach is the emphasis on youth leadership during the research process. However, youth can require extensive supervision from adult researchers during YPAR projects, for example, if they are not familiar with conducting research.

Chezare and Marciano (2018) discuss the necessity for closely supervising the youth during the data gathering process (which, in this case included scheduled interviews with peers and teachers) – as in their experience, most youth have never conducted research in this formal way (p. 701). Similarly, while having youth be involved in all stages of the research process is a YPAR goal, including in conceptualizing the research questions, Ozer et al. (2013) bring our attention to the fact that engaging and encouraging youth researchers to select specific research problems or topics does not always unfold organically, and that sometimes youth need to be presented with a number of options to choose from (p.13).

Also at issue are existing power relations between adults and youth. Ozer et al. (2013) emphasize the challenges that youth researchers experience when working in collaboration with teachers and principals, wherein the latter individuals can sometimes be in opposition to the youth's ideas and contributions regarding proposed action steps following data collection (p. 18). Similarly, as Kohfeldt et al. (2011) assert, school as a research site can be problematic, because it is an organization that serves young people "whose position is largely devoid of power" (p. 30). These positions can be difficult to unsettle through an individual research project. For instance, while YPAR methodology provides a clear framework for positioning youth as experts of their own (research) contexts, pre-existing relationships with teachers can influence the youth's

contributions. Teacher behaviours that either encourage or discourage youth researchers' opinions and reflections about the research shape (or inhibit) students' contributions as well as "possibilities for action" (Kohfeldt et al., 2011). This can limit YPAR's potential for suggesting school reforms. Tensions can also arise in relation to notions of validity. Mirra and Rogers (2016) focus specifically on tensions arising between the researchers, the Universities, and their accordant funding bodies regarding what counts as 'legitimate' research. While potentially limiting YPAR research, this situation means that YPAR can also provide youth and adult research collaborators with opportunities to "push back" against what are increasingly rigid pressures from funding bodies to move away from supporting democratic and collaborative approaches to conducting research such as YPAR (Mirra and Rogers, 2016, p.1263).

**Summary and Conclusion**

What distinguishes YPAR from other "participatory" research projects discussed earlier in the chapter is that youth are key actors throughout all phases of the research and dissemination process, and it is often concerned with school related matters. However, the business of "doing" YPAR involves some challenges. For example, adult researchers who do not have experience working with youth in this capacity may default to authoritative roles that can limit youth from assuming their position as co-researchers as opposed to research participants in service of an adult researcher's objectives. Some other limitations to doing YPAR are the tensions between what the youth identify as issues to be researched, versus what counts as 'valid' research according to the funding bodies.

Despite such discrepancies in defining what is meant by participatory when doing research with youth, the growing body of peer-reviewed, academic research – as well as the community-based, online publications – on studies that employ YPAR reveal a growing

movement of adult and youth researchers intent on using research as a catalyst for furthering change in the lives of the youth involved (Chezare and Marciano, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2014; Powers and Allaman, 2012; Scorza et al., 2017). Despite still being relatively new on the methodological scene, YPAR methodology is rich with possibilities. However, there is still much work to be done, especially when it comes to decentralizing notions of power and agency and defining – over and over again – what we mean by *participation* when doing participatory research with youth.

In the following chapter I provide a detailed account of the research design for the BCDP education research and in so doing, I differentiate it from this dissertation study, in which I do a race analysis of the data that looks at the salience of race in Black youth and Black teacher perspectives, as well as perspectives from White teacher and principal perspectives. I also provide some contextual information regarding the research site and my location as a White researcher looking at Black youths' schooling experiences.

# Chapter 5

## Methods: Research Design and Procedures

### Chapter Organization

In this chapter I describe all of the procedures involved in the execution of the BCDP education research. I was hired as a research assistant for this project, and in this dissertation, I used the data from interviews that my colleagues and I conducted. I then differentiate my analysis and discussion of the BCDP education research data from the previously authored works using this same corpus of data (Livingstone, Celemencki, Calixte, 2014; Torcyzner, 2010). In the last part of this chapter – by way of contextualizing my study – I discuss the BCDP education research contexts. I then discuss my location as a White researcher of Black youth contexts and why such reflections matter for this study. I culminate the chapter with a discussion regarding the limitations and strengths of the BCDP education research's YPAR methodology, and what such insights give us into participatory research processes with youth.

#### Introduction to the BCDP education research.

The project manager, Anne Marie Livingstone, hired me as a research assistant for the BCDP education research. This project was one of many concurrent initiatives under the umbrella of a larger, citywide research initiative entitled *Demographic Challenges Facing the Black Communities of Montreal in the 21st Century*[9]. A joint collaboration between the Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training and the Montreal Black Communities Demographic Project, the "21st century" project was a follow-up to a 2001 study undertaken by

[9] See document: https://www.mcgill.ca/mchrat/files/mchrat/ExecutiveSummaryBlackDemograhic2010.pdf

the same two organizations entitled *The Evolution of the Black Community in Montreal: Change and Challenge.* Using demographic data from the 2006 Canadian Census regarding various aspects of Montreal's Black communities, the 2010 study focused on education, the criminal justice system, employment, the elderly, and the role of faith-based organizations.

The results from the 2001 BCDP study revealed how Black high school students had slightly higher attrition rates than the general population (Torczyner and Springer, 2001). The purpose of the 2010 study was to see whether or not this situation had changed almost a decade later. Accordingly, the driving questions that informed the BCDP education research were as follows:

1. What do Black students view as the factors that influence their successes and challenges in school?

2. To what extent are schools and community-based organizations addressing the needs of Black students, and in what ways do they promote their academic success?

3. What can schools and community organizations do to promote the success and graduation rates of Black high school students?

The education project had two components. Anne Marie was to first identify and discuss new developments in relation to Black youth and education since the 2001 report, based on the answers from teachers and principals from schools with large Black student populations in response to the questions above. For this part of the project, Anne Marie and I conducted focus group discussions with Black and White teachers and individual interviews with Black and White principals at four Montreal high schools. The insights gathered from this data were published in the 2010 BCDP executive summary report entitled *Demographic challenges facing the Black community of Montreal in the 21st century* (Torczyner, 2010).

The second focus of the BCDP education research was to collect first-person responses from Black youth at the four schools to the questions outlined above. Informed by YPAR and PAR methodologies, the objective of this second phase of the project was to engage Black students as co-researchers in exploring how schools and community organizations help to promote the academic success of Black high school students in Montreal. For this part of the project Anne Marie and I recruited twenty Black youth researchers from the four schools where we conducted teacher and principal interviews. We subsequently prepared them for conducting focus group discussions with other Black youth at their schools.

The BCDP youth researchers were instrumental in: designing the youth focus group protocol and being the sole facilitators of the youth focus groups. The youth focus interview protocol – located in Appendix 5 – comprised of many questions designed to get the focus group participants talking about their schooling experiences, with an emphasis on better understanding what kinds of supports exist for support Black youth excellence at the four schools. While an intersectional analysis was not part of the study design initialized by Anne Marie, there were a couple of questions that look at issues of race in the youths' schooling experiences, and one questioned that prompted students to consider whether they believed that the same strategies for ensuring school success were necessary for boys and girls.

The BCDP youth researchers were also involved in the following tasks during the YPAR project: 1. Coding and analyzing the transcripts from the youth focus groups; 2. Disseminating the research results through academic conference presentations; and, 3. Co-writing up the results for two publications (Livingstone et al., 2010; Livingstone, Celemencki, Calixte, 2014). This part of the education project respected a number of YPAR criteria discussed in chapter four, such as

engaging youth in the data-gathering and co-analyzing and disseminating the results. The YPAR methods used will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

**Project funding, rationale for school selection.**

The BCDP education research was partially funded by the Services aux Communautés Culturelles of the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Leisure[10] (MELS) and the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation; the Commission Scolaire de Montréal (CSDM) also provided additional funding. The youth researchers' participation was voluntary, though upon fulfilling their agreement to attend at least 80% of the team meetings, each youth received a small bursary. The small budget for the project dictated the recruitment of only four Montreal schools to be involved, two in each of the Anglophone and Francophone sectors. The schools were chosen based on their locations in different parts of the city, and the fact that they had significant Black student populations. For example, one high school was located in a neighbourhood with a large Haitian population, while another was located in a part of the city with a large Anglo-Caribbean population. The other two schools were located in neighbourhoods with more mixed ethnicity demographics, including sizeable Black communities.

**BCDP youth researchers: recruitment and selection.**

Once Anne Marie and I selected the four schools, we cold-called the school principals and explained the project in brief while providing details regarding our expectations of the youth participant-researchers throughout the duration of the BCDP education research. We requested permission to visit each school on a specific day to recruit students from Secondary III-V (fifteen- seventeen-year olds). The justification for involving the senior students was based on

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[10] What was referred to as MELS is now called the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/the-ministere/ministere/minister-of-education-and-higher-education/)

our belief that they would be more comfortable participating in the project than their younger peers and would perhaps be more accountable for attendance during team meetings. After securing the principals' support from the four schools, a staff person from each school was designated as a liaison to work with Anne Marie and myself for the duration of the project. At two of the schools the liaison was the principal; at the other two schools, we liaised with the social worker or the vice-principal. Anne Marie and I then created a recruitment poster announcing the BCDP education research, including a date and time to attend an information meeting with us during the lunch hour.

The liaisons at two of the schools hung posters on our behalf to alert students to the recruitment meeting. At these two schools we met with groups of approximately 15-20 students that had seen the poster and were interested in learning about the project. After briefly presenting the project aims to the youth in these two groups, we prompted them with a few open-ended questions about their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, non-academic interests, why they were interested in being part of the project, and if they were comfortable working in a bilingual environment. We then gave them approximately fifteen minutes to respond to the questions. We also explained that if they were selected to participate in the project, they would be expected to attend at least 80% of the team meetings, a twice a month commitment over a four-month period. This explanation was followed by a group discussion where the youth described their educational experiences, positive and negative. At the end of the meeting we gathered the youths' written responses and informed them that we would let them know whether or not they were selected via email or telephone (as per their preference).

After meeting with students from the two schools where we held recruitment meetings, Anne Marie and I reviewed the questionnaires, discussing the students' written responses one at

a time. Our final selections were made based on this criterion: noted interest in the project, non-academic interests, bilingual capacities, and an even split between female-presenting and male-presenting participants. We did not, however, ask the participants to self-identify their gendered identities. Our final selections, therefore, considered the desire to have students from varying ages, linguistic, cultural, and traditional gendered groups. Once we selected ten students from the two schools where we held recruitment meetings, we contacted these individuals via email or telephone to set a date and time for the first team meeting.

The other two participating schools did not allow us to hold a recruitment meeting. Instead, these schools' liaisons each pre-selected five youth based on their interests in the project – as determined by their response to the posters in the school - and their bilingual capacities. When we met these students, we realized immediately that they were handpicked for being high achievers, including several members of student council from both schools. We wished to avoid this kind of selective representation during the recruitment process, but these two schools insisted on pre-selecting youth researcher-participants. When meeting with these two groups we explained to the youth that their participation in the project was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

**Attrition.**

Fourteen of the original twenty students selected remained in the project for the entire duration, including nine girls and five boys. Five students dropped out during the process. We felt that perhaps three out of these four individuals may have dropped out of the project because they were not genuinely interested in participating and were perhaps pressured from the vice-principal to participate. Another student left due to their student council responsibilities that conflicted with the project's requirements. Still, the final group comprised of a near even split

between boys and girls.

**Youth focus groups: recruitment.**

With input and feedback from the BCDP youth researchers, Anne Marie created a flyer for the purposes of recruiting Black youth participants to attend youth-led focus groups at each school. The flyers were then printed and posted in the school by the youth researchers. The youth researchers also told their friends about the proposed date and time for the focus group discussion. Students who expressed interest in attending the focus groups were given consent forms by the youth researchers and asked to bring them back signed on the day of the focus group.

**Recruitment and procedures for interviews with principals and teachers.**

As mentioned earlier, Anne Marie and I cold-called the participating schools. At the same time as proposing their school as a research site, we asked to conduct individual interviews with the principals, while requesting permission to hold focus group discussions with teachers.

**Project organization - research team meetings.**

The primary goal of the BCDP education working group was to train youth researchers with the skills necessary in order for them to be able to conduct focus group discussions with other youth at their schools, as well as to map out the various resources available at their schools geared towards helping Black youth succeed at school. The team met every second Saturday afternoon for a period of approximately four months, with another few meetings added during the final month of the project. A local YMCA in downtown Montreal provided us with a free room for conducting the meetings equipped with long, rectangular tables and a white board. I brought my laptop to the meetings for recording field notes of team discussions following guest presentations. Individual participation varied slightly from meeting to meeting, though youth

attendance was almost capacity for each meeting.

The meetings also functioned as a space for discussing the various issues raised by youth, such as – but not limited to – challenges and successes at school, experiences of racial discrimination, career aspirations, and extracurricular interests. Additionally, several members of Montreal's Black communities were invited as guest speakers during team meetings, presenting topics such as community resources available for Black youth, legal issues facing recent immigrants, and cultural activities that might interest Black youth in particular. Subsequent team meetings were held after the focus group discussions were completed in order to read through and analyze the youth focus group data in preparation for drafting and completing the research report. Once the team meetings concluded - which coincided with the end of the school year - Anne Marie and I continued to work on the report in collaboration with three members of the youth research team. The final report was published online several months later with the following title: Black Youths' Perspectives on Education Challenges and Policy (Livingstone, Celemencki et al., 2010) and emphasized in-school resources to help ensure the academic success of Black youth at the participating schools.

**Procedures/training in qualitative research.**

The first two months of the education project emphasized the 'how-to' of doing qualitative research, such as: how to take field notes, how to analyze school artefacts such as school newspapers, how to conduct focus group discussions, and how to conduct a "community mapping exercise" at their schools[11]. Anne Marie and I also led a couple of sessions on how to develop research questions, how to ask interview questions, as well as how to be active listeners

[11] The protocol for this mapping exercise can be found in Appendix 5.

during focus group discussions. The team meetings also focused on familiarizing the youth researchers with issues such as: school policies, antiracism initiatives in Montreal, and community-based programs targeting Black youth school success.

**Ethics and consent.**

***BCDP youth researchers.***

Anne Marie and I developed consent forms for the project in the planning phase of the research, prior to recruiting the youth researchers. The consent forms were designated for the youth researchers and their parents to sign, whereby the youth agreed to participate in the project and the various tasks associated. The form also contained information about the fact that the youth could withdraw from the project at any point. When attending the first research team meeting, the youth researchers presented their signed consent forms to us.

***For youth participants attending student-led focus groups.***

The second set of consent forms was designed for the youth focus group participants, and was created in consultation with the youth researchers during team meetings. The youth researchers distributed the consent forms to potential youth-participants at their schools who expressed interested in attending the youth-led focus group discussions. Interested students were told to return the signed forms directly to the youth researchers, or to the designated adult liaison at the school, in advance of the planned discussion (or to bring them on the day). Some participants only obtained consent forms the day of the discussion, later returning the signed forms to the student facilitators or the adult liaison at their school.

***For teacher focus groups and principal interviews.***

Both teachers and principals signed and returned consent forms to either Anne Marie or me prior to the interviews; all of the interviews were recorded and transcribed.

**Data collection methods**

***For principal and social worker interviews and teacher focus groups.***

Three of the four principal interviews were conducted in person and one occurred over the telephone. Each interview was recorded and the data was transcribed. At three of the schools, the principals organized a group of teachers on our behalf. The teacher focus groups were composed of teachers who attended on a voluntary basis, after learning about the project from the school principal. These focus groups were conducted on school grounds, and the number of participants varied, ranging from four to over ten teachers.

Anne Marie conducted two of the teacher focus groups on her own. I conducted a third teacher focus group that I co-facilitated with a McGill Education professor. The teacher and principal interviews were conducted with the interview protocols in appendixes three and four, respectively, and focused on the following themes: teacher/student relationships, classroom dynamics, curriculum, community support, and policy initiatives. Additionally, I spontaneously conducted an interview with a social worker at one of the participating schools. Whereas the student focus group interviews were informed by YPAR in the sense that the youth researchers collaborated with us in developing the questions and finalizing the questionnaire – as well as the youth conducting the focus groups - the teacher focus group and principal interviews were informed by a questionnaire designed by Anne Marie. All of the interview guides can be found in the Appendices.

**Youth researchers – community-mapping exercise.**

The youth-led data collection occurred in two parts: youth-facilitated student focus group discussions, and a community mapping exercise. For this latter task, the youth researchers spoke with school guidance counsellors and school community workers in order to take a

comprehensive inventory of extracurricular and community resources for all students, as well as those designated specifically for Black youth. The mapping exercise was executed with the help of a nine-page questionnaire - developed by Anne Marie - composed of questions to enable youth to compile as much information as possible about their schools. The questionnaire drew some inspiration from the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium's template "Criteria for an Equitable School"[12], and included sections on a variety of themes, such as school climate, equity and diversity, academic support and extra-curricular activities.

**Youth-facilitated focus group discussions.**

***Preparation.***

During the BCDP education meetings that focused on teaching the youth about conducting qualitative research, the youth conducted mock interviews with one another using questions they had developed based on their schooling experiences, including relationships with teachers. This training was informed by the Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework that we employed for designing this part of the BCDP project, and for preparing the youth researchers to conduct focus groups with other youth at their schools. During these mock interviews other students observed and took 'field' notes. The development of the student focus group questionnaire evolved out of these processes.

During subsequent team meetings, the BCDP education team brainstormed themes to be addressed in the student focus group questionnaire, such as: teacher/student relationships, Black communities resources, school environment, race-related issues, and factors that contribute to or hinder students' academic success. Together we developed a questionnaire that contained

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[12] https://maec.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/MAEC-Equity-Audit.pdf

approximately twenty-five questions reflecting the above-mentioned themes. These questionnaires were used by the youth researchers as guides for the youth focus group discussions and are included in appendix 5.

***Execution.***

Using the questionnaire developed by the BCDP education team, researchers from each school worked together in school-specific teams during the BCDP education meetings in preparation to facilitate one focus group discussion with other Black youth at their schools. Either Anne Marie or I attended the three, pre-organized focus group discussions in order to help set up the recording equipment. Our involvement was otherwise peripheral, though we did ensure that the recording equipment was turned on and continued to function throughout the discussion. We also collected the equipment at the end of the discussions and brought the recordings to the transcribers, who were hired by Anne Marie.

Each discussion lasted approximately ninety minutes and included 12-15 participants, with a seemingly even split between male and female presenting participants. For logistical reasons it was impossible to organize a student focus group at one of the schools. Anne Marie and I therefore met with a group of students from this school that we recruited at the end of a school day, outside the front doors of the school. We then sent the interested youth to an off-campus location that we had previously arranged with a local community group.

**Rationale for YPAR methodology choice and data collecting methods.**

Endeavouring to highlight Black youth voices in the BCDP, YPAR Methodology provided the closest methodological fit for many aspects of the project, because we wished to provide authentic opportunities for youth to participate in research that was shaped by their interests. What was not exactly YPAR about this project, however, was the fact that the youth

were recruited after the research design was complete. However, the youth researchers took active roles in designing the interview protocols for the youth focus groups, and they co-analyzed and co-disseminated the focus group data with Anne Marie and me.

The youth researchers' insights were integral in the creation of the youth focus group questionnaire, which informed the tone and direction of the youth focus groups that they facilitated with their peers. I believe that having youth researchers facilitate the youth focus group discussions created an atmosphere in which the youth participants were more likely to disclose the truth when asked, for example, about strained relationships with their teachers. Additionally, the community mapping activity that was undertaken by the youth researchers provided additional "insider" information regarding the various services offered for Black youth at each of the participating schools.

While the focus group was very generative, in hindsight I wish that Anne Marie and I had taken more of an intersectional approach to the protocol design with the students. While there was one question in the BCDP-YPAR protocol that prompted the male and female participants to reflect on whether the same school supports existed to ensure school success for both groups, they did not address this in the focus groups, and it wasn't clear to me if male and female participants differed on this issue because they did not gender identify when speaking and nor did the transcriber indicate this information.

On a final, important note, although four schools participated in the BCDP education research, for this dissertation I restricted my analysis to the data from three schools. Without a school liaison appointed by the principal from the fourth school, we were not able to organize a teacher focus group discussion, nor a coherent youth focus discussion. Moreover, the ad-hoc student focus group transcript from this school was based on a poor quality recording and

contains very little clear and useable data. Endeavoring to have the same participant representation across the schools, I therefore only used the data from the three schools for which we had coherent transcripts from interviews with all three participant groups (teachers, students, principals).

**Description of participating schools and interview participants.**

During all of the interviews conducted for the education project, either Anne Marie or I were present. As such, the details regarding the schools, contexts and specific information regarding individual participants and participant groups vary slightly for each school discussed in this dissertation. For example, much of the descriptive information regarding the schools is from my personal observations gathered during youth recruitment sessions held on-site, while other observations were added from going to the schools to conducted interviews myself. Additionally, in these descriptions I have included the pseudonyms I have accorded to participants and acronyms for schools. I employed these terms when presenting and discussing the data in chapters six and seven, respectively.

For the student focus groups facilitated by the youth researchers at the three schools, no personal information besides the names of the participants was collected via the consent forms, signed by the students and their parent or guardian. During the focus group at one of the schools, some students mentioned their own or their parents' country of origin, but this was not the case at the two other schools, and the facilitators did not prompt this information. When known and relevant, information about student backgrounds will be shared, however, it is not comprehensive.

***School #1: Raleigh high school (RHS).***

RHS is part of an English school board and is located approximately forty-five minutes

from the downtown core of Montreal in a suburban family neighbourhood with mixed demographics. This was the only school that I did not visit and am therefore not able to provide a physical description of. The neighbourhood where the school is located has a large, English speaking, West African population, and many third generation Canadians from various Caribbean, English-speaking islands.

During our telephone interview the principal (who is White) informed me that the school welcomed students from more than fifty-three different countries of origin, with approximately thirty-seven different mother tongues represented. At the time of the interviews, Black students from varying cultural backgrounds accounted for thirty percent of the school's population. The principal also informed me that most of the RHS students come from middle and upper middle-class backgrounds. 70% of students graduate with a high school diploma within five years, and 80% do so within six or seven years. Unlike the two other schools discussed in this chapter, RHS has approximately 7-10 Black teachers on staff (at the time of the interview), as well as a few Black support staff and administrators.

Principal (RHS-P): At the time of the interview that I conducted with RHS-P, he had been at the school in this capacity for three years. He was previously a teacher within the same school board, but not at RHS.

Teacher Focus Group (RHS-TFG): Anne Marie conducted this focus group on her own. The largest teacher focus group of the three schools, this group included ten participants that ranged from a first year English and Media Studies teacher, to someone that had been teaching secondary three English Language Arts for over nineteen years. Another participant had been at the school for eight years teaching Math and Computers. At least two community workers from the local Black communities also participated in this discussion. This was the only teacher focus

group with Black participants, who represented approximately half of the total participants. Student Focus Group (RHS-SFG): The student focus group at RHS had approximately seventeen participants from grades nine-eleven. The majority of participants were second and third generation Canadians whose parents are from English speaking Caribbean countries. There were also a few students whose parents were from Ghana, Africa.

***School #2: Champagneur high school (CHS).***

CHS is part of a French school board and is located on the island of Montreal, a great distance from the downtown core, but nonetheless in a bustling neighbourhood with many commercial strips. There is a high concentration of first and second generation Haitian Canadians, as well as a large North African population in the surrounding area, both of which are reflected in the school's student demographic profile. The largest school featured in the education project; during the time of the interview CHS had a population of approximately 1,500 students. CHS is in an old building from the 1970s that is in desperate need of a makeover, and it differs from the other participating schools in that the building houses a traditional high school – with special services for students with behavioural and language integration difficulties -- as well as a professional trades program featuring classes and certification in: plumbing, electrical work, and masonry. Attrition is a major problem at CHS, and during the interview with the principal she noted that over 45% of the students from the previous year's grade eleven class did not graduate.

Principal (CHS-P): At the time of this interview conducted by Anne Marie, CHS-P – who is White - had been in that role for four years, but at the school for eight years running. Her tasks included the overall direction of the school and, in a previous capacity as assistant principal, overseeing students with academic and behavioural issues.

Teacher Focus Group (CHS-TFG): Four teachers attended this focus group. One had been teaching secondary V Economics and History since 2001. Another participant had been teaching English as a Second Language to secondary two students for over a decade. Another participant was a Special Education teacher, and the final teacher did not introduce herself during the discussion. All of the participants who attended this focus group are White, and Anne Marie conducted this focus group.

Student Focus Group (CHS-SFG): Approximately twenty Black students from grades nine-eleven participated in the student focus group at CHS. During the discussion several of the youth spoke about their Haitian roots, while a few discussed the fact that either they or their parents were from Mali, the Ivory Coast, or Senegal[13].

***School #3: Altamount high school (AHS).***

This English language high school is located in a neighbourhood with many different ethnic and cultural communities, a historically working class, English - speaking population. AHS is tucked away at the end of a long road, far from the city's Metro line. The school population during the time of the interviews was approximately 330 students. According to the school principal, the majority of current students live in the immediate and surrounding neighbourhoods. She also noted that the school is very multicultural and that a majority of the students' families have been living in the area for many generations.

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[13] As mentioned earlier, no demographic information about the youth focus group participants was collected, but at this particular school students discussed their backgrounds more than at the other two schools, perhaps because some of the participants were not born in Québec, as was mentioned by a few individuals. Conversely, the other two participating schools were part of English school boards and it is therefore likely that the youth participants were at least second generation Canadians, as the requirement for admissibility in English language schools in Québec is that at least one parent attended primary school in English, in Canada.

My discussion with the school's social worker (AHS-SW) revealed that approximately 40% of the student population at the time of the interviews were of Black, Anglo-Caribbean heritage, with the remaining 60% a combination of (mostly) Caucasian and mixed ethnicities – many of Irish or Italian origin – as well as a small contingent of students with South Asian origins. At the time of the interview there were no Black teachers at AHS, and only two or three Black school staff, including the 'acting' Principal.

Principal (AHS-P): During the course of the education project the vice- principal of AHS – who is Black - was promoted to "acting principal" halfway through the school year. Before her current position she was an elementary school teacher with no previous experience working at a high school. As one of the only Black staff members at the school – and the only Black administrator who participated in the BCDP education research - AHS-P's insights during our discussion proved critical in helping to understand some of the particular challenges facing Black students at AHS, including low teacher expectations of Black students.

Social Worker (AHS-SW): The social worker at AHS – who is White - was the only support staff member that I spoke with of the three participating schools. At the time of the interview, she had been working at the school for a decade and had a deep understanding of the complex challenges experienced by Black students at AHS. During my interview with AHS-SW she explained how nearly half of the grade seven class were considered at risk of dropping out of school before finishing grade eleven, and that AHS did not have the resources necessary to support the specific needs of these students. Notably, AHS-W was the only White participant from my study who critically considered the challenges that Black students at her school face that might have to do with racial discrimination. Consequently, AHS-W's self-reflexivity and critiques of her White colleagues at the school prompted me to consider and treat her

contributions differently than the other White participants, who did not disclose such reflections during the interviews.

Teacher Focus Group (AHS-TFG):

A group of five White teachers participated in the AHS-TFG, one single, three-hour discussion that I co-facilitated with a McGill Education professor who had extensive experience teaching at inner city, American high schools. One participant had been at AHS for fourteen years, and taught English to secondary four and five students. Another participant shared that he had been at AHS for almost a decade and taught most subjects except for Math and Science. The third participant had been teaching at AHS for a decade and at the time of the interview, was teaching secondary four Canadian History in addition to a Black History course (the first time that the course had ever been offered at AHS). Of the two final participants, one had been teaching Math at AHS for three years, and the other had just begun her teaching career and was a floater teacher, instructing a number of different subjects and grades.

Student Focus Group (AHS-SFG):

Approximately ten to fifteen youth between grades nine-eleven participated in the student focus group at AHS. The vast majority of participants were third generation Canadians, mostly of English speaking, Anglo-Caribbean origins. Obtaining a 100% verbatim transcript of student reflections from this focus group proved impossible, as the quality of the recording was poor because of the placement of the recording device. However, between Anne Marie's field notes and the transcription, we were able to parse out some valuable student reflections.

**Consent for using the BCDP education data in this dissertation.**

I obtained approval to use all of the BCDP education research data from youth, teacher and principal interviews from Dr. Jim Torczyner, the project's Principal Investigator.

My request was approved by the McGill Research Ethics Board (see Appendix 1). The data that I discuss in chapters six is from the youth focus group discussions facilitated by the education project's youth researchers. The data from teacher focus groups and principal interviews discussed in chapter seven is also for the BCDP education project, interviews were conducted by Anne Marie and me. I did not conduct all of the adult interviews, but I had access to all of the education project data, including the transcripts from interviews that were performed only by Anne Marie. The analysis of the above-mentioned data is the original work of the author of this dissertation.

**Distinguishing the original work in this dissertation from the BCDP education research.**

As illustrated by the BCDP research questions presented earlier in this chapter, the emphasis of that project was on identifying school supports to ensure the success and graduation of Black students. The data from the youth and teacher focus groups, and principal interviews, were discussed in the BCDP executive report, without a single citation of verbatim data (Torcyzner, 2010). The data from the youth focus groups, however, was cited extensively in a report and later in a peer-reviewed publication ((Livingstone, Celemencki et al., 2010; Livingstone, Celemencki, Calixte, 2014).

What I noticed when reading the transcripts from the student, teacher and principal, BCDP education research data, was that Black and White teacher and principal perspectives regarding the obstacles to Black youth's school success diverged radically, that the youth and Black adult participant reflections echoed similar themes, and that White participants spoke about race in very different ways than the Black participants. Endeavouring to highlight the centrality of race in participant perspectives, in my study I do a race analysis of the data which underscores the salience of race in participant perspectives, and what such perspectives have to

tell us about Black youths' schooling experiences, school contexts, and relationships with school teachers and administrators.

Whereas the main emphasis of the BCDP education research was to identify the supports for Black student success and graduation at the participating schools, my central research questions are as follows:

1. What do Black youth say about their schooling experiences? How do race, racism and racialization figure in their perspectives?
2. What do White and Black teachers and principals identify as the barriers to their Black students' school success? What roles do race, racism and racialization play in their perspectives?

**Working the data - searching for emergent narratives.**

After reading the transcripts several times and noting the overlaps in reflections from the youth participants, I identified a few recurring narratives such as: poor school reputation, low teacher expectations and discouraging teacher attitudes. Inspired by Saldana's approach to organizing qualitative data (2014), I looked for single words uttered by the youth participants that were repeated, such as "teachers", "discouraging", or "help". I then searched for short phrases that were spoken frequently, such as how the youth felt as though their teachers do not provide them with academic support, or that they [teachers] "discourage" Black students, or the mention of poor school reputation. Since youth participants from all three schools discussed their school's negative reputation, I designated this as a title to organize the data, because it emerged frequently throughout different conversations. The second title that I designated to organize the youth focus group data is "teacher attitudes towards Black students".

During teacher focus groups and principal interviews, what came to light was how central

race was to participant perceptions of the obstacles to Black student success, and specifically, how Black and White adult participants diverged substantially in what they identified as obstacles to Black student success at their schools. Here I noted the repetitive nature of some reflections from White teachers and principals, as well as from Black teachers and one Black principal such as (cultural) "differences", students' "poor attitude" (from the former group), as well as lack of support (from the latter group). Accordingly, the adult participant data are organized under two categories: 1. White participant perceptions of Black students; 2., Black participant perceptions of Black students.

**Searching for emergent codes.**

As Saldana (2014) writes, when working with qualitative data, themes are to be understood as extended phrases or sentences that "summarize the manifest (apparent) and latent (underlying) meanings of data" (p.9). The codes that I designated to group the data include verbatim quotes from the data in their titles. For example, here are two codes from the discussion of the youth focus group data in chapter six: Invisibility of White dropouts: "White students also dropout but they never talk about that in the news", Teacher discouragement: "They're supposed to encourage and appreciate the students, and instead they discourage us".

Here are two codes from the adult participant data in chapter seven: Biased perspectives of White teachers: "Because we tend to be a White staff, we tend to see Black kids… like, as different" and, Different learning needs: "Not everybody learns the same way, and it doesn't mean they can't learn, it just means they learn differently".

**Considering my Location as a White Researcher in a Black Research Project**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, my BCDP colleague – who is Black – and I worked with a research team composed of twenty Black youth for the YPAR project discussed in this

chapter. During the several months that we spent working with the BCDP youth researchers we had many discussions about their schooling experiences, but also about music, culture, friends and family. In the spirit of transparency, I too shared some personal information during those discussions, including the fact that I regularly performed with local hip-hop/soul music collective, Kalmunity, and that I worked and lived in rural Japan for two years after finishing my undergraduate degree in 2000. This last story prompted the following question from one of the youth researchers: "How were you treated as a Black woman in rural Japan?". A surprising question given I am White. Henceforth – and long before I did a race analysis of BCDP interview data and constructed my conceptual framework around discussions about Black youth and education in Canada and Quebec - race was to be front and center to this dissertation.

My earliest memory of being perceived as a Black woman occurred when I was around six years old, attending day camp in Montreal. One of my camp counsellors, who was Black, told me "there's something that they are not telling you", and by *they,* she meant my parents. I was confused, but still young and not yet too cerebral, and so I did not think that much about this strange question as I (and this counsellor) struggled to manage my tangle of Black, curly hair during that very hot summer.

After returning to Montreal from Japan in 2003, I designed and taught yoga and meditation at four Montreal high schools. During the two years that I worked with the students - many of whom were Black – I was consistently told that they perceived me as Black, even when I *clearly* explained that I was of White, European origins. The earlier question from the BCDP researchers - which clearly implied that they too perceived me as Black - stopped me dead in my tracks. Not because they believed that I was Black, but rather because I realized that the personal disclosure that I was privy to during the team meetings may have been because I was perceived

as such. This concern was quickly debunked when I announced that I was in fact White, and of European origins, and, following this disclosure, the BCDP youth researchers proclaimed something very similar to my yoga students nearly a decade earlier, along the lines of "it doesn't matter what you say you are, we see you as Black". It was at this point that I started to consider the importance of considering how might the BCDP interview participants' perceptions of me as Black (or White) influence what they would and would not share with me? Moreover, how might my racial location as a White researcher of Black youth contexts perhaps shape my interpretation of the data?

To make matters more complicated (for me, not for the BCDP youth researchers), is that identifying as White is not the entire truth, at least from the purview of history and my utterly destroyed and never-to-be-recreated because everyone was murdered family tree. I am the child of Holocaust survivors. To be clear, my paternal grandmother, Faigie Tabacznik was murdered at Auschwitz when she was 38 years old, and about four months pregnant. Faiga's family of ten siblings counts one sole survivor, Tata Helen, who currently lives in the United States. Subsequent to my grandmother's deportation from Belfort, France, and murder upon arrival at Auschwitz, her three children – my father being the youngest – were hidden throughout the duration of the war by various Christian families and orphanages in France. My father, his two siblings, and their father, Jacques, all survived Faiga.

My mother was born just after the war in a former concentration camp in Germany, Bergen-Belsen, her father Morris (Moshe) Shipper's siblings survived, miraculously, while living in the Lodz ghetto. My maternal grandmother, Annie Orner, was the sole survivor of her family. And so this means that there was a time when my family were classified racially as subhuman, with tragic consequences.

Why is all of this messy and tragic history relevant in a dissertation about Black youth and education in Quebec? During much of this project I struggled to understand the lives of the participants based on the personal narratives that they shared, and what such stories have to tell us about their school and life contexts. As discussed above, I am often not perceived as White, and wonder what might that mean in the context of this study. Moreover, how did my racial location shape my discussion of the conceptual framework in chapter three and my interactions with the adult participants and youth researchers in the context of the interviews and BCDP-YPAR meetings? Finally, how will my race analysis of the data in chapters six and seven be shaped by my racial location as a White person? In problematizing my own racial identity – in part, by contextualizing the racialization of my family during the Holocaust – I illustrate the importance of troubling the larger discourse of race, or more specifically, what we think of or talk about when speaking about race in contemporary Quebec.

I believe passionately in the importance of highlighting Black youth voices – and those of their Black teachers and principals – in the research about Black youth and education in Québec, and how YPAR shows great promise for doing this work in the province. However, further reflections about my racial location as a White body in a Black research project - working with an entirely Black research team - had me consider the fact that I might perhaps be perceived of as an agent of oppression during the interviews by those individuals who perceived me as White. I also never considered how my racial location might affect the types of disclosure (or not) offered by the interview participants until I began analyzing the data.

In this same critical vein, I considered how the study findings may have differed, for example, if the participants at the RHS teacher focus group (the only one with Black teacher participants) were all Black. For example, what might the Black teachers say in the company of

only Black colleagues that they perhaps would not say in front of their White colleagues and a White researcher? I believe that AHS-P, who is Black, perhaps held back in her explanation of some of the racialized dynamics between Black youth and White teachers at her school because I was conducting the interview, and she would have perhaps been more at ease having the discussion with Anne Marie (who identifies as Black). In this same vein, I believe that the participants of the all-White teacher focus group at AHS were completely un-self-conscious in sharing their honest (and, in my opinion, deeply racist) perceptions of their Black students because the two interviewers (of which I was one) were White.

Notably, neither AHS-P nor the Black RHS teacher participants specify the racial location of the teachers who they say are treating Black students poorly, though I surmise that these individuals are likely White. During our interview, I inferred that AHS-P was referring specifically to White teachers, but that as a recent hire at AHS, she was perhaps reticent to make such claims 'on the record' with me. It is also possible that – as the literature in chapter three indicates – AHS-P did not specifically refer to racism, nor to the racial location of the teachers in question because she was raised to believe that it's not polite or correct to do so.

What is also probable, is that AHS-P was reticent to make such claims against White teachers because of the fact that I interviewed her, and as an olive-skinned woman of European descent I might have racist and deficit notions about Black student underachievement. And she would not be wrong to think any of these things. Therefore, to my great surprise, when analyzing the teacher and principal data in chapter seven – I unknowingly fell prey to my own engrained racist assumptions about Black youth and the obstacles to school success. In fact, my earliest reading of the French Québec literature in particular made me believe that – as the White participants so clearly describe in chapter seven – it was perhaps these youths' immigrant

trajectories and difficulties integrating in the Québec context that were 'getting in the way' of their ability to succeed at school. Critical race theory helped me to challenge these initial assumptions as well as critically reflect on my positionality as a White woman of European heritage; by working the data numerous times through a CRT in education lens, I put race at the front and center of my discussion about Black youth and education in Québec.

**Querying YPAR.**

A few months before the first meeting with the BCDP education youth research team, I began researching the participatory research methodologies discussed in chapter four, with a particular emphasis on understanding YPAR. My interest in YPAR emerged from the BCDP education research team meetings discussed earlier in this chapter, and many questions and concerns about this approach persisted throughout the duration the of project. By way of introducing the youth focus group data in chapter six, my exploration of YPAR in this last chapter section is shaped by observations about the dynamics between the youth facilitators and the youth participants during the two youth focus groups that I attended - as recorded in personal field notes during the discussions, in addition to observations about the research meetings with the BCDP youth team.

***The limitations of YPAR methodology in the context of the BCDP education research.***

In the early stages as a co-researcher on the BCDP education research, I realized that while many aspects of our work with the youth researchers were primarily inspired by YPAR, we also diverged from the methodology somewhat in order to organize and execute the project in a short period of time, which is not typical of YPAR (Caraballo et al., 2017). In the remainder of this section I discuss what I believe were the limits of YPAR methodology within the context of the BCDP education research, and I return to this topic – while also emphasizing the strengths of

YPAR – in the final chapter of this dissertation (chapter eight). I also hadn't considered a number of issues prior to working with the youth researchers, such as the fact that youth lack the financial resources, and also the experience required to orchestrate (academic) research design, conduct data analysis, and disseminate results in an academic way (Chezare and Marciano, 2018).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the emphasis of the BCDP education research was to look at in-school supports that help promote the school success of Black youth and to ensure graduation. These were the parameters within which the BCDP youth researchers were prompted to brainstorm in order to come up with relevant questions to ask their peers in the youth focus groups. These "brainstorming" sessions became the basis of the youth focus group protocol presented in appendix 5. The fact that the youth were not free to determine the emphasis of the research did not seem very YPAR to me. To this point, Ozer et al. (2013) remind us that engaging and encouraging youth researchers to select specific research problems or topics does not always unfold organically, and that sometimes youth need to be presented with a number of options to choose from (p.13).

Being a relative novice researcher and second year doctoral student at the time of the BCDP education research – and endeavouring to adhere to the parameters of YPAR methodology as I understood it - I struggled with feeling like a bit of a methodological fraud. How could we claim this project to be YPAR when the youth were perhaps constrained by the research goals that they did not determine? Moreover, when reading about and *doing* YPAR, and later, when writing this dissertation, I realized that much of the peer-reviewed YPAR literature I encountered had the names of the adult researchers exclusively, which led to some further question about YPAR: Is it possible that YPAR has perhaps become increasingly accepted as a

so-called 'legitimate' form of qualitative research because of the (now) myriad of peer-reviewed publications on the topic? Moreover, since the labour and precision involved in producing such publications often falls more substantially on the shoulders of adult researchers – and if youth voices are sometimes omitted from the dissemination process altogether - how "participatory" can participatory research, and YPAR, truly be?

Very early on in my work as a research assistant with the BCDP education research group it became clear to me that we had overlooked some important aspects about working with youth as co-researchers. For example, the youth had no prior experience in conducting research and therefore required constant mentoring throughout the months of our collaborative work. This could perhaps have been expected, but I did not anticipate having to exercise as much authority as I did, specifically in behaviour management and attendance accountability during team meetings. Or perhaps this was simply a function of being fifteen-seventeen years old? These were the challenges that I identified with YPAR that I did not find sufficiently represented in the YPAR literature.

I had not accounted for the importance of transforming the research meetings into a non-school like atmosphere, or that despite our best efforts at collaborative work, we were seemingly still perceived by the youth – not incorrectly – as being "in charge". My sense is that our attempts at getting the youth to settle down after arrival, reminding them to arrive on time, and requests to return promptly after lunch break were perceived – and not wrongfully so – as attempts to corral what was some very excited and effusive energy. I suspect that despite the jovial atmosphere during the team meetings – which were held at a downtown, Montreal YMCA - the residue of strained relationships with teachers reared its head in the context of the meetings, because discussions amongst the challenges at school often revolved around complaints about

their teachers. As Kohfeldt et al. (2011) assert, school as a research site in YPAR can be problematic, because, it is an organization that serves young people "whose position is largely devoid of power" (p. 30). Therefore, while the team meetings did not occur on school grounds, I suspect that the academic emphasis of the meetings, i.e., the research agenda – and the fact that we were discussing their schooling experiences - may have perhaps triggered some difficult feelings from the youth researchers.

As an emerging researcher, I experienced some of the earlier-described experiences as frustrating within the context of the BCDP education research, perhaps because I identified, firsthand, the tensions that arise when YPAR "on the ground" does not reflect what it looks like on the page. Such tensions made me interrogate the purpose and function of YPAR methodology as a set of guidelines for conducting research in collaboration with youth, because it sometimes felt as though I was figuring my way through a maze of sorts during the BCDP education research.

***The strengths of YPAR methodology in the context of the BCDP education research.***

While we diverged from an ideal YPAR methodology during the BCDP education research in a number of ways, I also believe that the youth researchers benefited a great deal from being involved in the project. The youth researchers participated eagerly during every team meeting, and especially during discussions about their schooling experiences. Simply listening to the youth talk to one another – while also talking directly with them – provided a deep immersion into some aspects of their personal lives and their schooling experiences. These enriching discussions and the time spent with youth during our team meetings were both fun and inspiring. These early discussions also prompted me to consider my racial location as a White

researcher of Black youth and their school contexts, and what influence this might have on my interpretation of the data, which I discuss further at the end of this chapter.

At least half of the BCDP youth researchers were on the honour roll – while also involved in extracurricular activities like student council and sports – and despite this, one of the common threads that united them were experiences of racism and racial discrimination at school and in social contexts. These first meetings felt very much in the spirit of YPAR, because we were focused on getting to know one another while also dovetailing with the explicit research goals of learning about the youth's schooling experiences and providing them with the space and time to share freely with one another; the latter point, I believe, is a strength and solidarity-building experience amongst the youth researchers.

There seemed to be almost an instantaneous familiarity amongst the participants, and I happily joined this comfortable, easy way of communicating and *being* during team meetings. I also had this sense that the BCDP youth researchers were genuinely excited to get to know one another and share experiences of their mutual schools, and all this on Saturday afternoons in the spring! This sense of comfort, familiarity, and confidence in speaking about their schooling experiences was also evident in these youths' behaviours as facilitators of the youth focus group discussions at their schools. As we learned from the discussion of the relevant literature in chapter three, Black students in Québec experience numerous challenges at school, and I suspect that working together with their Black peers in an environment that honoured their emotional and intellectual capacities was rewarding in ways that their schooling experiences are perhaps not.

At the beginning of the focus group at AHS, one of the BCDP youth facilitators said the following:

> There's no need to beat around the bush, so we'll get straight to the truth, anything we're going to talk about here is in plain air, it's not going outside. So teachers are not going to hear. Nobody is going to hear you. So basically, it's your own opinion, everything you have to say about school, the teachers, and whatever.

I am certain that the youth focus group data discussed in chapter six – in which the youth participants reflect emotional transparency and vulnerability in their discussions - would not have surfaced if these discussions had been facilitated by adult researchers, and certainly not if the youth facilitators had been White. It is equally important to consider that the ease with which the youth participants (and the youth facilitators) shared during the discussions might also be indicative of their urgent need to be heard, without filters.

Youth focus group participant responses emerged organically during the focus group discussions facilitated by the BCDP youth research team, I believe, because the youth facilitators also came to the table to share their own negative experiences at school, sometimes helping to draw similar narratives out of their peers. If Anne Marie or I had attempted something similar with the participants, I do not believe that it would have *landed* in the same way. To this extent, having the youth researchers facilitate the youth focus groups was instrumental in ensuring that these discussions – despite being organized around a specific set of pre-determined questions developed by youth and adult researchers together – were in fact quite organic in the sense that the participants often diverged from the set themes in order to recount some deeply personal stories that were further elaborated on at times by the youth facilitators.

As Ladson-Billings (1998) discusses, the centrality of race in Black youths' schooling experiences is exposed, in part, by their deeply personal, first person reflections. This last point, I believe, also helps to justify why YPAR was the best methodological fit for the BCDP education

research youth component, because it produces the contexts in which such rich and authentic data can emerge, fostering genuine connections built between the facilitators and the participants that is based on trust and shared lived experiences. In the following chapter I analyze the first person reflections of the youth participants through the lens of a CRT in education framework. In doing so I pay careful attention to what these stories have to tell us about Black youths schooling experiences, and what such experiences have to tell us about these participants.

While problematizing what would be (for me) some unforeseen challenges related to 'doing' YPAR, other aspects of YPAR methodology in the context of the BCDP education research were very successful. For instance, the work we did to prepare and produce the focus group protocol was fruitful for the youth researchers, because they then felt confident in facilitating the youth focus groups on their own. We also wished to provide the BCDP youth researchers with total autonomy in the facilitation of these focus groups, and we did so. Anne Marie and I attended the discussions and sat outside the circle, only ensuring that the sessions were recorded; our participation was limited to this sole function. In fact, I believe that it was our passive attendance which enabled the youth researchers to embody their brilliant selves as facilitators, as they delved into some difficult topics (to be discussed in the following chapter). In chapter eight I elaborate on the strengths of YPAR (in general), and specifically, within the context of the BCDP education research.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have provided detailed information regarding the procedures entailed in the organization and execution of the BCDP education research. I have introduced the reader to the schools and the participants who were interviewed for the BCDP education research. I have also explained the ways in which my discussion and analysis of the data in chapters six and

seven are my original scholarship and are distinct from the BCDP education working group's disseminated results. Finally, in this last section I asserted the importance of considering my own racial location as a co-researcher on the BCDP education research.

**Organization of the data chapters.**

In chapter six I present and discuss the youth focus group data and in chapter seven I discuss the teacher and principal data. The themes are introduced and identified at the beginning of every new section, as indicated by their accordant number (e.g. 2.1. 2.2. etc.).

# Chapter 6

## Findings and Discussion: Youth Focus Groups

### Introduction and Chapter Organization

In this chapter, I present and analyze the findings from the three youth focus group discussions that were facilitated by BCDP youth researchers. I make purposeful links between the data and some of the key research findings identified in the relevant literature in chapter three, such as: Black students' academic capacities are often underestimated by their teacher; teachers and school administrators often "stream" Black youth into low level academics and vocational programs; and, Black students report that teachers treat them poorly as compared to their White peers (Briggs, 2017; Collins and Magnan, 2018; Dei et al., 1997; 2017; Eid et al., 2011; James and Turner, 2017; Livingstone, Celemencki and Calixte, 2014; Potvin and Leclercq, 2011b; Lafortune, 2014).

The central research questions that will inform my discussion and analysis of the data in this chapter are: 1. What do Black youth say about their schooling experiences? How do race, racism and racialization figure in their perspectives? In this chapter and in chapter seven I look at the salience of race in participant perspectives, and I will be drawing upon my defining of terms and discussion of Critical Race Theory in Education and antiracist education in chapter two to inform my interpretation and analysis of the data. As I will underscore in chapter seven, this critical, race-informed lens will also enable me to examine the centrality of race in what the adult participants identify as the obstacles to their Black students' school success.

The youth focus group discussions that I attended at CHS and AHS were both held in large, multi-purpose rooms with desks and chairs arranged in a circle by the youth facilitators. That the youth facilitators welcomed their peers into the room, I believe, was critical both in setting the tone of the discussions to come and in making the space seem less formal and not intimidating. As well, having the youth researchers assume a position of friendly authority, I believe, enabled the youth participants to feel comfortable attending what would reveal itself to be some much-needed opportunities to vent amongst peers. To help facilitate the youth focus groups, the BCDP youth researchers used the interview protocol in Appendix 5. The entire BCDP education team developed this protocol over a number of meetings.

**Presentation of Findings**

**1. School reputation and impacts of negative media reports about their schools.**

A common issue discussed at length during each of the youth focus groups was the schools' poor reputations. As indicated in the interview protocol in Appendix 5, there was not a single question that pertained to school reputation, yet at each of the three schools, the topic was discussed following question #3, "What do you like least about your school?" Overall, the data below illustrates how a negative school reputation was attributed to two sources: peers' and the medias' negative and false perceptions of Black students.

***1.a. Peer bias: "That's where all the Black kids go".***

As discussed in chapter five, RHS is located in a Montreal suburb known in part for having large Haitian and French-speaking, African communities. The school has a diverse student demographic profile, with over forty mother tongues spoken by students. During the youth focus group, participants discussed how often they heard their peers from other schools saying negative things about RHS, which, as this student believes, is because of the multicultural

population: “But I mean, it’s like… I feel like when people hear RHS it’s like, ‘that’s where all the bad Black kids go to’”. This same participant then said:

> Many people get, like, “Oh, you go to the ghetto school. How do we know what a ghetto school is exactly? Like, what is a ghetto school? They probably think that ghetto school is like… It’s cause our school looks like a rainbow. And I know that… what’s so ghetto about it?

These comments enable us to see how the negative associations made about RHS because of the high Black student population are a source of frustration for this individual. Other participants discussed the negative comments about RHS that they have heard from their friends attending other schools:

> Student A: Yeah, it’s like, ‘Sher, what school do you go to? [RHS.]. Oh. How is it? It’s a bad school, eh?’
>
> Student B: When they asked me what school I go to, and I said [RHS]. And then they were like, ‘Oh. Do you have to wear a bullet-proof vest?’ […].

The following comment from an AHS student gives voice to overall feelings about the atmosphere at AHS: “When I walk in to school, literally I want to vomit, I feel sick”. This final reflection from another AHS participant gives us a sense of the discomfort that him and his Black peers feel because of the school atmosphere: “I think we’re actually starting to look kind of comfortable with the way people actually look at us”.

Overall, the data in this section gives us some insight into how negative school reputation can shape the participants’ interactions with peers from other schools. From RHS students we glean the racist assumptions made about Black youth by their peers from other schools; AHS

youth reflections emphasize the negative school atmosphere, alluding to the possibility that Black students are racialized.

### *1.b. Invisibility of White dropouts: "White students also dropout but they never talk about that in the news".*

Prior to the youth focus group discussion at CHS, a local newspaper had published at least two articles by francophone, Québécois journalists who depicted Haitian-Canadian students at CHS as unsophisticated and academically stunted. The comments below are in response to these reports:

> Student 1: They said that Black students from Haiti did not know how to hold a pencil in their hands (...) that really affected me. (own translation).
>
> Student 2: The worst is that they (the newspaper) claimed to really understand our lives and such (as Blacks students), and they used like, one isolated case, so people believe it to be true for all Black students at CHS (own translation).

Other CHS students shared their frustrations about information published in a local newspaper:

> "There was an article in a local newspaper and it said that Black youth dropout more than other youth, I don't notice that", (to which another student responded): "White students also dropout but they never talk about that in the news" (own translation).

The comments above illustrate the participants' frustrations in how reports about Black students from CHS emphasize Black academic underachievement, while choosing not to underscore White student underachievement. We can also glean from the above quotes how these students feel that such false representations about Haitian students at CHS are in part responsible for informing a negative public perception of *all* Black students at the school.

Another CHS student added that an article published in a local newspaper exaggerated

the economic difficulties of CHS students, alleging that some parents complained about the ten dollar per month cafeteria fees. As this individual asserts "It's like, they have a tendency to exaggerate…And it's like, this was just a small example, but it doesn't reflect our school, it's like, really, that's what you are going to focus on? (own translation). As the comment above helps to illustrate, this student is angry about the way that CHS parents and the school is portrayed by the local media as poor and, perhaps, disenfranchised. This adding to what we already know is often false and inflammatory information published about Black students at CHS.

Much like their peers at CHS and RHS, the youth participants from AHS are aware that some people view their school in a negative light. During the time of the focus group, AHS had been ranked as one of the lowest-performing high schools in Québec with respect to Ministry exam results in the senior grades, and this information was published in the local newspaper. While reflecting on this reality, one student from AHS made this comment, suggesting an acute awareness of social perception and bias: *"*Some people look down upon us, you know, they don't want us reaching the top. Some people try and stop us from getting there*"*.

**2. Teacher and principal attitudes towards Black students.**

We know from the discussion about Black youth and education in chapter three that overall, Black students in Canada and Québec are underserved at school, and that systemic school policies and practices can restrict Black students' abilities to achieve the kinds of school successes that they desire and are capable of achieving (Briggs, 2017; Codjoe, 2006; Collins and Magnan, 2018; Dei et al., 1997; Eid et al., 2011; Shroeter and James, 2015). We know substantially less – especially in the Québec context – regarding how relationships with teachers and school administrators may give rise to such realities for Black students.

### *2.a. Teacher discouragement: "They're supposed to encourage and appreciate the students, and instead they discourage us".*

As discussed in chapter three, at the time of the interviews, all of the teachers at CHS and AHS were White, while RHS had at least half a dozen Black teachers who attended the teacher focus group. As well, CHS and RHS had White school principals, while AHS' principal at that time was Black. As the following AHS participant reflection illustrates, poor and seemingly apathetic teacher attitudes contribute to his negative feelings about the school: "If we have the vibe that they don't want to be there, obviously that's why we act, you know, because I don't want to be here at all". Youth participants from the other schools also complained about unsupportive teachers and school administrators, as this CHS participant explains: "The staff, like, the school staff and teachers, they're supposed to encourage and appreciate the students, and instead they discourage us" (own translation).

As another CHS participant explains, teachers at his French language school – all of whom are White – do not seem to care about their jobs or their students: "Sometimes the teachers - I know many teachers - sometimes they're like 'I teach you, I get paid, that's it, that's all'. And there's like, no other contact" (own translation). From this comment we can glean the student's frustration with what he identifies as teacher disengagement and seeming apathy regarding their job.

Providing yet another glimpse into life at CHS, when asked about what she found difficult, overall, at school, this participant complained about CHS-P, who is White: "Like, the school principal doesn't do anything to help us. Do you think that influences people to dropout?" This quote provides some insight into how this student clearly identifies CHS-P as a discouraging influence at school. Moreover, we can perhaps assert from her use of the word "us"

that this student is identifying that CHS-P does not provide support for Black students at the school. Also important to note from the above quote, is that this is one of the only instances in the youth data where dropout is mentioned, and in direct response to lack of support from school staff.

Much like the CHS student above, here an RHS student describes his teachers' response to requests for additional help in the classroom: "Some try, but most of the time they don't because, like, they take it as defiance, as if to say, 'don't tell me how to do my job' ". Here we see that the student's attempts to communicate with her teacher are met with a negative response, which the student appears to interpret as indicative of the teacher's lack of investment in her school success. The teacher's response could also signal that she was having a bad day, is overworked, or is lacking support from the administration in her teacher functions and takes it out on their students.

Much like the participant quoted above, the comments below from two AHS students illustrate their teachers' negative responses to their requests for extra help at school:

> Student A: "Even if you go ask them sometimes, […] for help, sometimes they might not, they might not give you the help you need".
>
> Student B: "Some teachers, they discourage kids […] they make us feel bad […] they discourage everybody when they teach…".

Much like the reflections presented earlier, the data above speaks to Black students' efforts to secure extra help for their academic difficulties and their feeling that they are consistently met with teachers who do not want to help them. These dynamics make the students angry and frustrated because though they clearly have the drive and desire to work hard, these efforts are neither acknowledged nor rewarded.

As the discussion about poor treatment from AHS teachers continued, another AHS student shares his feelings regarding disrespectful teacher attitudes:

> Teachers that don't respect us, they can't expect us to sit down and respect them, like, when we get mad, we're humans, they act like they're the only ones that can get mad; they're the only ones who can get angry, like you know [...] so we deserve the same amount of respect that they want in their classroom.

The extent to which this and other AHS students are angry at their teachers – all of whom, as we know from the school profiles in chapter five, are White - is also evident in this next quote, where this individual believes that his teacher thinks he is, in his own words, "stupid": "Like teachers, it's like you say something and they make you feel stupid, they make you, like, inferior or something like you don't-like 'I'm here to learn, that's why I'm asking a question, to learn' ". In signalling that he interprets poor treatment from teachers as reflective of the belief that he (and perhaps other Black students) are inferior, this reflection might indicate that this student believes that his teacher treats him poorly because he is Black, but does not state it in such clear terms. Moreover, this student is also clearly motivated to engage in classroom learning and is angry that his teacher is not supporting his desire to do so.

Students from RHS also complain of poor teacher attitudes and teachers who do not provide the help they need, and are asking for, as they explain below:

> Student A: Like, I tend to give up easily.
>
> Student B: Yeah, me too.
>
> Interviewer: Is it because there's nobody they're pushing you?
>
> Student C: Yeah. My teachers think, 'Oh, I'm here in the morning…'

Student D: But, like, let's say, like, you go, they are there. But, just, like, you don't feel like being there, cause… like, let's say you're still not passing. You feel like they're wasting their time helping you. You get discouraged easily.

Much like the data earlier in this section, the last quotes above speak to the frustration and humiliation that the youth participants feel because their teachers negatively respond to their requests for extra school support, and because they feel disrespected and disregarded by teachers and, at CHS, their school principal.

As we know from the discussion in chapter two, because Black students experience racial discrimination at school from as early as primary school, they are more sensitive to, and also more likely to interpret poor treatment from White teachers as discriminatory (Henry, 1996; Dei and Calliste, 2000). In this section the youth participants do not frame poor treatment and low expectations from their teachers as evidence of their racist perceptions about Black students. However, we can infer from the data a sense of disappointment, frustration, and perhaps injustice that might signal the acknowledgement of racism in their teachers' poor treatment of Black students at all three schools.

### *2.b. Culturalized racism: "They have this idea, that since you're Black that means that you have nothing, nothing in your head. You're always, like, pushed to the side".*

As discussed in chapter five, RHS had at least six Black teachers – and several Black support staff – during the time of the interviews. In the RHS youth reflections in the previous chapter, the participants do not specify the racial location of the teachers that they are talking about. However, in some instances such as in the first quote below, this participant clearly illustrates his perception that his teachers' poor treatment and low expectations are because he is

Black. My default assumption as I analyzed the RHS data, therefore, is that these students' frustrations were not directed towards their Black teachers.

This first quote from an RHS student helps to illustrate how he feels as though he must disprove his teachers' false and negative assumptions about Black students:

> If in math class, for example, you're the only Black person in the class, each time you must prove that you are capable. I am capable of doing something. They have this idea, that since you're Black that means that you have nothing, nothing in your head. You're always, like, pushed to the side.

Another RHS participant discusses similar reflections about the difficulties he and other Black students at the school experience because of teachers' low expectations of Black students in particular: "It just feels like some teachers won't give Black students opportunities". As another student added following this comment: "So it's basically about being, like, being told you can't do it, basically". This data illustrates the extent to which the participants perceive that their teachers' poor treatment of them is informed by the belief that Black students are not worth helping, because they are incapable of achieving academic success. Such reflections suggest that teachers' racist perceptions of Black students may be what are causing them to treat these students poorly and have low academic expectations of them.

As discussed in chapter three, Black students attending school in the French language sector are much more likely than any other students to attend vocational programs or adult education (McAndrew et al., 2013; Potvin and Leclercq, 2011b). The data below is from CHS youth participants and speaks to their experiences at the sole French language school in this study. As discussed in chapter five, unlike at AHS and RHS, CHS houses vocational programs in the building.

To begin, one CHS participant had a clear perspective about the vocational programs, as she explains: “The fact that the vocational program is here, is just lame” (own translation). This comment suggests that this student is unhappy about the simple existence of the program. Another comment from a CHS youth participant illustrates her feelings about CHS-P’s enthusiasm for sending youth with academic difficulties to the vocational programs:

> She walks around to all of the classes, and then she says ‘Well if you don’t have good grades we can send you to the professional trades program? […] Not everyone really wants to go the CEGEP’. I so disagree with that. It’s easier there, is that what she (the principal) is saying? Between you and me, going further in school is better than just going to trades (own translation).

From the comment above it appears as though the push to attend the trades programs is understood as a kind of dropout incentive, which, understandably, this student interprets as meaning that CHS-P does not think that she can thrive in the academic program. The quote also clearly illustrates that this youth participant desires to further her academic path, but that she is not receiving the support of her (White) school principal to pursue these dreams.

Other CHS participants shared the things that their White teachers have said to them that they perceive negatively:

> Student A: The teachers will be like, instead of pushing you to do better, they will be like ‘if you don’t have good grades, have you thought perhaps of transferring to the professional program? Or perhaps adult education?’ (own translation).
>
> Student B: ‘It’s better to go to the vocational program, it’s way better than adult education’. Or sometimes they’ll say, like, ‘you can drop out for like a year and then start another program. (own translation).

Collectively, the data in this section also enables us to better understand that CHS participants perceive that their White teachers and CHS-P (who is also White) not only underestimate Black students' academic capacities, but that they actively push them to give up at conventional academics. Notably, above we have another example of how a Black student is directly implicating poor treatment from teachers – in this case, manifest as low academic expectations – as a factor that influences dropout.

**Discussion**

**Peer bias: School reputation.**

As the discussion in chapter three helped to illustrate, other Black Canadian students also report racist assumptions that teachers and peers hold of them which stem from the assumption that they are negatively identifying with gangster hip hop culture, for example, by wearing baggy jeans and large t-shirts (Briggs, 2017; James, 2012; Shroeter and James, 2015; Yon, 2000). As one RHS participant shared, her peers from another school asked if RHS students must wear bulletproof vests to school, commenting that RHS is a "ghetto school". The ghetto comment is meant as an insult, and is a common expression used in hip hop vernacular, alluding to those who are poor and disenfranchised. Moreover, other comments illustrating peer bias about RHS as a violent school, also draw from gangster hip hop iconography, in which hyper-masculine, hyper violent images of Black men proliferate (Celemencki, 2007). Overall, the RHS youth reactions to the peer bias discussed in section one suggests that they are frustrated by the negative assumptions made about RHS because of the large, Black student population.

The RHS youth data suggests that peers are actively maintaining "racist systems" by denigrating Black youth under the premise of humour (Sleeter, 2016b). It is possible that such individuals are White, but what if we perhaps consider the possibility that they are Black? As

Fryer (2006) asserts, the racial discrimination of Black and other racialized youth manifest as racially-motivated attacks or name-calling – including by their Black peers - is a "social disease", which is most prevalent in racially integrated public schools (p.217).

In my discussion with the AHS social worker that I will share in the following chapter, she mentioned that the school's poor reputation – much like at RHS and CHS - is largely a response to the large Black student population. As the reflections about the school environment from two AHS participants in particular suggest, there are negative influences at school that contribute to what AHS students describe as an unfavourable school environment. In their description of how they are racialized by their peers - and presumably, treated in racist ways - the youth in section one share the extent to which Black students are negatively reacting to the fact it is their "Blackness" – and not their individual behaviours and actions - which are under attack.

As Ibrahim (2017) names, their "Blackness is caught under the specter of Whiteness" (p. 511). Notably, neither RHS nor AHS participants mention the identities nor the racial location of the individuals that are causing them to feel uncomfortable. However, the data in section one infers that RHS and AHS participants' perceptions *of other peoples' racist thinking about them* may be part of what makes school difficult for these students. I argue that having to contend with what the youth participants describe as their peers' and the medias' racist perceptions about them, may contribute to their experience of school as a "site of racism" (Howard, 2002, p.103).

**Culturalized racism in the media.**

In section 1.b., CHS students speak about how an article published in a local newspaper portrayed Black students from Haiti as not knowing how to hold a pencil. Other reports emphasized the high dropout rates of Black students in the French sector, and the alleged economic difficulties of students at CHS, which is known to have a high, Black student

population. CHS students react negatively to what I argue are racist portrayals about Black youth from their schools in the media, as one student asserts: “The newspaper claimed to really understand our lives and such (as Blacks students), and they used like, one isolated case, so people believe it to be true for all Black students at CHS”.

The CHS youth data in section 1.b. illustrates the students’ frustrations in being reduced to cultural stereotypes that pathologize Black students as academically weak and socio-economically disadvantaged. Moreover, the quote above infers that this student is angry at the media for publishing such racist portrayals of Black students, and that such perspectives, she believes are in part responsible for shaping negative public perceptions about Black youth from CHS.

**Teacher discouragement.**

The youth data in section two illustrates that Black students work hard at school and that they often solicit extra help and support from their teachers. However, despite such efforts, the youth across the three schools consistently describe negative interactions with teachers who do not take the time to explain things to them and who they perceive as not caring about their jobs. For example, as one CHS explained, he believes that the following can sum up poor teacher attitudes at his school: “I teach you, I get paid, that’s all”. Some of the students feel angry towards teachers because they feel disrespected, as in the AHS participant who said, “They make you feel stupid, like, inferior or something”. Collectively, such insights confirm what we know from other first person perspectives from Black students in Québec, whereby they report being underserved at school (Eid et al., 2011; Lafortune, 2014; Livingstone et al., 2014).

Black Canadian students are often pathologized as having academic difficulties and family problems, and males in particular are often referred to as “at-risk” (Briggs, 2017; Dei et

al., 1997; James, 2012; 2017). Accordingly, in section 2.b., some youth participants share their perceptions of poor treatment from teachers as being because they are Black, as one RHS student shares: “They have this idea that since you’re Black, that means that you have nothing in your head”. As Eid et al. (2011) note, Black students in Québec are more likely than other racialized students to recount experiences of racial discrimination at school by way of low teacher expectations. Other data also speaks to the youths’ perceptions that their teachers – all of whom at AHS and CHS, are White – believe that Black students are low achievers.

Black students often experience difficulties at school as the result of systemic racism, and when they receive academic support and encouragement at school from Black teachers and support staff, these measures do a great deal in ensuring school success (Howard and James, 2019). Notably, across the three schools I found no evidence of the participants speaking positively about their teachers, which is interesting, especially since, as we know from the school profiles in chapter five, RHS had a number of Black teachers at the time of the interviews.

**Culturalized racism: Academic derailment of Black students.**

In Québec, Black youth are often discussed in relation to their immigration and integration trajectories, and other factors that contribute to their academic difficulties are often overlooked, in the French language literature in particular (Lafortune, 2014; McAndrew et al., 2013; Magnan et al., 2017). The data in section 2.b. emphasizes how French-sector, CHS participants indicate that teachers and CHS-P consistently direct Black students with academic difficulties to the vocational program at the school, and sometimes, to adult education elsewhere. Such interventions from the White school staff at CHS provide some evidence of how teachers and the school principal might believe that academic success is a so-called “White people’s prerogative” (Fordham and Ogbu,1986, p.179).

As Razack (1995) argues, race and so-called racial differences are often used as a way of signaling alleged deficiencies in racialized individuals. The CHS youth data illustrates the participants' perceptions and experiences of low academic expectations from their teachers and CHS-P. For example, as one CHS student shared, one of her teachers suggested taking a year off in order to "figure out" what she wanted to do with her academic future. We can perhaps infer from this data that it might be teachers' racist views about their Black students that is prompting them to direct these students to the vocational programs and to take time off. We know from the discussion in chapter three that when Black students' academic dreams are disregarded by teachers who do not believe in their capacity for school success, the negative outcomes can linger and further stigmatize these students (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Dei et al., 1997; Howard, 2014; James, 2012). This clearly seems to be a factor that influences Black students in the French sector to disengage or perhaps dropout altogether.

The data across the three schools illustrates, overall, that Black students perceive poor treatment from teachers as preventing them from achieving the kinds of success that they imagine for themselves at school. While the youth participants do not identify the racial location of their teachers, we know from the school descriptions in chapter five that all of the teachers at AHS and CHS are White. Not specifically citing teachers' poor treatment of them as racist infers that the youth may have cultivated some resilience to racism (Smith et al., 2006; Ruck and Wortley, 2002). More probable, however, is that the youth participants have learned to be quiet in calling out what they identify and experience as racism, because they may have been taught that it's not "polite" to talk about race at school (Dei et al., 1997; 2017; Howard, 2014). The experiences of student participants recall the ways, as Howard (2009) asserts, Whiteness is

deployed and maintained in educational contexts when teachers diminish their Black students' academic efforts, and we see clear evidence of this in the youth data discussed in this chapter.

**Conclusion**

The data in section one illustrates the extent to which the youth participants are deeply angered and frustrated by what they interpret as their schools' negative reputations being informed by racist perceptions of Black people. We also know from the data across the three schools that Black youth identify teacher and principals' low expectations and lack of support as obstacles at school. As well, some students feel as though their teachers have poor perceptions of Black students in particular. My race analysis of the data suggests that teachers' racist thinking about their Black students might be what is causing them to treat these students poorly. This poor treatment – as evidenced by low expectations, lack of academic support, and suggestions of alternate paths such as time off, adult education, and vocational programs – may be causing some Black students to have academic difficulties and to disengage at school.

In chapter seven I will look closely at what White and Black teachers and principals say about their Black students, underscoring the salience of race in their perspectives.

# Chapter 7

## Findings and Discussion: Teacher Focus Groups and Principal Interviews

### Introduction

In chapter six, I organized my discussion of the data according to the following codes and themes: 1. Peer bias, and the invisibility of White dropouts; 2. Teacher and principal attitudes towards Black students; Teacher discouragement, and culturalized racism. Overall, my race analysis of the youth focus group data suggests that teachers' racist thinking about Black students at the three schools could be what informs low academic expectations, and in turn, what produces these poor relationships.

In this chapter, I will present and analyze the findings from three focus groups' discussions with Black and White teachers, three interviews with Black and White school principals, and one discussion with a school social worker, who is White. The central research questions that will inform my analysis and discussion of the data in this chapter are: What do White and Black teachers and principals identify as the barriers to their Black students' school success? What roles do race, racism and racialization play in their perspectives?

In my discussion of the data I will underscore the centrality of race in the adult participant perspectives. Additionally, the data is presented and divided into two main categories: 1. White participant reflections and, 2. Black participant reflections. In my efforts to provide a rich discussion of the data - while also triangulating these findings with key findings from chapter six - I have one sole discussion section at the end of this chapter in which I will describe and analyze teacher and principal perceptions and treatment of their Black students.

### Presentation of findings

1. **White participant reflections about Black students.**

**1.a.** ***Biased perspectives of White teachers: "Because we tend to be a White staff, we tend to see Black kids… like, as different".***

Prior to conducting interviews at AHS, I was aware that the school had received consistently low Ministry rankings because of poor exam results in the senior grades, and – as briefly mentioned in chapter six – this information is published in local newspapers. During my discussion with AHS-SW – who is White - she confirmed that the school's poor reputation is indeed amplified by negative, local media reports. AHS-SW also discussed how the public perception of the school as "bad" or "rough" is due to its location in a socio-economically disadvantaged area of the city, with a historically high Black population, as she elaborates:

> The sort of folk tales about (AHS) were always about, you know, being a tough inner-city school…uh, lots of fights (which don't happen…it's just a rumour), lots of, lots of edgy stuff. In my experience, before I came here, I thought 'oh God, I'm gonna really have a tough time there.' It's absolutely not true. It's the safest school I've ever worked in.

AHS-SW's comment that such racist perceptions exist about AHS, despite what she reports is a very safe environment, help to further magnify the extent to which negative perceptions about the school are informed (in part) by racist thinking about Black youth in general.

When I asked her if she felt that Black students at the school were treated differently than the other students, AHS-SW explained: *"*Because we tend to be a White staff, we tend to see Black kids… like, as different. So for sure, I think that we observe the Black kids more closely". As our discussion continued and I asked about how disciplinary issues are addressed at the school, AHS-SW explained that Black students are often sent out of class for so-called behavioural issues, as she explains:

> The thing that I see more of with the Black students is trips to the office and all that kind of…behavioural issue that's got so many facets to it. You know, what sends a kid…Is this a confidential interview? What sends a kid to the office? Um…acting out in class.

AHS-SW's reflection that Black students are "observed more closely" – and in particular that they are more likely to be identified as having behavioural issues - is consistent with the findings from McAndrew et al. (2013). Notably, AHS-SW's question regarding the confidentiality of our interview suggests that she may be skeptical of why Black students are targeted so frequently, inferring that perhaps something other than these students' alleged behavioural issues is prompting teachers to send them to the office.

As our discussion continued, I asked AHS-SW why she thought that Black students are seemingly tagged more than other students as having behavioural issues, she offered the following reflection, which speaks to a gap that she identifies in the Québec research, which I also signal in chapter three:

> I just wonder so often about whether the question ought to be asked about Black kids or whether it ought to be asked about some other socio-economic factor over represented in the Black community. And I know that Marie McAndrew said that she's accounted for everything, but… I don't know.

Above, AHS-SW is alluding to comments about McAndrew et al.'s research (2013) in which they employed quantitative measures to assess Black students' educational trajectories and graduation outcomes, in part, by looking at socio-economic factors. AHS-SW's comments above suggest that she may be critical of the fact that the research did not address the extent to which -

as the youth data illustrates - low teacher expectations and poor school environment negatively shape Black students' schooling experiences.

As the AHS youth data from chapter six helps to underscore, the participants feel as though their teachers treat them poorly as compared to their White peers. The comments from AHS-W provide some clear evidence of the extent to which Black students at AHS are subject to tough disciplinary measures from their White teachers, which is also consistent with findings from the Canadian research about Black youth and education (Briggs, 2017; Dei et al., 1997; Eid et al., 2011).

Notably, RHS had at least half a dozen Black teachers and a few Black support staff at the time of the interviews. Despite such staff demographics, however, the following comments from RHS-P paints a picture in which Black students are inherently perceived differently than White students. He first implicates the wider culture, saying:

> We live in a world where your perceptions of a Black teenager are just, subconsciously and immediately, are very different from your perceptions of a White teenager. The kids know those perceptions. They sense those perceptions.
>
> He then added, however: "So, we have… a racist teaching staff, not overtly racist […]", indicating the problem exists within the school directly.

Interestingly, RHS-P's depiction of the racist school atmosphere - in addition to the earlier comment – reads as rather matter of fact, as though racism is somehow normalized at RHS. During the teacher focus group discussion at CHS, one teacher participant's comments – much like RHS-P and AHS-SW - give us a sense, overall, of what seems to be a racist staff culture, as he explains:

> Sometimes when I am in the staff room talking with my colleagues, some of them make these negative comments regarding different ethnic groups and I am like: 'Why are you working in this neighbourhood?' Why are you working at this school if you don't want to deal with these people? (own translation).

This comment illustrates this CHS teacher's concerns that some of his colleagues have significant prejudices towards some of their students. This assessment of a discriminatory culture is supported by the comments made by another teacher, who shares that:

> It's funny, eh? I don't know, I sometimes think, and I imagine a Black student having done something. I am not racist. But why do I automatically assume that it's a Black or Latino kid. I didn't ever think it could be a White Québécois kid. I think my association is with gangs, and the gangs are often ethnic (…). (own translation).

This second quote clearly illustrates some racist thinking that this teacher has about Black and other racialized minority students, an inability to recognize and admit why this is problematic, and how such perceptions may come to bear upon her treatment of Black students.

#### *1.b. Blaming Black students and families for academic challenges and failure: "I think a lot of Black students here have family problems, divorce, single parent families or economic difficulties that prevent them from finishing high school".*

The following comment from a CHS teacher helps us understand what she perceives as obstacles to all Black students' school success at CHS: "I think a lot of Black students here have family problems, divorce, single parent families or economic difficulties that prevent them from finishing high school. Some come back, and others attend the vocational programs later on". At first read this individual is citing observable facts from her teaching experience. However, upon further analysis we can also infer that this individual may be pathologizing Black students

and their families as being poor or emotionally unstable. This can be interpreted as evidence of culturalized racism, wherein this teacher believes that Black students' alleged family issues are what are causing them to disengage in the classroom and consequently, are responsible for their academic difficulties.

In the following comments from CHS-P, we also see evidence of culturalized racism, wherein she believes that first-generation, Haitian-Canadian students in particular may not be 'cut out' for the traditional career paths that they and their parents imagine for them:

> In particular amongst the Haitians and their parents, it's the 'immigrant dream', to have a better future for the children. And the best future is perceived as being a Doctor or an engineer, nurse or lawyer. It's very difficult for Haitian parents and students (for most of them, that is) to accept that other choices are possible, vocational programs, for example, or semi-professional trades. (own translation).

As we can see from the comment above, not only does CHS-P pathologize first (and possibly second) generation, Haitian-Canadian students as academically incapable, but she also undermines their parents' capacity to be realistic and informed when guiding their children to establish career and school goals. CHS-P's negative perceptions about first and possibly second-generation, Haitian-Canadian students at CHS reinforce racist stereotypes and also completely ignore the racist structures responsible for creating the circumstances in which Black students struggle at school because they are demotivated. CHS-P's perceptions of her Haitian students appear to be informed by deficit notions about Haitians in general, while the passage from a CHS teacher quoted earlier illustrates deficit attitudes towards Black students and families more generally.

From the CHS youth focus group data discussed in chapter six we know that Black students with academic difficulties are often advised to attend the vocational programs at the school. In the following reflection from CHS-P, we see that like the CHS teacher quoted earlier, she perceives many of her students through a deficit lens: "There is a lot of desperation amongst the students here, lots of deception…So it's our job to offer other choices, other paths. That's our challenge" (own translation). Much like the sentiments expressed by other White participants quoted throughout this chapter, the quote above helps to illustrate that CHS-P does not see what the CHS youth participants identify as the underlying causes for Black student disengagement (low teacher expectations and streaming to vocational programs), and instead proposes 'alternate paths' to education as a means of curbing dropout and school disengagement.

As the quote above suggests, CHS-P believes that many students at her school – whose racial location she does not specify - are under the allegedly false impression that they can succeed in conventional academics (e.g. "deception"). From this quote it appears as though CHS-P is perhaps a strong advocate of the vocational program, as well as adult education for students with academic difficulties. As we know from the discussion of the youth data in chapter six, Black students at CHS are often directed to "alternate" educational paths by CHS-P, whom they portray as a strong advocate of vocational and adult education programs.

While CHS-P does not specify the racial location of the students that she is referring to in the above quote, we see evidence of deficit thinking, blaming the student for their academic difficulties, while not looking at how school environment and relationships with teachers might shape her students' schooling experiences. Such reflections give insight into her beliefs about students' academic difficulties and the top-down solutions that she proposes.

In the following reflection from an AHS teacher on why she believes that some of her students disengage at school, we see how she, too, draws on deficit notions about her students, many of whom we know from the school profiles in chapter five are Black, as she explains:

> No one has school pride. And I feel like the kids don't…they're not proud to be from here…they just don't really want to be here (…) some of my kids are like 'this school is dumb, everyone here is stupid'. I mean that they've totally bought in; they've bought into the perception of the school.

Interestingly, this teacher emphasizes student responses to negative perceptions about the school, rather than interrogating what influencing factors contribute to AHS students' beliefs that their school is 'dumb'. Such comments are in line with the other reflections so far discussed here, which blame students - and sometimes specifically Black students (and their families) - for their academic difficulties.

In the following passage from another AHS teacher participant, she is shocked and surprised when witnessing her Black students' negative reactions to what she felt was culturally inclusive and relevant curricula, including some texts which described life for Black Americans under the historical dictates of "Jim Crow", as well as the discourses of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior:

> I was trying to explain that the word (negro) was used like the way Black is now and they (Black students) just did not want to listen; like some of them did not want to listen for the rest of the class. I found it so mind-blowing that we were having this conversation here, like I thought I was going to get them interested in talking and some of them just totally shut down.

The previous reflection helps to illustrate how this White teacher negatively and also, as I suggest, incorrectly, interprets Black students' classroom behaviours. It might be that the materials in question triggered feelings of discomfort in her Black students, especially since – as we know from the AHS youth data in chapter six – they are uncomfortable and angry at many of their teachers because they feel deeply disrespected and devalued. We can also glean from this teacher's response that she does not understand why her Black students might respond negatively to historically biased course materials - despite her attempts to put them in context - and instead accuses them of reacting, in her opinion, poorly, to what she felt were good attempts at engaging them. We can infer from her recounting of the class scenario that her default perspective of her Black students is negative, and that she does not consider why they would respond negatively to these materials.

***1.c. Culturalized racism: " I don't know what happens on the plane ride over here (…) but a lot of the Black children allow themselves a whole lot more than the previous generation would have back at home".***

In section 1.b. we see the tendency for White adult participants to pathologize Black students and their families as deficient, and as responsible for their academic difficulties. They also blame Black students for their academic difficulties and implicate Black people and "Black culture" in general in black student underachievement. During my discussion with RHS-P about Black student underachievement at his school, he referred to what he believes is a systemic problem overall - and in particular with Black students - by noting that they allegedly buy-in to what he referred to broadly as a "culture of underachievement". For instance, RHS-P discussed how some Black students who make the honour roll are taunted by their (Black) peers, as if to say (as he did) "that's not cool, that's not what do you do".

There is a lot to unpack in these reflections from RHS-P, but perhaps most poignant is how his theory of a "culture of underachievement" resonates with the acting White hypothesis

discussed in chapter three, whereby the "problem" with Black students is flagged as having to do with so-called cultural behaviours and attitudes, rather than looking at how classroom dynamics, relationships with teachers, and overall, racist school culture might be contributing to Black student underachievement at RHS. These oversights are curious, because RHS-P has already told us that overall, there is a racist teaching staff at RHS, but he does not address how this "culture" might be contributing to Black students' difficulties at school.

We know from the school profiles in chapter five that AHS has a substantial, Black, Anglo-Caribbean student population. In the following passage from an AHS teacher, we glean how negative and racist perceptions of Black people in general – and Black students from the Caribbean in particular – dictate his perceptions about why some of his Black students do poorly in Math, as he explains: "Black culture from the islands is a lot more easy-going. In Math they have to be so meticulously detailed that I don't think they [Black students of Caribbean origins] are trained for that from the start". This same AHS teacher weighed in about what he identifies as other barriers to Black student success at his school that – much like RHS-P's reflections above – also illustrate culturalized racism:

> I did not visit schools on the islands, but I've been to the islands and several of them…I don't know what happens on the plane ride over here (…) but a lot of the Black children allow themselves a whole lot more than the previous generation would have back at home.

As we see from the comments above, yet again, the problem of Black student underachievement is seen as residing with the students and their "culture". Moreover, what is also evident from the above quote is the fact that this teacher negatively prototypes his Black Canadian students as having attitude issues, without identifying the systemic factors (such as his

racist perceptions) that might produce the adversarial or disengaged classroom behaviours that he discusses.

Another teacher participant from AHS also relies on a cultural deficit model when talking about Black student underachievement at her school:

> But to me, I'm not a Black person and I don't have a very accurate knowledge of Black culture, but it seems to me that the culture that they attach themselves to feel good about being in the community is a culture that's failing.

Much like the previous data presented in this section, the above comments are also examples of culturalized racism, whereby this teacher blames Black students for their academic difficulties, while clearly stigmatizing so-called Black culture as something that is "failing" and "unhealthy."

In the following quote, we see that CHS-P believes that her Haitian students are academically weak and in particular, those who have recently immigrated to Québec, as she explains:

> When they arrive at 12-14 years old, with only primary school knowledge…it's impossible for them to catch up…And when they attend the classe d'acceuil, especially for the Haitian students, many have never attended school before... Integration in a new life, a new country, it's definitely a shock, even if it's a positive shock. (own translation).

As we know from the CHS youth data, the students say that they want to thrive at school but are not receiving the support they need. The CHS youth data also tells us that the Haitian students in particular are angry about the portrayal of them in the media as academically delayed. CHS-P's perceptions above – as also evidenced in earlier data where she talks about her Haitian students – clearly illustrate her belief that Haitian students are academically inferior. Moreover, CHS-P identifies the integration process in Québec as part of the solution to aid the difficulties of

immigration, and not (perhaps more accurately, and as discussed in chapter three) as part of the problem for many of these students.

The following reflection from an RHS teacher also illustrates culturalized racism when talking about his Black student underachievement at his school, specifically, the belief that Black students at RHS fall prey to so-called "negative influences" that are responsible for producing academic difficulties:

> Because it is a school where they [the Black students] are represented to quite a large degree, there seems to be a certain sort of sub-culture that has developed. It's a sort of culture where achievement is not seen as, you know, something necessarily desirable.

It is not entirely clear what this and the earlier participant's comments are referring to when speaking about a "culture" or "sub-culture" that Black students are allegedly "attaching" themselves to. We can infer from the context that perhaps they are referring to hip hop culture, or gangster hip hop culture more specifically. It is also possible that this individual believes that some of his Black students are faking a lack of interest or intentionally doing poorly in school, which, as I will discuss later, also illustrates culturalized racism by articulating a deficit view about Black student achievement.

In conclusion, as illustrated by the White participant data in section one, in reproducing the theory of acting White to explain Black student underachievement, White teachers and principals place the blame and burden of academic underachievement on Black students, their families, and more generally, "Black culture". White staff from the French sector in particular pathologize Haitian students of immigrant origins (and their parents) as academically weak.

**2. Black participant reflections about Black students.**

***2.a. Lowered expectations: "They [Black students] don't know who to turn to".***

While reading through the RHS teacher data, the only school with Black teachers,[14] I paid particular attention to comments that were made by these individuals. From the transcripts I was able to distinguish the RHS Black teacher participants' comments from their White teacher peers', as during their reflections they mentioned being able to personally identify with or understand the struggles experienced by their Black students.

As one RHS teacher explains, many Black students struggle with difficulties at school because they do not know where to turn for support:

> They [Black students] don't know how to say they don't know. They [Black students] don't know whom to turn to. I mean obviously their teacher, but often their teacher has a crowd of kids waiting for help or whatever.

This comment helps us understand some of the challenges facing Black youth at RHS, while also giving context to some of the youth focus group data in chapter six, which speaks to their frustrations in wanting to succeed but not having their teachers' support in doing so. Interestingly, though we know that there are several Black teachers at RHS, the emphasis of the youth focus group discussion was frustration with teachers, which I presumed to mean not their Black teachers. As another teacher participant from RHS shared, for many Black youth at the school, classroom disengagement may also reflect the legacy of racist treatment at school as experienced by their parents, as she explains:

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[14] All of the teacher data in this section are from Black teacher participants that participated in the RHS focus group. Despite not being present at that discussion, I knew that many Black teachers participated because Anne Marie (who facilitated the discussion) shared this detail with me.

> I think that anyone who is an "other" sometimes feels displaced in the system, whether it's a parent who may have not necessarily been given a chance to go and further his or her education, and then their child is having difficulties at school, I think it's important to keep in mind that they [the student] will be a bit more resentful of the system.

The "resentment" that this participant refers to gives us some insight into how Black teachers may be better able to understand the challenges that their Black students experience at school because – for those who went to school in Canada – they may have had similar experiences here. Moreover, as the research suggests, Black teachers and other Black school staff are often able to provide much needed emotional and academic support for Black Canadian students (Dei, 2017; Henry, 2017; James, 2017; Ruck and Wortley, 2002; Smith et al., 2006).

As AHS-P shares, Black students at AHS work very hard and want to thrive at school, and yet there are a number of obstacles that prevent (some) from succeeding, as she explains:

> Sometimes there is that lack of…that sense of learned helplessness where they feel they can't do it (…). They may have been told that, you know, they wouldn't be able to accomplish anything (…). Or the expectations were not set high enough, so they sort of fell into that trap of, 'well I can't do it, so what's the point of trying'.

As the above quote helps to illustrate, AHS-P also identifies low expectations as one of the systemic factors preventing youth from succeeding at school. When asked if these circumstances and what she frames as "learned helplessness" were unique to Black youth at AHS, AHS-P explained that while other racialized students also experience academic difficulties, she believes that Black youth face particular challenges, as she explains: "I think maybe historically with Black students, they may have not been pushed as hard and so forth. So

it's just a matter of letting them know there's so much more out there". AHS-P does not identify the source of low expectations, but when combined with the AHS youth reflections and some AHS-SW's reflections in section one, we can infer that she is at least in part identifying the racism that White teachers are demonstrably enacting at AHS.

As one of the only Black staff at AHS – and the only Black administrator interviewed for the BCDP education research - AHS-P's reflections proved critically important for this project because she has an overview perspective that teachers do not necessarily convey in their reflections. Notably, in using passive constructions such as Black youth "may have been told" or that "expectations were not set high enough", AHS-P's comments suggest an awareness that others are implicated in the poor treatment of Black students at the school, but she seems unwilling or hesitant to speculate on who these people might be. I infer from her reflections that she is referring in part or whole to White teachers and other school staff.

### *2.b. Different learning needs: "Not everybody learns the same way, and it doesn't mean they can't learn, it just means they learn differently".*

As we saw from the data in section 1.c., White participants draw on cultural deficit models when discussing Black student underachievement, blaming Black families and Black culture from specific geographical regions for Black students' academic difficulties. In the following reflections from Black adult participants, they also refer to cultural differences when discussing their Black students' academic lives, but these indicators are not perceived as problematic nor as markers of academic deficiencies as they are in the White adult perspectives discussed earlier in this chapter. In describing the scenario of her Jamaican student who recently emigrated to join his Canadian (born and raised parent), living in Montreal, she explains:

> I mean, I think in a typical classroom he'd be considered disruptive, because he likes to get up and walk around and what not (…). But, you know, even if he's walking, he'll still participate in class discussions (…). He's stayed after school a few times to catch up on work. And he tells me how he doesn't like the culture here. It's too fast paced.

First, the quote above illustrates how this teacher does not perceive this student's behaviour as problematic. From her reflection we can glean that the discussion provided an opportunity for the student to identify his struggles at school, and that he is motivated to succeed as evidenced by his after school efforts. Contextualizing this student's behaviour in this way also suggests that this teacher is empathetic towards the student, a sentiment that was not conveyed in any of the White participants' identifications of the obstacles to Black student success at their schools.

Helping to further our understanding regarding what may be preventing some Black students from succeeding at school, AHS-P made this comment, albeit with some (seeming) hesitation:

> I shouldn't say Black students. I don't like saying, 'cause, you know, all students…I don't like putting them into a certain…box (…). Not everybody learns the same way, and it doesn't mean they can't learn, it just means they learn differently.

Here we see that as with the RHS teacher quoted above, AHS-P's reflection helps to illustrate that she is also empathic towards her Black students, because (as earlier data illustrates), she is able to identify the many challenges to school success that they face. Moreover, unlike the White adult participants who blame Black students for their academic difficulties, AHS-P understands that not all students will necessarily thrive under the same conditions, and this is not perceived as a learning deficit. To add – as illustrated by an earlier quote from an RHS teacher - diversified learning needs and classroom behaviours perceived as difficult are not necessarily indicative of a

disinterest in learning or learning deficiencies, as the White adult participant would have us believe.

Collectively, the Black adult participant data underscores that Black teachers and principals are better able to empathize with the challenges facing their Black students, and as such, are able to provide the support that youth participants say that they lack at school. The data also enables us to see that the Black adult participants identify the same obstacles to Black student success as the youth participants, though neither group identifies the racial location of the individuals responsible for demotivating Black students. In conclusion, as we saw in chapter six, Black students identify the racism that the white teachers are demonstrably enacting, and as the Black adult participant data in this section illustrates, Black teachers have insight into this same racism, despite not referring to it directly as such.

**Discussion.**

***Disconnect between perspectives of Black youth and White teachers on Black student experiences at school.***

*White teacher and principal's low expectations for students of "immigrant origins".*

As we know from the discussion of the Québec context in chapter three, many Black students in the French sector are first or second (and sometimes third) generation Canadians (McAndrew et al., 2013). McAndrew et al. (2013) also discuss the extent to which many Black students in Québec complete their degrees in adult education, though they do not address the systemic factors at school that contribute to such realities for Black students in Québec. As my discussion of the youth data in chapter six illustrates, Black students from CHS want to pursue academics but they perceive of and experience their teachers' and CHS-P's push to attend the vocational program as derailing their interests and desires.

In the CHS-P and CHS teacher data discussed in section 1 of this chapter, these individuals sometimes signal out first generation, Haitian-Canadian students as being academically weak, while also sometimes referring more generally to Black students at the school. The CHS adult participant data reveals that these individuals believe that the parents of first generation, Haitian-Canadian students had unrealistic expectations for their children's' futures. It is possible that students educated in Haiti who have immigrated to Québec might not be at the same academic level as their peers in Québec, for example, because of differing education systems in the two countries. However, what is problematic about CHS-P and CHS teacher perceptions of these students, and Black students overall, is that what they identify either as a possible lag or as unrealistic expectations comes to mean that these students cannot improve at school. Also evident in such deficit perceptions about their Black students is the fact that the CHS (adult) participants do not appear to be thinking about ways to help these students improve at school in order to catch up with regular stream classes.

Such perceptions about Haitian and other Black students and their families are racist and speak to the ways in which culturalized racism is deployed by White teachers and principals in order to legitimize the push for these students to attend vocational programs at the school, or alternate paths such as adult education or 'taking time off'. As well, asserting that the integration of Black (immigrant) students into White, Francophone Québécois culture is beneficial for them totally discounts the fact that – as we know from the discussion in chapter three – the integration of first-generation, immigrant Canadians into Québec schools is often typified by social pressures from peers, and discriminatory treatment from teachers and school principals (Estimable, 2005; Magnan et al., 2016; Steinbach, 2015).

As Solorzano (1997) suggests, racism gains traction when so-called "racial authority" is mobilized in order to justify the dominance of one (so-called) race over another (p.16). In drawing on false and racist constructs about Black or specifically Haitian people in determining these students' academic and social capacities, CHS-P and CHS teacher perceptions of these students, I argue, illustrate culturalized racism. Accordingly, these participants' racist perceptions about Black people are articulated in the generalizations made about Black families, about Haitian students as academically weak, and about these students' parents as inept at making the right decisions for their children's academic futures. CHS-P's reflections also confirm what CHS youth participants shared about Black students with academic difficulties at their school being diverted from academic studies and urged to attend vocational programs - and to a lesser extent, adult education - instead of attending CEGEP and University. To conclude, in asserting that they know what is best for their Black students - despite what the students themselves and their parents want – CHS-P and CHS teachers' perceptions illustrate culturalized racism that negatively impacts their Black students' schooling experiences and their educational trajectories.

***Acting White.***

When discussing the acting White theory to explain Black student underachievement, Ogbu (1987, 2004) asserts that since Black youth generally perceive their White peers as being well supported by their White teachers, they [Black students] allegedly come to believe that doing well at school means that they are acting White, and this is not desirable. When RHS-P refers to his Black students as subscribing to a so-called "culture of underachievement" at school, we see that he, too, is influenced by theories of acting White.

RHS-P and a White RHS teacher discussed their belief that Black students do not allegedly value academic success, both asserting that Black students allegedly "attach themselves" to a "culture" that is not succeeding. Here again we see that Black students are blamed for their academic difficulties, but more specifically, these individuals place the blame of Black student underachievement on an amorphous Black "culture". In so doing, these individuals clearly illustrate what Razack (1995) describes as the reference to race and so-called racial differences as a way of signaling alleged deficiencies in racialized individuals.

In chapter six, an RHS student speaks about Black students having to prove that they are good at Math, so as to deter teachers' negative stereotypes about Black students' academic capacities. From the White adult data in this chapter, we also learned that an AHS teacher generalizes all Black students "from the islands", claiming that they are not taught Math in a way that enables them to succeed at school in Canada. In claiming that Black students (and Black people) are weak at Math, the AHS teacher in question deploys Whiteness as a legitimizing standard. As Dei et al. (1997) assert, in Canadian schools, Whiteness is securely in place and ensures that White people maintain a "material, political and symbolic advantage over the Black race" (p. 67). We see the enactment of this 'advantage' in White teachers and principals' undermining of their Black students' academic capacities, equally in the French and English sector adult data.

In other White participant data from the English sector adult participants, their reflections also illustrate the tendency to cite cultural differences as reasons for Black student underachievement and disengagement at their schools, which is similar to how French sector participants talk about their Haitian students. In the latter context, however, there is also the citation of Haitian students' immigrant paths as contributing to what CHS-P refers to as a

"deception" regarding what they wish to achieve, and what their parents believe they are capable of. Collectively, such racist perceptions about Black students as academically weak mean that the burden of underachievement is placed on students, as opposed to their school environments and teachers, which is what the Black adult participant data clearly indicates.

Save for AHS-SW, the White adult perspectives discussed in this chapter belie the complete absence of a critical, anti-racist lens that would enable them to confront key questions about the systemic practices they uphold that prevent Black youth from reaching their full potential, and that go beyond the fundamentals of teaching, learning, and administrative functions (Dei and Calliste, 2000, p.162). That these White participants do not critically interrogate (let alone identify) how their own racist perceptions might contribute, for example, to what RHS-P, AHS-SW and a CHS teacher participant refer to as racist teacher perceptions and school environment, also speaks to the ubiquity of Whiteness that is woven into the fabric of these three schools, whereby Black and other racialized students are at a clear disadvantage.

In referring to "culture" numerous times throughout reflections about their Black students, it is also possible that the White adult participants are referencing what they perceive to be negative influences in the lives of these students, such as hip hop (in general), or gangster hip hop culture. As Celemencki (2007) notes, the images of Blackness presented by gangster hip hop culture can provide enticing, though limited and self-limiting, models for young Black men who are searching for examples of Black success in the public sphere. Blaming Black students' affiliation with "culture" of any kind as a reason for the academic difficulties speaks again to the persistence of culturalized racism, and again, the perception that cultural deficit is what is at the root of Black student underachievement.

In conclusion, as Razack (1995) asserts, when race is used as a way of signaling alleged deficiencies in racialized people – as it is in the White participant interviews – it deflects attention away from the "structural relations of domination and subordination" (p. 72) that are responsible for sustaining and normalizing racism in classrooms and schools. Accordingly, the White participant data in section 1. illustrates that these individuals do not acknowledge the racist culture *that they are responsible for producing* at their schools, which in turn informs the negative perception of their Black students.

***The case for a critical race lens in White teachers' pedagogical approach.***

When AHS teacher quoted in section 1.b. appeared confused and angry by her Black students' refusal to participate in class discussions in response to the word "negro" in classroom texts, her negative reaction illustrates her disconnect and insensitivity to these students. That the teacher in question made efforts to engage her Black students with what she believed to be relevant course materials is in and of itself a positive action. However, the students' negative responses that she shares suggest that despite her best intentions, she is not professionally competent or emotionally prepared to teach such content. Blackwell (2010) suggests that without proper training in antiracist pedagogical approaches, some White teachers can be rather "tone-deaf" in their delivery, for example, by presenting culturally specific histories and practices as 'folkloric' or homogenous in nature. We see some evidence of this kind of tone-deafness in this AHS teacher essentially being shocked by her students' negative reaction to what she felt were inclusive classroom materials.

We know that this AHS teacher believed that she was doing something positive, yet, as Cho (2009) asserts, despite what may be best intentions at creating inclusive, equitable classrooms, many White teachers explicitly choose to <u>not</u> see their racialized students through

the lens of race, therefore subscribing to *colour-blindness* (p. 1600). It is this acute *colour-blindness,* I argue, which was apparent in the AHS teacher's pedagogical approach, whereby she is incapable and perhaps even afraid to identify her fear of addressing race in a critical way in her classroom: both her own racist thinking and bearing witness to her students' experiences of racism at school.

In some of the youth data there are complaints of teachers who do not do enough to engage students, and one student talks about the overemphasis of White settler histories in the classroom. Clearly, the youth data illustrates that participants are asking for more diversified (non-White) curricula, and the AHS teacher in question attempted to respond to this need. However, I assert that because this teacher cannot or will not address what seem to be fears of confronting the realities of her students' experiences with racism – and perhaps her own racist beliefs about these students – this prevents her from being able to effectively teach from an antiracist informed, pedagogical approach. Moreover, the example of this teacher – and this classroom scenario – and how race-focused curricula (when presented incompetently) can go terribly wrong – in addition to the numerous examples of White participant data which highlight these individuals' misperceptions about their Black students - help mount a case for the importance of building antiracist, pedagogical competencies in White and other teachers of Black students that begins with the basics of critical self-reflection.

### ***Similarities between perspectives of Black youth, teachers and staff on Black student experiences as schools.***

The data from Black adult participants in section two helps to further confirm what the youth participants – and AHS-SW, who is White – have asserted in their reflections: Some teachers have low academic expectations of their Black students; they do not push them to succeed, and some White teachers and principals perceive Black students as academically

deficient and behaviourally problematic. As AHS-P and the Black RHS teacher participants explain, Black students are hard working and have high expectations for themselves, but they sometimes "fall into a trap" in which they no longer believe that they are capable of succeeding at school because of people who do not believe in them. We can infer from the data that by "people", the Black adult participants are in fact referring to teachers and perhaps other school staff. To add, AHS-P believes that these circumstances condition many Black students to enact what she refers to as "learned helplessness" because of not being pushed to succeed at school.

The youth data in chapter six illustrates the frustration and disappointment that Black students feel because of teachers who appear not to care about nor believe in their abilities to succeed at school. Accordingly, as the discussion in chapter three also underscores, Black students' academic capacities and efforts to thrive at school are often undermined and dismissed by their teachers (Dei et al., 1997; Howard, 2014; James, 2017; Shroeter and James, 2015). As we also know from the youth data in chapter six, teachers' low expectations loom consistently in Black students' schooling experiences. However, their persistent efforts to succeed despite such adversity speak to what AHS-P asserts is a tenacity and inherent drive in Black students that is in part, born from experiencing systemic racism at school.

As AHS-P explains, "Not everybody learns the same way, and it doesn't mean they can't learn, it just means they (some students) learn differently". Accordingly, the need for more diverse course materials and differentiated instruction was also confirmed by the youth participants in chapter six, who report asking their teachers to present materials in different ways in order to make classroom learning more interesting and relevant. However, as already discussed, some White teachers may lack the skills and the desire to effectively engage their Black students in ways that reflect cultural sensitivity, as well as the critical and reflexive

capacities necessary to do so.

The Black adult participant data in section two also highlights that some Black students' classroom behaviours are misinterpreted by some teachers – whose racial location they do not specify – as disruptive. The tendency to interpret Black students' classrooms negatively is evidenced by the White adult participant data discussed earlier. What the Black adult reflections also illustrate, is that what the White adult participants describe more generally as learning difficulties because of so-called cultural deficit in their Black students, the Black adult and youth participants frame as difficulties and disinterest with course materials, and the stresses of not being able to count on their teachers for support.

**Conclusion**

Overall, White participant perspectives in section one illustrate that these individuals place the burden and the blame of Black student underachievement on Black students, the immigration and integration process, Black families, and more generally, Black culture. These perspectives indicate that they do not identify nor examine the racist structures and systemic practices - including their own racist perceptions - that are responsible for Black student classroom disengagement and underachievement at their schools. White participants perceive themselves as part of the solution to Black student underachievement at their schools (as opposed to being part of the problem).

Overall, Black adult participants identify low teacher expectations, lack of encouragement for Black students, and overall lack of school support as the main obstacles to Black students' school success. Racist treatment from school staff towards Black students can be inferred in their reflections, but it is not mentioned directly. In conclusion, Black students and Black adult participants agree with the factors that contribute to Black student obstacles at

school, namely, the racism that teachers and school staff are enacting.

In the next and final chapter of this dissertation I reiterate some key conclusions about the data gleaned from my discussion here and in chapter six. I then highlight the contributions of this research to the field of Black youth and education in Québec; more broadly, to Black youth and education in Canada, and to YPAR methodology. I conclude by discussing the limitations of my study, as well as making suggestions for future directions in research.

# Chapter 8

# Conclusions

## Introduction

The majority of what we know from the peer-reviewed literature about Black youth and education in Québec emphasizes how these youths' immigrant pathways - and accordant challenges of so-called cultural and linguistic 'integration' - can pose some serious challenges for their academic trajectories, leading to delayed graduation, completion of high school studies in adult education or vocational programs, or dropout (McAndrew et al., 2013; McAndrew and Ledent, 2007; Potvin and Leclercq, 2011b). Much less is known about the school contexts and student-teacher relationships that may influence such outcomes.

Overall, my study illustrates the extent to which White teachers and principals' perceptions of their Black students in three Montreal high schools illustrate clear evidence of racism, which exercises negative impacts on these students' emotional and academic lives. I argue that the racialization of Black students – as described by the Black youth participants in chapter six, and as illustrated by the White adult participant data in chapter seven – contributes overall, to these students' difficulties at school.

## Key findings data

As discussed in chapter one, my study was informed by two driving sets of research questions: 1. What do Black youth say about their schooling experiences? How do race, racism and racialization figure in participant perspectives? 2. What do White and Black teachers and principals identify as the barriers to their Black students' school success? How do race, racism and racialization figure in participant perspectives?

My discussion of the youth and adult participant data in chapters six and seven produced the following conclusions:

1. Overall, race over-informs how White teachers and principals in both linguistic sectors perceive of and treat their Black students;
2. White teachers and principals' racist and deficit notions about Black people and so-called Black culture inform their perception of Black students as academically weak;
3. In reproducing the theory of "acting White" to explain Black student underachievement, White teachers and principals place the blame and burden of academic underachievement on Black students, their families, and more generally, "Black culture";
4. White staff from the French sector pathologize Black students (and their parents) as academically weak;
5. Black youth with academic difficulties attending school in the French sector feel pressure to leave high school and pursue alternate educational paths, such as vocational programs and adult education; this may be a factor impacting Black dropout overall, and at French sector schools in particular;
6. Culturalized racism about Black students as perpetuated in the media – and by peers from other schools – adds to Black students' sense of marginalization at school because they are perceived and personified (in part) as violent, and academically weak;
7. Black teachers and Black administrators identify the same barriers to Black student school success as Black students, primarily as low teacher expectations and lack of academic support and guidance for Black students in particular.

8. Black educators may be more sensitive and responsive to their Black students' needs for emotional and academic support at school.

***Key findings from review of the relevant literature.***

One of the key findings that can be gleaned from my literature review in chapter three is the fact that the majority of existing research about Black youth and education in Québec pays scant attention to racism, and frames Black youth educational issues in terms of immigration. Overall, my study points to the salience of race to the education of Black youth in Québec, and that the gap between Black and White perceptions of Black youth and education - as illustrated by the White versus Black participants in my study - is somewhat replicated in French versus English language research in the province.

**Contributions**

My research points to the salience of racism for informing our understandings about Black youth and education in Québec, and why the general silence around discussions of race in the relevant French language research is so problematic. As my discussion of the data in chapters six and seven helps to underscore, there is a gap between perceptions of the obstacles to Black student school success in White versus Black adult participants. Specifically, my analysis and discussion of the data help to illustrate how White teachers and principals make racist assumptions about Black students, for example, in: underestimating their academic capacities; pathologizing Black students as academically weak and behaviourally problematic; and, in blaming Black students and their families – and more generally "Black culture" for the students' academic difficulties.

I argue that these key findings contribute to the field of Black youth and education in Québec, in part, by speaking in clear terms about the ways that White teachers' and principals'

racist perceptions and treatment of their Black students can lead to academic disengagement, which may be a factor that leads to graduation delays and dropout. To add, in framing discussions about Black youth and education in Québec (most prominently) in relation to these students' immigration trajectories and integration in the school system, the French literature, to some extent, negates the importance of also including the clear impact that race exercises on Black youths' schooling experiences in the province.

The key conclusions from my discussion of the data contribute to the fields of: Black youth and education in Canada and Québec; pre-service teacher education professional development training and capacity building for in-service teachers; diversity education; antiracist education; critical race theory in education; critical race studies, and Black studies, for the following audiences: pre-service teacher education students and teacher educators, in-service teachers, administrators, psycho-social staff, and pedagogical consultants.

## Limitations and Considerations

### *Small sample*

One of the most significant limitations to this study was what I felt to be the relatively small sample of Black youth focus group participants, of which there were approximately sixty, from three public schools (two in the English sector and one in the French sector). Also, in order to further understand whether White teachers' discouraging attitudes and lack of academic support extended to other racialized students, it would have been interesting to also interview some of these students. Including the perspectives of White and other racialized youth in the French sector would have also enabled us to understand if other students with academic difficulties were equally encouraged to attend trades programs and adult education.

***Intersectionality and gender***

As clearly stated in chapter one, the emphasis of my study was to look at the salience of race in participant perspectives, in part, against the backdrop of the relative absence of race in discussions about Black youth and education in the peer-reviewed, Québec literature as discussed in chapter three. However, another limiting factor in this study that was not taken into consideration is what differences or nuances – if any – a gendered analysis of the youth data in particular would have rendered.

As discussed in chapter five, the demographics of the BCDP youth focus group participants were generally split between male and female-presenting participants. However, the McGill graduate student hired to transcribe the BCDP data did not identify the focus group participants according to what they perceived as these individuals' gender, and this would have been problematic to presume gender according to the participants' voices. Moreover, since the BCDP-YPAR project design did not account for gender in the focus group interview protocol – for example, in asking participants to gender-identify before sharing their reflections during the focus groups - made a race-gender intersectional analysis not feasible for this study.

While there was one question in the BCDP-YPAR protocol that prompted the male and female participants to reflect on whether the same school supports existed to ensure school success for both groups, such distinctions were not evident in participant responses, in part, because they did not gender identify when speaking. An intersectional lens that took into account race and gender with more than one question in the interview protocol, therefore, may have perhaps enabled us to identify the possible differences in what the female-identified, versus male-identified participants shared about their schooling experiences, and what this has to tell us about their school and classroom contexts in Québec. For example, from the discussion about

Black youth and education in chapter three, we know that Black boys in particular are often labeled 'at-risk' and presumed to have academic difficulties (Briggs, 2017; James, 2012; 2017). Such an intersectional analysis would have also perhaps enabled us to better understand if the Black, male-presenting youth participants feel that they too are more likely to be labelled as 'at risk' by their teachers and other school staff, and whether or not they perceive more stringent disciplinary measures, for example, than their than their Black, female-presenting peers, or their non-Black peers.

This intersectional lens would have perhaps also enabled us to better understand if the Black, female-presenting students are more likely to be directed to post-secondary nursing programs, which is sometimes discussed in the literature about Black education in Canada. In conclusion, while not accounting for gender in the BCDP education study indicates perhaps a design flaw, the limitations discussed herein – and the rich data that could be culled from an intersectional analysis which looks at the implications of gender as part of a race analysis on Black youth perspectives – in subsequent research, could provide further rich and important insights for understandings about Black youth and education in Quebec.

Another important limitation to note is the fact that the data in this study is now ten years old. However, some recent reports substantiate the current relevance of this study by citing the increase in incidences of hate crimes and discrimination towards Black and other racialized and minoritized groups in Québec over the past ten years. Collectively, this research also highlights that unemployment rates for Black youth in Québec (15-24 years old) are twice the average than for other young Canadians, and that Black people in the province – including large numbers of Black youth - are often victims of racial profiling by local police (La Presse Canadienne, 2019; Livingstone et al., 2018; Pierre, 2019; Shingler, 2019). Giving further context to the racialization

of Black people in Québec as identified above, the current literature about Black youth and education in Québec as discussed in chapter three makes clear that Black students in the province continue to experience academic difficulties and delays at school, and that race is not often discussed or even identified as a causal factor in the educational research.

A final limitation that I identified is the fact that since the BCDP-YPAR study did not request demographic information from the youth focus group participants, we do not have a sense of, for example, how or in what ways the youths' (or their parents') country of origin or ethnicity might shape how they identify, make sense of, or navigate systemic racism at their Quebec high schools. What we do know from the BCDP-YPAR data, however, is that students at both the French and English language high schools – who range from first generation Canadians to fourth and fifth generation – experience the same obstacles to school success such: as low teacher expectations; lack of support at school; and in some cases, identifying that Black students in particular are subject to systemically poor treatment from teachers and principals. In particular from the French school in this study (CHS), we also know that Black students report feeling pushed to attend trades programs and adult education by their teachers and school principal, all of whom are White.

**Reflections about the limitations of YPAR methodology in the context of the BCDP education research.**

In chapter five I discuss what I identified as some of the limiting and limited aspects of YPAR methodology within the context of the BCDP education research. In this section I address some of the methodological concerns first addressed in chapter five, as part of a culminating, first person reflection on my experiences with YPAR methodology in the context of the BCDP education research. I was sometimes uncomfortable with my 'power' as an adult in the project, for example, in having to sometimes "police" the behaviour of youth participants during research

meetings. I also considered how the youth researchers relied on the adult organizers to obtain project funding or to write up results in the way that is required by peer-reviewed publications. Other related concerns that are equally important to consider when doing YPAR is whether or not the research process empowers youth to the extent that they will continue to be agents of change in their schools and communities once the research projects are completed, and whether or not we can ensure that youth researchers do not become subjects during research projects meant to serve their needs.

The main limitation of the BCDP education research YPAR methodology was that because of time constraints, we did not include the youth researchers as part of the project design nor in identifying the primary research goals. Additionally, I personally did not anticipate having to exercise as much authority as I did with the youth researchers, specifically in behaviour management and attendance accountability during team meetings. Despite these complexities, my insights gleaned from the experience of working with a YPAR-informed methodological framework for the BCDP education research, I believe, enable me to attest to the immense value in providing racialized and marginalized youth with opportunities to authentically contribute to academic research as experts of their own school contexts. The findings from my study also help to advance our understanding of the critical importance in having youth perspectives inform the research that speaks about their schooling experiences.

The BCDP-YPAR research goals of learning about the youths' schooling experiences and providing them with the space and time to share freely with one another were, I believe, both a strength and solidarity-building experience for the youth researchers. The ease with which the youth focus group participants (and the BCDP youth researchers) shared with one another during the focus group discussions indicates their need to be heard, without filters, which is what the

YPAR-informed discussions provided. This last point, I believe, helps to illustrate why and how YPAR in the context of the BCDP education research was able to generate such rich and authentic data, in large part because of the genuine connections built between the youth facilitators and the youth focus group participants based on shared lived experiences.

As discussed in chapter five, having Black youth facilitate focus groups with other Black youth at their schools was integral in drawing out the rich narratives from the youth focus group participants. Moreover, the BCDP youth researchers showed incredible maturity and subject mastery when conducting the youth focus groups, while also expertly contextualizing focus group data during the analysis and dissemination process. As well, working with the BCDP youth researchers within a YPAR-informed context helped shaped the research process because of the youth's contributions in identifying some key themes and questions for the focus group questionnaire.

Re-imagining youth involvement in participatory research requires that we broaden our methodological imaginations to embrace new approaches to research design that evolve over time, including within and about YPAR. Accordingly, YPAR methodology has the potential for providing transformational learning opportunities for youth that standardized curricula and classroom learning cannot always provide. Some important questions to consider when doing participatory research with youth: Would youth mobilize amongst themselves and conduct research without the catalyzing efforts of adult researchers? Is a project framed as 'research' only when an academic researcher is involved? If – as adults working with disenfranchised and marginalized youth in our academic research paradigms - including YPAR - we are truly concerned about issues of representation and agency, we must continue to be critical and sensitive in this work. Finally, the challenges inherent to doing participatory research with youth

begs a larger question about the function of such research: *What purpose does it serve, and for whom?*

**Implications**

**1. For antiracist education.**

As we saw from the discussion of the AHS teacher data in chapter seven, one teacher's attempts to remedy the chasm she sensed between her (White) self and her Black students was to employ what she felt were culturally relevant materials in the classroom, without being adequately prepared to do so. Other data from White teacher participants in both linguistic sectors help to illustrate the deep chasm that exists between White teacher perceptions of their Black students' classroom behaviours, and Black students' lived experiences. In contrast, the Black teacher reflections from chapter seven enable us to understand how these teachers are seemingly better equipped to understand – and be sensitive to – the particular sensitivities of Black (and perhaps) other racialized students' experiences of marginalization at school. Part of this is because as racialized bodies in Québec, they too have very likely experienced the same kinds of racist treatment in their social and professional lives.

All teachers – and in particular White teachers of racialized students – can in fact be *instrumental* in the eradication of Whiteness in their classroom by engaging in critical self-reflection, while simultaneously encouraging *all* of their students to reflect on the ways in which they may have encountered or enacted racism at school. I therefore believe that it is imperative for all teachers in Québec to attend critical antiracist education professional development training as part of mandatory pre- and in-service teaching. Such mandates, I suggest, would help teachers to develop the critical, self-reflexive capacities, professional skills, and curatorial mastery to affectively teach "intersectionality" across disciplines, while addressing students from diverse

backgrounds.

**2. The case for substantive recruitment of Black teachers and administrators in Québec high schools.**

The sensitive and astute observations about the obstacles to Black student success expressed by Black teachers and one Black principal participant in chapter seven – and conversely, the racist perspectives from White teachers and principals – signal the necessity for diversifying the staff demographics of what we know to be mostly White staff at Québec schools serving Black and other racialized students. Understanding the extent to which – from the adult participant perspectives in chapter seven — Black youth are systematically underserved at school and that race is inferred as a central factor in such treatment – also helps to illustrate how schools are microcosms for the kinds of systemic inequalities that exist in *all* sectors of society (Choi, 2008). What is also true – as evidenced from the Black adult participant data - is that Black educators of Black students are much more adept at correctly identifying the obstacles to Black student success than their White peers, because they themselves are sensitive to and familiar with the realities of racial discrimination.

I also advocate the necessity for more aggressive recruitment of Black and other racialized students to attend teacher-education programs across Québec. I argue for the importance of promoting existing teachers and other qualified staff members from racialized communities to positions of management and high level support staff at schools, boards, and the education ministry. Such aggressive equity-based initiatives, I argue, would ensure not only greater visibility for such individuals, but would also send the much-needed message to parents and students from racialized and marginalized communities that their educational rights and needs matter and are represented at the level of school and board infrastructure.

## Suggestions for Further Research

### Black youth and education in Québec, Critical Race Theory in education, antiracist education, and teacher education - diversity education component.

As discussed in chapter six – and in chapter three – Black youth's first person perspectives indicate that race is often cited as a reason for poor treatment from teachers and lack of school support (Collins and Magnan, 2018; Magnan et al., 2017; Livingstone et al., 2014). As mentioned several times throughout this dissertation, much of what we know about Black students in Québec from the French language literature is often framed around these youths' immigrant trajectories and school integration.

I argue that in order to better understand the obstacles to Black student success in Québec, it is imperative that further research explore in-service and pre-service teacher attitudes about their black students, while also extensively documenting Black Québécois youths' first person reflections about what they perceive as the challenges to school success. Further research exploring these issues, I argue, might provide further insights regarding race as a limiting factor for Black students, while also identifying other factors not adequately addressed in the existing research that posits the reasons for academic delays and dropout. In addition, it would be equally important to conduct a mixed methods research study that looks at the links between Black youth's first-person experiences of racial discrimination at school, while cross-correlating these findings with updated quantitative data about these youth's attendance at trades programs and adult education, or dropout altogether.

## Conclusion

It is critically important to continue mobilizing the brilliant and extraordinary insights that Black high school students in Québec offer to the research about them. Including Black youth in Québec as researchers of their own contexts – in partnership with teacher-practitioner,

community-based and University YPAR-informed researchers, I argue, will provide further rich "insider" insights into what they identify as the obstacles to school success. When considered alongside the observations and analysis of teachers, educational researchers and policy makers, these insights and perspectives could further help us to change what I believe are unacceptable school circumstances for so many Black high school youth in Québec.

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# Appendix 1: McGill ethics and consent form

**ETHICS REVIEW - AMENDMENT REQUEST FORM**

This form can be used to submit any changes/updates to be made to your currently approved research project. Explain what these changes are, and attach any relevant documentation that has been revised. Significant changes that have ethical implications must be reviewed and approved by the REB before they can be implemented. This form is also to be used for indicating changes to funding and personnel.

**REB File #: 90-0908**
**Project Title**: 2006 Black Communities Demographic Project
**Principal Investigator**: Prof. Jim Torczyner
**Department/Phone/Email**: School of Social Work, 514-398-6171, jim.torczyner@mcgill.ca
**Faculty Supervisor (for student PI)**:

The purpose of this form is to request that Ms. Jacqueline Celemencki, doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Education at McGill, be given permission to use data from the qualitative research on education which is being conducted for the "2006 Black Communities Demographic Project." Ms. Celemencki has been employed as a research assistant on the project since October 2008. Her main role is to assist with the implementation of the participatory research project which is engaging high school students from the Black community in a study on programs in their schools and community-based organizations. Ms. Celemencki will be using data gathered through this project, including her own observations and analysis, as the basis for her doctoral thesis.

**Principal Investigator Signature**: _____ Date: 20 mai 09

**Faculty Supervisor Signature**: _____ Date: May 21, 2009
(for student PI)

**For Administrative Use** **REB:** ___REB-I ___REB-II ____REB-III

____ Expedited Review ____ Full Review

____ This amendment request has been approved.

Signature of REB Chair/ designate: _____ Date: _____

## Appendix 2: Codes chart for chapters six and seven

| Actor | Altamount High School | Champagneur High School | Raleigh High School |
|---|---|---|---|
| School Pseudonym | AHS | CHS | RHS |
| Principal | AHS-P | CHS-P | RHS-P |
| Social Worker | AHS-SW | X | X |
| Teacher Focus Group | AHS-TFG | CHS-TFG | RHS-TFG |
| Student Focus Group | AHS-SFG | CHS-SFG | RHS-SFG |

## Appendix 3: Interview protocol – school principals

**School of Social Work**

Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training Planning (MCHRAT)
Consortium de formation sur la défense des droits humains de Montréal (CFDDHM)

McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social (MCESSP)
Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planificiation sociale et stratégique CMEPSS)

**Interview Guide - School Principals**

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The purpose of the interview is two-fold: 1) to learn more about your school and the students that you serve, and b) to gather your views on the role of governmental and community-based initiatives in promoting the success of Black students, and particularly in responding to the lower graduation rates highlighted in the *2001 Black Communities Demographic Project*.

### A. Background of the respondent

How many years have you been principal of the school?

Where were you working prior to this assignment?

### B. Portrait of the school, students and community

To begin, could you give me a brief introduction of your school?

*Question for probing:*

- What are some of the unique aspects of your school and the students you serve?
- What are some of the particular strengths of your school? (e.g., special academic programs, multicultural initiatives, composition of staff)
- What is important for us to know about the students you serve? (e.g., areas of residence, multicultural, socio-economic differences, etc.)

What are some of the major challenges at your school? How are they being addressed?

We know from research that Black high school students in Montreal face a number of disadvantages in high school; for instance, they are generally more likely to dropout and to be enrolled in special education and receive lower academic scores when compared to the general population. To what extent do you see these issues playing out in your school?

What do you think are the main causes of these problems?

Is there anything else that is important to know about the experiences of Black students at

your school?

*Questions for probing:*

- In what ways are the experiences of Black students similar or different from other students?
- In what ways do the experiences of Black students vary (e.g., across gender, class, culture, immigration history)?
- What are some of the strengths and successes of Black students?

**C. Educational Policies, Programs and Practices**

In 2001, the previous *Black Communities Demographic Project* showed that Blacks in

Montreal were significantly less likely to have earned a high school diploma, according

to census data from 1996. In your view, to what extent has this issue has been addressed

by governmental and community-based organizations since 2001? To what extent has

your school attempted to address this issue?

*Questions for probing:*

- Why do you think that government and/or community-based organizations have not addressed this issue?
- What are the obstacles in the way of changes in educational policy and practice?

I would like to learn more about the policies and practices at your school. In general, what steps are being taken to promote equity in the education of students?

*Questions for probing:*

- Has the school formulated any specific policies to promote equity?
- In what ways does the school ensure equal opportunities for all students despite social and economic differences?

- Is intercultural or anti-racist education part of school policy?
- In what ways is the school responding to the diversity of its student body? (e.g., in teaching, extra-curricular activities, support services, etc.)
- Are there any specific initiatives to prevent students from dropping-out? If so, what are they and what students do they serve?
- What have you observed as some of your successes? What about challenges?

What changes do you think need to be implemented at your school in order to enhance the success and graduation of Black students?

**D. Strategies to enhance the success of Black students**

If you were to make broad recommendations for improving the success of Black students in Montreal schools, what would they be?

*Questions for probing:*

- What strategies would you recommend for schools and community-based programs?
- What would you highlight as the elements of a successful dropout prevention strategy?
- Do you think a specific strategy is needed that focuses on the situation of Black students or should the issues be addressed through a more universal approach (e.g., one that tackles "racial" inequality)? What do you think about the idea of Afrocentric schools?
- Do you think different approaches are needed for boys and girls?
- What role do you feel principals can play in removing barriers to success for Black students? What role do you feel teachers can play?
- What support do schools need that they might not currently have? (e.g., professional development and training, pedagogical resources, after-school programs, etc.)
- What support do you think should be directed to the parents of Black students?

In your view, what role should higher governmental bodies, such as the *Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports* and school boards, play in enhancing the success of Black students? What roles do they (and should they) play in supporting schools and community-based organizations?

Finally, is there anything that you would like to mention that we have not discussed? Do you have any questions for me? I thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

## Appendix 4: Interview protocol - teacher focus groups

**School of Social Work**

Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training Planning (MCHRAT)
Consortium de formation sur la défense des droits humains de Montréal (CFDDHM)

McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social (MCESSP)
Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planificiation sociale et stratégique CMEPSS)

**Interview Guide – Teacher focus groups**

I. Introduce ourselves

II. Explain informed consent and go over the consent form; answer questions and obtain signatures.

III. Explain the overall project and student involvement, along with the purpose of the focus group: to get teacher perspectives on achievement and graduation gaps for Black students.

IV. Ask teachers to introduce themselves: what they teach, how long at this HS, etc.

**V. Discussion:**

**Research has shown that there are significant gaps between the educational achievements and graduation rates of Black high school students and the general population of students in Montreal.**

**1. Black academic success at your HS**

Do you see this at your HS, that is, are Black students more likely to have academic problems?

To what extent do you see this happening in your school?

- Academic difficulties - leading to dropout?
- Why do you think it happens? What are the factors?
- Are Black students more likely to have disciplinary or behavioral issues?
- What's going on at the school level to improve academic success of Black students?
- What have you or other teachers done in class to improve their success?
-

**2. Support to address the achievement gap**

What resources, support, training, and professional development are available for teachers to assist in addressing the achievement gap for Black students?

- At the school level?

- At the community level?

What should be available for teachers? What is needed? What would help?

- At the school level?
- At the community level?

What should be available for students? What do they need? What would help?

Do you think the QEP (reform curriculum) will help address this achievement gap?

**3. Role of parents**

How would you describe relationships between parents and teachers/administrators at your school?

- What role do you think parents play in student success?
- How could relationships with parents be improved?

## Appendix 5: Interview protocol - youth focus groups

**School of Social Work**
Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training Planning (MCHRAT)
Consortium de formation sur la défense des droits humains de Montréal (CFDDHM)

McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social (MCESSP)
Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planificiation sociale et stratégique CMEPSS)

### Focus Group Discussions - Students

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1. Do you think your school is a good place to learn?
2. What do you like the most about your school?
3. What do you like the least about your school?
4. Do you think that Black students at your school have unique challenges and needs?
5. How does your school encourage you to learn and to succeed?

*Questions for probing:*

- What support do you receive from school staff? Do you feel you have the support you need to do well in school and to graduate? What about other Black students?
- Where can you go for help when you are having difficulties with your studies (e.g., homework or a course subject)?
- Where can you go for help when you are having personal difficulties?
- Do you participate in extra-curricular and after-school programs?
- Why do you participate in these programs? How are they helping you in school?
- What other opportunities are available at your school? (e.g., internships, mentoring, etc.)
- What can your school do to be a better place for students to spend time and to learn?

*Questions for probing:*

- What can your school do to increase the success of Black students?
- What can be done to prevent Black students from dropping-out of high school?
- Do you think that the same strategies are needed for boys and girls?
- What specific programs or changes would you like to see in your school? (e.g., more after-school programs, greater integration of cultural diversity into the curriculum, etc.)

## Appendix 6: BCDP youth researchers recruitment poster

**School of Social Work**

Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training Planning (MCHRAT)
Consortium de formation sur la défense des droits humains de Montréal (CFDDHM)

McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social (MCESSP)
Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planificiation sociale et stratégique CMEPSS)

***Be part of the change you wish to see in the world!***

**Join a Participatory Research Project on Education and African-Canadian Youth**

**A Project of the 2006 Black Communities Demographic Study**

Researchers working on the *2006 Black Communities Demographic Study* are looking for 20 high school students to work with them on a participatory research project on education policies and programs for secondary students in Montreal. The main purpose of the research is to look at the ways in programs and services in schools and community-based organizations support the academic success and graduation of Black students.

**What are the objectives of the participatory research project?**

- To explore the progress in government and community-based initiatives since the first *Black Communities Demographic Study* was published in 2001;
- To give Black youth an opportunity to express their views on the issues that affect their engagement in school and the best ways to promote their success.
- To engage students, parents, teachers, administrators and community-based workers in discussions about ways to enhance the school success of Black students.
- To highlight examples of effective policies and programs and recommendations for future action.

**Why involve youth in research?**

- Youth have a natural idealism, creativity and open-mindedness that can lead to new ways of looking at and responding to existing challenges!
- Youth are the ones who know best about their own experience!
- Youth are interested in opportunities to make a difference in their worlds!

**Who, what, when, and where?**

***WHO*:** Up to 20 students in grades 10 and 11 from five (5) French and English schools in Montreal will work with adult researchers from McGill.

***WHAT*:** The main research activities will be: a) "community asset mapping" to identify the resources, capacities, programs and practices in schools and community-based organizations; b) focus group discussions with students, parents, teachers, and community-based workers. These activities will be carried out by youth with the assistance of 1-2 adult researchers.

***WHEN:*** From January to June 2009. Training and work sessions involving all 20 youth will be held on Saturdays between 2 and 3 times a month.

***WHERE*:** At a central location in Montreal. Details will follow.

**Youth participating in the project will receive a scholarship worth $500 or more! It may also be possible to get academic credits for your work.**

**For More Information:**
Anne-Marie Livingstone (Project Coordinator) & Jacqueline Celemencki (Research Assistant)
2006 Black Communities Demographic Study
Tel.: (514) 398-2142
Email: amlivingstone@sympatico.ca

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**The Background: Youth Involvement in Research and Evaluation**

**Youth involvement in research and evaluation** is an approach being used more and more by schools and community-based organizations in order to: a) include the voices of youth in decision-making and planning, b) better understand the experiences of youth and the issues that confront them, and c) enhance the effectiveness of programs and services. A few examples include:

- The "Boston Student Researchers for High School Renewal" (SRHSR) and youth researchers associated with "Kids First" in Oakland, California, used survey methods to understand the perceptions and feelings of students regarding issues such as school climate, security, physical conditions, and student-teacher relations in schools. Findings demonstrated the degree to which students cared about their schools and desired

opportunities to be involved in making decisions to improve the school climate and learning opportunities.

- In Michigan in the US, a group of teenagers were concerned about discrimination and conducted a city-wide survey on attitudes about “race” in schools. They used the results to develop an action plan in which students educate other students about discrimination.
- In Chicago, a group of adolescent girls conducted a study on security and “street harassment” in their neighbourhood. Results were used to convince city authorities to install new street lights in areas where girls and women were most at risk of harassment.

**A few good publications on the topic:**

1) Cammarota, J. and Fine, M. (2008). *Revolutionizing education: Youth participatory research in motion*. New York, NY: Routledge.

2) Delgado, M. (2006). *Designs and methods for youth-led research*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

3) Ginwright, S., Noguera, P., and Cammorata, J. (Eds). (2006). *Beyond resistance: Youth activism and community change*. NY, NY: Routledge.

# Appendix 7: Community mapping exercise

## BCDP Youth Mapping Project Questionairre

### School-Wide Policies on Equity and Diversity

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does the school/school board have an equity charter, mission, or policy? | | | |
| 2. Do educational policies and/or practices in the school adhere to these charter/policies? | | | |
| 3. Are the policy and mission statement publicized regularly to staff, students, and parents, and other stakeholders in the community? | | | |
| 4. Does the school have an plan of action to meat the mandate set out by the equity charter? | | | |
| 5. Was the equity charter co-produced with all stakeholders (students, parents, staff and community groups)? | | | |
| 6. Do all students have equal access to participate in school activities, regardless of academic achievements, financial limitations, linguistic challenges, etc? | | | |
| 7. Are gay, lesbian, trans, and bisexual students' needs provided for within the capacity of the school infrastructure? | | | |
| 8. Are pregnant or parenting students' needs provided for within the capacity of the school infrastructure? | | | |
| 9. Are there school sponsored activities established which encourage students to develop personal, civic, service, and societal responsibilities? | | | |

### School Climate/Environment/School Culture

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does the school have bulletin boards, displays, hall decorations, that represent the interests and activities of the larger student body? | | | |
| 2. Do staff, administration, support staff (others) interact with students? | | | |
| 3. Are students encouraged to initiate their own non-academic activities? | | | |
| 4. Are their special programs in place for black students that are having academic troubles? | | | |
| 5. Do students of varying ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and gendered groups, interact with one another? | | | |
| 6. Is there a feeling of overall support for students to succeed academically? | | | |
| 7. Are their resources that are available specifically for black students? | | | |

Staff Training and Involvement

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Do staff communicate regularly with school administrators? | | | |
| 2. Do staff communicate regularly with parents? | | | |
| 3. Do staff communicate regularly with students outside of class? | | | |
| 4. Do teachers/support staff attend/have access to regular training workshops? | | | |
| 5. Are teachers/support staff encouraged to engage in ongoing job/skills training to help students? | | | |
| 6. Are staff members of different genders, races, ethnic backgrounds, or disabilities represented in the school? | | | |
| 7. Are all staff members familiar with the varied demographic groups and neighborhoods represented in the school? | | | |
| 8. Do staff members communicate well. and on a regular basis, with staff members from other ethnic, racial gender or disability groups? | | | |
| 9. Have all staff members received training to learn strategies for attending to the needs of marginalized students? | | | |

Student Involvement and Student-Lead Initiatives

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Are students involved in governing boards, and decision making processes at the curricular and social aspect levels? | | | |
| 2. Is there a student council at your school? | | | |
| 3. As a student, do you feel that your voice is solicited as a determinant in how decisions that affect you are made? | | | |
| 4. Is there a student year book? Is it a student run inititative? | | | |
| 5. As a student, do you have the support of the staff and administration in initiating academic and non-academic activities? | | | |
| 6. Are students' preferred social groups reflective of their linguistic, ethno-specific, or socio-economic backgrounds? | | | |

Parental and Community Involvement

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Are parents involved in the way the school is run? | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2. Do parents have any say in the way that curriculum is shaped? | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |
| 6. Does the school offer mentorship/co-op/work-study programs and training with the help of local community groups? | | | |
| 7. Do local community groups provide spaces for youth to congregate? | | | |
| 8. Do any partnerships exist between school and community groups? | | | |
| 9. | | | |
| 10. | | | |
| 11. | | | |

Curriculum and Academic Support

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does the curriculum reflect a move towards intercultural or multicultural understanding and learning? | | | |
| 2. Are the histories of various cultural groups represented in the history curriculum (Sec.4,5)? | | | |
| 3. Does the school provide tutors to help students in difficulty? | | | |
| 4. Does the school provide special classes for advanced students, or students with special needs learning? | | | |
| 5. Does the school provide opportunities for youth to learn outside the limits of the curriculum (i.e. special projects, alliances with other stakeholder groups such as University partnerships, community/religious groups)? | | | |
| 6. | | | |
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Guidance and Counseling Support

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
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Extra-Curricular Activities

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does the school offer extra-curricular activities? | | | |
| 2. Are these activities mostly sports-based? | | | |
| 3. Are these activities meant to provide academic support? | | | |
| 4. Are the after-school activities student-run? | | | |
| 5. Do the after-school activities occur on school grounds? | | | |
| 6. | | | |
| 7. | | | |
| 8. | | | |
| 9. | | | |
| 10 | | | |

In-School Resources/Technology/Library Facilities

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Does the school have a library? | | | |
| 2. Is library equipped with a good variety of books? | | | |
| 3. Can students or teachers suggest books for purchase? | | | |
| 4. Does the school have a budget for library maintenance and purchases? | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Does the school have a computer room? | | | |
| 6. Is the computer room equipped with new and accessible equipement? | | | |
| 7. Does the school have internet access? | | | |
| 8. Are students limited to conducting research (excluding email, facebook, and MSN)? | | | |
| 9. | | | |
| 10 | | | |

Other Stakeholder Involvements (University Partnerships, Religious Groups, Private Donors/Volunteer Staff

| CRITERIA/QUESTIONS | Yes | No | Needs Improving |
|---|---|---|---|
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| 3. | | | |
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# Appendix 8: Informed consent form: youth focus group participants

McGill

**École de service social**
Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training (MCHRAT)
Consortium de formation sur la défense des droits humains de Montréal (CFDDHM)

McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning (MCESSP)
Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planification sociale stratégique (CMEPSS)

## FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT ÉCLAIRÉ
## (Groupe de discussion - Étudiants)

**Titre de la recherche:** Étude démographique sur les communautés noires

**Chercheur Principal:**
Dr Jim Torczyner
École de service social
Université McGill
3506 University, bureau 113
Montréal (Québec)
H3A 2A7
Téléphone : (514) 398-6717
Courriel : jim.torczyner@mcgill.ca

**Co-Chercheure:**
Anne-Marie Livingstone

La présente est pour vous inviter à contribuer à l'*étude démographique sur les communautés noires* de 2006, une étude dirigée par Dr Jim Torczyner, professeur à l'École de service social de l'université McGill et directeur du *Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planification sociale stratégique* (CMEPSS).

**De quoi il s'agit dans cette étude?**

L'étude démographique sur les communautés noires de 2006 fait suite à une étude semblable qui a été produite en 2001, aussi dirigée par professeur Jim Torczyner, qui a analysé les données du recensement canadien de 1996 et produit un rapport détaillé sur la situation démographique, sociale, et économique des communautés noires de Montréal. Les données ont mis en évidence des problèmes d'inégalité socio-économique (par exemple, inégalité au niveau des taux de diplômation) et fragilisation des familles.

L'étude actuelle analysera les données du recensement de 2006 et identifiera 1) les changements démographiques, sociaux, et économiques depuis 1996 ; 2) les initiatives publiques et communautaires qui ont été élaborées et mises en œuvre en réponse aux conclusions de l'étude de 2001.

L'éducation est un des secteurs faisant partie de la recherche sur les actions gouvernementales et communautaires. Cette recherche est dirigée par Anne-Marie Livingstone. Les objectifs de cette recherche sont : 1) examiner les initiatives qui ont ont été élaborées et mises en œuvre en vue d'augmenter la réussite scolaire et les taux de diplômation des élèves noirs ; 2) identifier des exemples de programmes et pratiques prometteurs et des recommandations.

**Qu'est ce que l'on vous demande de faire?**

On vous demande de participer à un groupe de discussion sur l'éducation et les jeunes de la communauté noire. Le but du groupe de discussion est d'avoir vos points de vues sur le rôle des écoles et des organismes communautaires dans la réussite scolaire des jeunes. La discussion durera environ 60 à 90 minutes et sera enregistrée seulement avec votre consentement et le consentement de votre parent ou une autorité parentale.

**Quels sont les risques?**

Il n'y a aucun risque.

**Quels sont les avantages à participer à l'étude?**

Votre participation à l'étude nous aidera à mieux comprendre les actions que le gouvernement et les organismes communautaires peuvent prendre pour améliorer le succès des jeunes élèves noirs à Montréal.

**Quels sont vos droits?**

Votre participation à l'étude est volontaire. Si vous choisissez de participer, vous avez le droit de refuser de répondre à n'importe quelle question avec lesquelles vous ne seriez pas à l'aise ; vous avez le droit d'interrompre la discussion et de vous retirer à n'importe quel moment sans conséquences négatives.

**Comment la confidentialité sera-t-elle maintenue?**

Toute information receuillie lors du groupe de discussion restera confidentielle. Une fois votre formulaire de consentement rassemblé, seulement Anne-Marie Livingstone et les membres de son équipe de recherche auront accès à l'information. Votre formulaire de consentement signé et toute autre information seront gardés en sécurité dans un bureau fermé. Tous les documents seront détruits cinq ans après la fin de la recherche.

La cassette-audio du groupe de discussion (dans le cas où nous avons votre consentement pour l'enregistrement) sera seulement accessible à Anne-Marie Livingstone et les membres de son équipe de recherche. Les résultats de l'étude seront publiés sous forme générale, aucune information ne pouvant vous identifier. Toutes les cassettes-audio seront détruites lorsque l'analyse des données sera complétée.

**Qui contacter si vous avez des questions à propos de vos droits ?**

Si vous avez des questions sur vos droits en tant que participant à cette étude, s'il vous plaît contacter Lynda McNeil, Agent d'éthique en recherche au (514) 398-6831.

**Qui contacter si vous avez des questions à propos de l'étude ?**

Si vous avez des questions ou des soucis concernant l'étude, s'il vous plaît contacter Anne-Marie Livingstone par téléphone au (450) 622-2212 ou courriel (amlivingstone@sympatico.ca)

**CONSENTEMENT:** Je consens à être enregistré [redacted] OUI ____ NON

J'ai lu le formulaire et j'accepte de participer à cette étude

Signature du participant: [redacted] Signature de l'intervieweur: [redacted]

Nom du participant: [redacted] Date _____

Signature du parent ou de l'autorité parentale: [redacted]

Nom du parent ou de l'autorité parentale: [redacted]

# Appendix 9: Informed consent form: School principals and other professional staff

**School of Social Work**
Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training (MCHRAT)
Consortium de formation sur la défense des droits humains de Montréal (CFDDHM)

McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning (MCESSP)
Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planification sociale stratégique (CMEPSS)

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM (INTERVIEWS)
## (School Principals and Other Professional Staff)

**Title of the Research study:** 2006 Black Communities Demographic Project

**Principal Investigator:**

Professor Jim Torczyner
McGill University, School of Social Work
3506 University, room 113
Montreal QC H3A 2A7
(514) 398-6717
jim.torczyner@mcgill.ca

**Other researcher:**

Anne-Marie Livingstone

This is an invitation to contribute to the 2006 Black Communities Demographic Project, a study directed by Dr. Jim Torczyner, professor in the School of Social Work at McGill University and director of the *Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning* (MCESSP).

**What is this study about?**

The purpose of the study is to assess the situation of the Black community in Montreal using data from the 2006 Canadian census. The study is a follow-up to a similar study that was completed in 2001 and based on 1996 census data. The 2001 study resulted in a comprehensive portrait of the Black community on factors like immigration, employment, income, and education. In the current study, researchers will produce another detailed report on the Black community and assess whether any changes have occurred since 1996. In addition, the research will look at the actions that government and community-based organizations have taken to respond to the issues and needs highlighted in the 2001 report.

Education is one of the areas being studied as part of the research on government and community-based initiatives. This research is lead by Anne-Marie Livingstone, a staff member of the project. In this research, the purposes are: 1) to assess how governmental and community-based organizations have responded to the findings of the 2001 study, which showed that graduation rates in the Black community were significantly lower than average, and 2) to explore the ways in which government and community-based initiatives currently support the academic success and graduation of students from the Black community.

**What are we asking you to do?**

You are being asked to take part in a one-time interview arranged by Anne-Marie Livingstone. The purpose of the interview is to obtain your views on the role of governmental and community-based initiatives in promoting the academic achievement and graduation of Black high school students. The interview will last between 60 to 90 minutes and will be audio-taped only with your permission. The location of the interview is at your convenience.

**What are the risks?**

There are no risks whatsoever.

**What are the benefits in participating in the study?**

By participating, you may improve our understanding of the role of government and community-based organizations in promoting the success of Black high school students.

**What are your rights?**

Participation in the study is voluntary. Even if you participate, you may refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may also end the interview at any time without facing any negative consequences.

**How will confidentiality be maintained and your privacy protected?**

All the information we obtain from participants will be kept strictly confidential. Consent forms will be locked in a file in the office of the *2006 Black Communities Demographic Project* at McGill University. The forms will be seen only by Anne-Marie Livingstone and the research assistant for the study. All documents will be destroyed five years after the study is completed.

The audiotapes of the interview (if your consent to audio-tape is obtained) will only be accessible to Anne-Marie Livingstone and the research assistant. Results of the study will be published in general form, with no information to identify any single participant. Audiotapes will be destroyed after the data analysis is completed.

**Who do you contact if you have questions about your rights?**

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant in the study, please contact Lynda McNeil, Research Ethics Officer, McGill University, at (514) 398-6831.

**Who do you contact if you have questions about the study?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact please contact Anne-Marie Livingstone either by phone at (450) 622-2212 or email (amlivingstone@sympatico.ca).

**CONSENT:** I agree to be tape-recorded ✓ YES ____ NO

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study

Participant's signature: _____ Researcher's signature: _____

Participant's name: _____ Date _____

# Appendix 10: Informed consent form: teacher focus group

**School of Social Work**
Montreal Consortium for Human Rights Advocacy Training (MCHRAT)
Consortium de formation sur la défense des droits humains de Montréal (CFDDHM)

McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning (MCESSP)
Consortium de McGill pour l'ethnicité et la planification sociale stratégique (CMEPSS)

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM (FOCUS GROUPS)
## (School Teachers)

**Title of the Research study:** 2006 Black Communities Demographic Project

**Principal Investigator:**

Professor Jim Torczyner
McGill University, School of Social Work
3506 University, room 113
Montreal QC H3A 2A7
(514) 398-6717
jim.torczyner@mcgill.ca

**Other researcher:**

Anne-Marie Livingstone

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This is an invitation to contribute to the 2006 Black Communities Demographic Project, a study directed by Dr. Jim Torczyner, professor in the School of Social Work at McGill University and director of the *Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning* (MCESSP).

**What is this study about?**

The purpose of the study is to assess the situation of the Black community in Montreal using data from the 2006 Canadian census. The study is a follow-up to a similar study that was completed in 2001 and based on 1996 census data. The 2001 study resulted in a comprehensive portrait of the Black community on factors like immigration, employment, income, and education. In the current study, researchers will produce another detailed report on the Black community and assess whether any changes have occurred since 1996. In addition, the research will look at the actions that government and community-based organizations have taken to respond to the issues and needs highlighted in the 2001 report.

Education is one of the areas being studied as part of the research on government and community-based initiatives. This research is lead by Anne-Marie Livingstone, a staff member of the project. In this research, the aims are: 1) to assess how school and community-based initiatives have responded to the findings of the 2001 study, and particularly the lower graduation rates observed among members of the Black community, 2) to explore how existing governmental and community-based initiatives promote the academic success and graduation of Black students.

**What are we asking you to do?**

We are inviting you to participate in a group discussion with other teachers from your school. The purpose of the discussion is to get the views of teachers on the role of governmental and community-based initiatives in raising the

**What are we asking you to do?**

You are being asked to take part in a one-time interview arranged by Anne-Marie Livingstone. The purpose of the interview is to obtain your views on the role of governmental and community-based initiatives in promoting the academic achievement and graduation of Black high school students. The interview will last between 60 to 90 minutes and will be audio-taped only with your permission. The location of the interview is at your convenience.

**What are the risks?**

There are no risks whatsoever.

**What are the benefits in participating in the study?**

By participating, you may improve our understanding of the role of government and community-based organizations in promoting the success of Black high school students.

**What are your rights?**

Participation in the study is voluntary. Even if you participate, you may refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may also end the interview at any time without facing any negative consequences.

**How will confidentiality be maintained and your privacy protected?**

All the information we obtain from participants will be kept strictly confidential. Consent forms will be locked in a file in the office of the *2006 Black Communities Demographic Project* at McGill University. The forms will be seen only by Anne-Marie Livingstone and the research assistant for the study. All documents will be destroyed five years after the study is completed.

The audiotapes of the interview (if your consent to audio-tape is obtained) will only be accessible to Anne-Marie Livingstone and the research assistant. Results of the study will be published in general form, with no information to identify any single participant. Audiotapes will be destroyed after the data analysis is completed.

**Who do you contact if you have questions about your rights?**

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant in the study, please contact Lynda McNeil, Research Ethics Officer, McGill University, at (514) 398-6831.

**Who do you contact if you have questions about the study?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact please contact Anne-Marie Livingstone either by phone at (450) 622-2212 or email (amlivingstone@sympatico.ca).

**CONSENT:** I agree to be tape-recorded ✓ YES ____ NO

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study

Participant's signature: _____ Researcher's signature: _____

Participant's name: _____ Date _____