Université de Montréal

Black Student Experiences in English Quebec Schools: A DisCrit Composite Counter-Story of the Special Education Placement Process

Expériences d’élèves noir.es dans des écoles anglophones du Québec : Un contre-récit-composé du processus de classement en adaptation scolaire à la lumière de *DisCrit*

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Abstract

While systemic racism continues to be denied in dominant political discourse in Quebec, racialized citizens and immigrants are the targets of oppressive treatment in various institutions across the province, including schools (Pierre & Bosset, 2020). This situation is particularly salient for Black students who have reported various manifestations of anti-Black racism in educational institutions (CDPDJ, 2011; Collins & Magnan, 2018; Louis, 2020). These experiences in conjunction with their concerning socio-educational portrait (Caldas et al., 2009; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017) and the predominant race and racism denial discourse incite a critical intersectional investigation of their school experiences. Specifically in light of their overrepresentation in special education (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008), this study documents Black student experiences in Quebec English schools throughout the special education placement process, and analyzes the systemic and structural barriers they encounter.

A *DisCrit* theoretical framework guided the inquiry, as it addresses the interrelationship of ableism and racism, and how they work in tandem to maintain systems of inequity (Annamma et al., 2016). Similarly, a critical qualitative methodological approach was employed, using a counter-story method (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Following the analysis of interviews with 21 school board members and 20 high school students, as well as their student files, the main results showed that while school board personnel perceived most of their practices as inclusive, benevolent, and beneficial to students, the majority of the reported student experiences do not coincide. Throughout the special education placement process, Black students were prevented from accessing information and fully participating in their own special education placement processes, as the majority were unaware of the codes and labels they had been attributed, and the support measures available to them. They were exposed to perceived unwelcoming and unsafe environments, academic neglect, as well as harsh forms of discipline. The analysis of the results suggests that special education placement processes are tainted by anti-Black and ableist practices and policies that adultify, medicalized and criminalize the behaviors of Black children, while failing to fully uphold their educational rights.

Key words: Black students, special education, antiblackness, DisCrit, counter-stories, adultification, criminalization, medicalization

Résumé

Alors que l'on observe un déni du racisme systémique dans le discours politique dominant au Québec, les citoyen.nes et les immigrant.es racisé.es sont les cibles de traitements oppressifs dans diverses institutions à travers la province, y compris au sein des écoles (Pierre et Bosset, 2020). Cette situation concerne plus particulièrement les élèves noir.es qui ont témoigné avoir subi des expériences de racisme dans les établissements d'enseignement (CDPDJ, 2011; Collins et Magnan, 2018; Louis, 2020). Face au déni du racisme caractéristique du discours dominant, une étude empirique, dans une perspective intersectionnelle et critique, s'avère nécessaire afin d'analyser les expériences scolaires des élèves noir.es, au regard des expériences de racisme vécues et en lien avec leur portrait socio-éducatif préoccupant (Caldas et al., 2009; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017). Eu égard à la surreprésentation des jeunes Noir.es en adaptation scolaire (Mc Andrew et Ledent, 2008), cette étude documente plus spécifiquement les expériences des élèves noir.es dans les écoles anglophones du Québec tout au long du processus de classement. Il s'agit également d'analyser les obstacles structurels auxquels ces élèves font face.

Cette recherche prend appui sur le cadre théorique « *Discrit* » (Annamma et al, 2016) qui met en évidence l'interrelation entre le capacitisme et le racisme, en analysant comment l'articulation entre ces deux dimensions contribue au maintien de systèmes éducatifs inéquitables. De même, une approche méthodologique qualitative critique a été privilégiée, à travers le recours à la méthode du *contre-récit* (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Les entretiens - menés auprès de 21 intervenant.es scolaires et de 20 élèves du secondaire - ainsi que l'analyse des dossiers scolaires de ces derniers, ont principalement fait ressortir l'existence d'un décalage entre les discours des intervenant.es relatifs à leurs pratiques - perçues généralement comme inclusives, bienveillantes et bénéfiques pour les élèves - et les expériences relatées par la plupart des élèves. La majorité des élèves noir.es interrogé.es se trouvait dans l'impossibilité de participer pleinement au processus menant à leur classement en adaptation scolaire, n'ayant pas connaissance des codes et des étiquettes qui leur avaient été attribuées, ni des mesures de soutien existantes. Ils (Elles) se sentaient confronté.es à des environnements d'apprentissage perçus comme malveillants et insécures, à la négligence scolaire ainsi qu'à des formes sévères de discipline. Les résultats de l'étude suggèrent que les processus de classement en adaptation scolaire sont entachés de pratiques et de politiques racistes et capacitistes envers les enfants noir.es dont les droits éducatifs ne sont pas pleinement respectés -ces derniers étant traités comme des adultes, médicalisés et criminalisés.

Mots clés : élèves noir.es, adaptation scolaire, éducation spécialisée, racisme anti-Noir.es, capacitisme, adultification, criminalisation, médicalisation, théorie DisCrit, contre-récit

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List of Symbols and Abbreviations

ABBE	Advisory Board on English Education
CCLA	Canadian Civil Liberties Association
CCR	Canadian Council for Refugees
CDPDJ	Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse
CPÉR	Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique en recherche
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CSE	Conseil supérieur de l'éducation
DisCrit	Disability Critical Race Studies
DSE	Disability Studies in Education
EHDAA	Élèves handicapés ou en difficulté d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage
IEP	Individualized education plan
MEES	Ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur
MELS	Ministère de l'éducation, du loisir et du sport
MEQ	Ministère de l'éducation du Québec
MICC	Ministère de l'immigration et des communautés culturelles
MIDI	Ministère de l'immigration, de la diversité et de l'inclusion
PRAIDA	Programme régionale d'accueil et d'intégration des demandeurs d'asile
RCLALQ	Regroupement des comités logements et associations de locataires du Québec
SHSMLD	Students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

To all my students, past, present, and future

In loving memory of Stephen Fields, Joanne Kizzee, and Nicholas Gibbs

And to every black child
trying to find their way in these institutions

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Introduction

Recent actions undertaken by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) within the context of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) highlight the importance of recognizing this group as distinct, whose human rights must be promoted and protected. A report issued by the council following its mission to Canada (2017) indicates that it is "deeply concerned by the structural racism that lies at the core of many Canadian institutions and the systemic anti-Black racism that continues to have a negative impact on the human rights situation of African Canadians" (p.7). Simultaneously, the existence of systemic racism is being vehemently denied in Quebec's official political discourse, largely grounded in postracial ideology (Howard, 2014, 2018). Yet, it would appear that the socio-academic portrait of Black students in the province substantiates the UNHRC's concerns as experiences of racial profiling, over-surveillance, excessive punitive measures, perceived racism, discrimination, and exclusion have been documented (CDPDJ, 2011; Collins & Magnan, 2018; Howard, 2014a). These experiences in conjunction with many other unfavorable educational dimensions such as their under-representation in advanced academic streams, and their overrepresentation in adult education and special education (Mc Andrew et al., 2011; Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008; Potvin & Leclercq, 2014) incite a critical intersectional investigation of their school experiences. Specifically in light of their disproportionate representation in special education (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008), this study documents Black student experiences in Quebec English schools throughout the special education placement process, and analyzes the systemic and structural barriers they encounter.

The first chapter, which describes the research problem, begins by situating Black communities in Quebec historically, demographically, and socio-educationally, as well as analyzing how they have been represented in research to date, notably as it relates to a postracial context. It then provides a comprehensive description of special education in terms of the racial disproportionality phenomenon, based on geographical trends, methodological contrasts, and institutional dimensions. The specific situation of special education and racial overrepresentation in Quebec is then elaborated. In light of all these considerations, the chapter concludes with the research question that guided the inquiry: *What are the experiences of Black students who have undergone special education placement in Quebec English schools*?

The theoretical foundations are presented in the second chapter. To fully understand Black student experiences of the special education placement process in the postracial scheme of Quebec, I turned

to critical theories. Among these, disability studies in education, critical race theory, intersectionality theory, BlackCrit, decolonial theory, and DisCrit contributed to the framework. Consolidated, they provided grounds for understanding subjective experiences and structures and their effects against a historical backdrop that incites questioning and challenging dominant ideologies and social power relations. Following a presentation of the fundamental theoretical underpinnings of disability and race, DisCrit, which guided the analysis, was contextualized to Quebec and the research project. The chapter concludes with a definition of the key concepts of the research question, as well as the specific research objectives.

The third chapter presents the methodology of the research, which is situated in a critical-emancipatory paradigm. It entails an overview of my positionality as a researcher and description of the counter-story method that was mobilized, which was based on the necessity of foregrounding the student voices as they relate to my own, as well as to the master-narrative. These methodological dimensions led me to propose a quadripartite model of analysis that was composed of 1) a thematic analysis of interviews with 21 members of school personnel and 20 students who self-identified as Black, 2) a typological analysis of the student placement process which facilitated a composite counter-story, 3) a contrasted analysis of the institutional dimensions and student perspectives, 4) a DisCrit analysis of the special education placement process from which a single composite counter-story emerged.

The fourth chapter manifests as a contextualization of the master-narrative regarding the special education placement process and meets the first objective of the research: t*o describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors in Quebec English schools*. In this sense, the results of the deductive thematic analysis of the individual and group interviews with school personnel are presented through a chronological reconstruction of the special education placement process according to various institutional actors. This entails the progression from referrals made in regular schools, transitions to special schools through a placement committee, and placements and service delivery in special schools. The chapter concludes with the personnel's reflections on Black student experiences.

Chapter 5 is entirely devoted to the student-participant counter-stories regarding the special education placement process. The results of the inductive thematic analysis, as well as the typological analysis are presented. Therefore, based on the thematic analysis, common themes and collective representations among the student-participants were presented, as well as composite characters of the special education placement process, based on the typological analysis. Thus the second objective *to document Black student experiences of the special education placement process* is addressed as well

as the third *to analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process,* in a partial manner.

The sixth chapter loops the third objective through a presentation of the results of the contrasted and DisCrit analyses. This chapter represents the portion of the analysis where my voice as a researcher was the most accentuated. It presents a critical contrast between the personnel and student accounts of the special education placement process, as well as my interpretation of the results, guided by the theoretical framework of the research. This final chapter of the dissertation constitutes a single composite counter-story of the special education placement process based on the interpretations of the 20 student-participants, and my own.

The thesis concludes with recapitulative highlights of all the chapters, as well as a discussion of the empirical, theoretical, methodological, practical contributions to the advancement of knowledge and their implications. The limitations of the research are also discussed. Finally, the thesis closes with recommendations for future research that continue the plight for social and spiritual justice in education for all students.

Chapter 1

The Research Problem: Black Quebecois Communities and Special Education

In Quebec, the "visible minority" population has been steadily on the rise since 1996. In fact, between 2001 and 2006[1], the population increase rate was more than seven times higher than that of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2009). Currently, people who self-identify as Black comprise one of the largest subgroups representing over 15% of "visible minorities" (Statistics Canada, 2019). Laterally, the proportion of students with special educational needs in Quebec increased from 12.9 % in the 1999-2000 school year (MELS, 2009) to 19.3% in 2013-2014 (MEES, 2015). A fundamental purpose of special education is to deliver adapted educational services that produce equitable outcomes for students designated with disabilities; yet, it is unclear whether this goal is being met (Kavale, 2014). For example, students placed in special education not only have an inferior success rate (MEQ, 2003; MEES, 2017), but racialized group disproportionality in special education exists as an international phenomenon (Cooc & Kiru, 2018; Gabel et al., 2009). The overlap of these two postulates may serve as a reliable indicator of educational inequality globally. With the purpose of better understanding this circumstance, this chapter presents the socio-historical, political and academic particularities of Black communities in Quebec. A detailed portrait of the existing studies on the disproportionality of racialized youth in special education within comparative international contexts will be elaborated, as well as the specific situation of racialized youth in Quebec special education. The final section aims to reinforce the relevance of this research about Black youth in special education and its social and scientific contribution, based on the limitations identified in Quebec, Canada, and the findings within the consolidated literature. In conclusion, the general research question of the study will be stated.

1.1 Black Communities of Quebec

Quebec considers itself a democratic and inclusive society that enables the full participation of its citizens through collective and individual engagement. In response to the steadily growing diversification of the population through immigration, Quebec has developed a public discourse on this issue and established principles that promote a pluralistic society based on the sharing of common institutions, respect for fundamental democratic values, and the promotion of a common public culture.

[1] There is significant controversy pertaining to the validity of the most recent census data made available through the National Household Survey (2011, 2016), mainly due to the voluntary nature of its completion, the steep non-response rate, and inconsistencies with previous data collection methods. Several researchers (Hulchanski & Maaranen, 2014; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017) have recommended the use of caution in utilizing the data, and in certain cases, avoiding its use altogether, especially as it relates to issues of diversity in Canada.

However, despite the presence of this political and legal framework, there remains a consistent gap between the official treatise and the reality of discrimination and racism (Austin, 2010; Howard, 2020). Additionally, not only is this treatise largely grounded in postracial ideology, but the historical interactions between settler Quebecois and Black people have been, to a large extent, erased or misrepresented (Austin, 2010; Howard, 2018; 2020; Thésée & Carr, 2016a). Therefore, it is necessary to produce a comprehensive portrait of the Black communities of Quebec to fully contextualize the research topic and its relevance. The aim of the following section is to bring to light the socio-historical, demographical, political, and academic particularities of the Black communities in Quebec.

1.1.1. Particularities of the Socio-Historical Context

The earliest recorded Black presence in present-day Quebec can be traced back to the arrival of Matthew da Costa. He accompanied Samuel de Champlain, the "founding father of New France", on an exploration to the lower St-Lawrence Valley in the early 17th century, somewhere between 1603-1606 (Austin, 2010; Williams, 1989). He was an interpreter between the French-speaking and Indigenous communities, and it is inferred that he had travelled to Canada prior to this date. Beyond this account, the early history of Black people in Quebec is entrenched in slavery, despite the nation's anti-slavery attitude that has been promoted officially, and commonly perceived as factual, until recently (Mackey, 2010; Nelson, 2020; Trudel, 2013).

1.1.1.2. Human Trafficking of Africans in New France

The beginnings of the human trafficking of Africans to the colonized territory that was given the name New France involve the importation and sale of an 8-year old Malagasy boy named Olivier Le Jeune in 1628 or 1629 (Fehmiu-Brown, 2011). The institution of slavery was first regulated in 1685 through a decree called the *Code Noir* penned by King Louis XIV of France, and officially legalized in 1689 (Williams, 1989). Human traffickers belonged to all ranks of society including governors, bishops, officers, lords, merchants, etc., and were mainly French settlers (Trudel, 2013). Due to census inaccuracies, it is impossible to obtain a precise portrait of the enslaved population. However, it is estimated that over a 125-year period, approximately 5400 people were enslaved in New France, among which the majority were *Panis*, an indigenous nation from the Missouri and Kansas rivers (Trudel, 2013).

The British believed that a slave-based economy "increased the chances of capitalist production, while at the same time it extended the notion of private property which was essential to the development of capitalism" (Williams, 1989, p.12). From this perspective, Black slaves came to be perceived as more valuable in terms of property and eventually outnumbered Indigenous slaves until the acquisition of slaves was gradually associated exclusively to Africans (Cooper, 2007). While some historians have documented the social standing and conditions of slaves as similar to those of free people (ex: Trudel, 2013), others have brought to light the violent and dehumanizing experiences enslaved people were subjected to, as well as their acts of resistance (Cooper, 2007; Fehmiu-Brown, 2011; Nelson, 2020). One example can be found in the struggle for freedom by Marie-Joseph Angélique - arguably the most legendary figure in Quebec's Black history - who was captured while fleeing from Montreal, accused of intentionally destroying a hospital and 45 homes by fire, tortured into confession, and publicly executed (Cooper, 2007; Fehmiu-Brown, 2011).

The late 18th century marked the beginning of the slavery abolition movement in Canada. Eventually, the value of slaves declined, escaping became more common, and courts rendered judgments against slave ownership rights. While the official end of slavery came with the British Parliament's Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, the antiblackness and dehumanization that anchored it continue to circulate in all spheres of Quebecois society including religion, employment, housing, the policing and justice system, healthcare, social services, education, and immigration (Gay, 2004; Maynard, 2017).

1.1.1.3. Immigration and the Persistence of Antiblackness

In addition to a large number of fugitives of American human trafficking (Gay, 2004), many Black people arrived in Quebec as free people. Both fugitive and free people came with diverse forms of entrepreneurial and skilled-labor expertise in areas such as fishing, fur trading, carpentry, etc. Some held important and prestigious roles in society such as mediators between French settlers and Indigenous people, especially in the early years of New France (Williams, 1989). However, free Black people could not settle there as easily as in other areas of the country due to the pre-apportionment of the land through family and kinship ties within the seigneurial system (Williams, 1989). Nevertheless, by the 1860's, Black Americans managed to establish a relatively successful network in a place that is described as "no colorblind paradise" (Collison, 1994, p.59). They are considered to have pioneered the establishment of Black communities in Quebec, which today mainly consist of immigrants from the U.S., the Caribbean, other parts of Canada, and Africa (Statistics Canada, 2016b; Williams, 1989).

Black American Immigrants

Canada has had a long-standing reputation as the land of freedom and opportunity among Black Americans. With several "terminuses" across the country, the Underground Railroad allowed for the refuge of tens of thousands of African victims of human trafficking (Historica Canada, n.d.-b). After emancipation, the expansion of the non-metaphorical, transcontinental railway system caused Canada to remain an attractive destination due to the availability of employment opportunities otherwise inaccessible in the U.S. Many Black Americans were able to obtain employment in Montreal as porters, a job that was practically exclusive to Black workers, due to the substandard working conditions, including inferior pay rates and exclusion from union membership (Calliste, 1995; Williams, 1989).

Moreover, in the early 1900s, Canada's endeavors to compete in the global economic market, prompted one of the largest immigration waves in history, wherein approximately 2.3 million foreign-born people were welcomed to the country (Statistics Canada, 2016a). However, the nation's reputable benevolence toward Black people was not reflected in immigration policies and practices. In fact, policies such as those outlined in the 1910 Immigration Act were deliberately crafted to prevent Black people from entering the country. Despite several generations of Black people enduring harsh winters in Canada, they were officially deemed "unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada" and were refused entry to the country (CCR, 2000). Given that white Americans were a highly desirable immigrant group, this legislation was intended to legally discriminate between white and Black applicants (Williams, 1989). Thus, immigrant cultural proximity to the majority group host society was advanced as an important integration factor, and would remain at the heart of North American immigration policies until the mid-twentieth century. During this era, less than 1000 people of the new immigrant population were Black Americans (CCR, 2000). They nevertheless constituted the largest group of Black people in Quebec until the arrival of those from the Caribbean.

Caribbean Immigrants

Despite the above-mentioned "climate unsuitability" clause, a number of immigrants from the Caribbean were admitted to the country under government sponsorship to fill specific industry gaps, especially those consisting of domestic work. This group mainly consisted of English-speaking women of the Caribbean middle-class (Williams, 1989). In the early 1960s, under the pressure of international governments, immigration initiatives supposedly moved from Eurocentric selection criteria to individual characteristics such as education and entrepreneurship (Bessière, 2012). Gradually, there was an increase in the admission of skilled Black workers, which was mainly filled by those from

English-speaking Caribbean countries such as Barbados, Trinidad, and Jamaica. In 1967, seemingly non-discriminatory selection processes were extended to Black applicants, resulting in a "massive nine-year influx of [Caribbean immigrants] to Montreal" (Williams, 1989, p. 62), who came to represent 70% of the Black immigrant population throughout the 1970s. Conjunctly, the Quiet Revolution, a period of political, institutional, and social reform in Quebec entailed the inception of the Quebec Ministry of Immigration in 1968, which prioritized linguistic criteria in the selection of immigrants. As a result, the arrival of a large number of qualified Black immigrants from Haiti, who tended to affiliate themselves with French nationalism, was facilitated (Bessière, 2012; Williams, 1989).

Haitians currently make up the vast majority of the Black population in Quebec (Statistics Canada, 2019). They arrived in the province in two significant immigration waves. In the early-1960s, a relatively small group (3539 people) settled, mainly composed of the intellectual elite or educated middle-class under political exile from an oppressive Duvalierian regime in Haiti. They generally spoke French as a first-language, had a post-secondary education, and were professionals in education, health, administration, engineering, etc. (Williams, 1989). In contrast, the group that followed in the mid-1970s, much larger in numbers, tended to speak Creole rather than French, and were from rural and disadvantaged areas, also seeking escape from an oppressive dictatorship (Giles, 1990; Labelle, 2004). With a much lower level of education than the former, they arrived at a time when the socio-professional context had become less favorable, as an economic crisis produced a greater need for manpower in the manufacturing sector rather than the tertiary sector. Therefore, unlike their predecessors whose social and professional integration happened without major difficulty, they would face a slew of integration challenges, notably related to the socio-academic integration of their children (Icart, 2006; Labelle, 2004), a situation that has remained constant (Mc Andrew, 2015).

Black Inter-Provincial Migrants

In addition to the descendants of those who resided in Quebec during the early 20th century and prior, a number of Black Canadians relocated to Quebec from other provinces. According to Williams (1989), Black people who had previously settled in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario left their provinces of residence in search for better economic opportunity. They were typically poorer in comparison to other Black people and in many cases, found themselves forced off the land they occupied by white farmers who were interested in labor-saving machinery (Israel, 1928). In the early eighties, it was estimated that this group made up 20% of the Black population of Quebec (Warner, 1983). Though not subjected to complex immigration and acculturation processes, this group

nevertheless shared most of the same struggles as foreign immigrants in terms of antiblack racism, discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage (Williams, 1989).

African Immigrants

Africans are considered the most recent group of Black immigrants, given their relatively negligible numbers in comparison to other immigrant groups prior to the 1980s. Williams (1989) and Bessière (2012) report international agreements between Quebec and other French-speaking nations, which encouraged the immigration of students, among which many were from Sub-Saharan Africa. This relatively new addition to the Black communities in Quebec in the 1980s typically came from Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Immigrants from English-speaking nations came from South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania. Williams (1989) reported that immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa typically consisted of a highly educated class, as 80% had studied at the university level and many had pursued graduate studies (Kaseka et al., 1983). However, the scope of the Black-African population is difficult to ascertain given the continental ethnic diversity. For example, federal accounts indicate that many immigrants from Sub-Saharan countries consist of South Asian and other ethnicities who do not self-identify as Black (Historica Canada, n.d.-a). Notwithstanding, since the 1990s, the population of Black-Africans has rapidly and consistently increased.

African and Caribbean Refugees

More recently, many individuals and families from sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean have immigrated to Quebec under the status of refugee. The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti are the countries that are most significantly represented. Between 2008 and 2012, 6.6% and 15.4% of refugees were from these countries respectively (MICC, 2013). Moreover, an earthquake of catastrophic magnitude in Haiti triggered a massive emigration wave for its victims in 2010. In fact, the percentage of newly arrived Haitian immigrants in Quebec nearly tripled to 9.8% in 2011 from 3.5% in 2009 (MICC, 2013). Similarly, between 2012-2016, Haiti (10.2%) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (7.1%) were among the top three countries of birth among refugees (MIDI, 2017). These countries were also among the most significantly represented in terms of those seeking asylum between 2013-2016 (PRAIDA, n.d.).

Thus, while a large number of Black people in Quebec are immigrants or from immigrant backgrounds, they do not constitute an immigrant monolith that recently joined the Quebec cultural landscape. I emphasize here, the plurality of the Black communities of Quebec, as well as their diverse and complex

identities that have been established all throughout Quebec's history, as well as their contributions to it.

1.1.2. Particularities of the Contemporary Socio-Demographic Portrait

In the 2016 census, the number of people who reported belonging to a Black "visible minority" group in Quebec increased to 319 230 from 131 970 in 1996; a trend that is likely to remain consistent (Statistics Canada, 2019). Among these, approximately 39% were born in Quebec or other parts of Canada, 31% in the Caribbean, and 26% in African nations. The immigrant population consists of 25% of people who arrived more than 25 years prior (before 1991), 15% who arrived during the years 1991-2000, 30% during the period of 2001-2010, and 30% who settled in Quebec between 2011 and 2016. The majority of Quebec's Black communities resides in Montreal (85%) (Statistics Canada, 2017).

1.1.2.1 Economic Indicators

In comparison to the total provincial population, Black immigrants tend to be overall younger in age, have a postsecondary education, have French as mother-tongue, and are usually proficient in both official languages of the country (MICC, 2010; Statistics Canada, 2019). In spite of these relative demographic advantages, the overall living conditions of this group remain significantly poor and in certain cases, appalling. Black citizens continuously encounter more obstacles to social mobility and lag behind their non-Black counterparts in multiple indicators of success, regardless of immigrant generational status, country of origin, or mother tongue. Their unemployment rate is 13.5%, a rate that is two times higher than the general population (MICC, 2010; Torczyner et al., 2010) and their employment probabilities remain lower than the average population (Turcotte, 2019). Of those who are employed, their salaries are nearly 30% inferior to the general population, which fall among not only the lowest in the province, but also in the country (Labelle et al., 2007; MICC, 2010), a trend that is likely to persist (Turcotte, 2019). Individuals from these communities are also overrepresented in low-status employment positions and underrepresented in decision-making bodies and higher-paying employment (Torczyner et al., 2010).

In 2006, close to half (47%) of Black children in Montreal under the age of 15 lived below the poverty line (Torczyner et al., 2010). Similarly, Black women comprise one of the poorest groups in the province, with a poverty rate of 39% versus 20% of the general population regardless of their age, level of education, training, or language (Torczyner et al., 2010). The combination of high poverty rates and, in some cases, the multifaceted challenges associated to immigrant acculturation is

susceptible of keeping many Black children and adults in impervious circumstances, much like the daunting experiences of their predecessors of the early settlement days. Evidence of this phenomenon can be found in the stagnant social mobility among Black communities compared to other groups (Abada et al., 2009). In particular, Black Quebecois citizens tend to experience more social challenges related to property ownership (Torczyner et al., 2010), a vital economic asset, especially in terms of upward social mobility. Among Montreal Black communities, 38% own the homes they live in versus 63% of the general population (Torczyner et al., 2010). For those in the rental market, substandard dwellings, unaffordable rents, and exposure to racial discrimination have been documented (RCLALQ, 2012; Williams, 1997).

1.1.2.2. Social Indicators

Representation in the media and relationships with police continue to be major sources of stress and injustice within Black communities (Hampton & Hartman, 2019; Maynard, 2017). Some researchers note that mainstream media relies on sensationalism, which contributes little to questioning prejudices against immigrants and racialized groups (Icart, 2006). Instead, stereotypical information that represents them as threatening or deviant is most often selected and propagated (Maynard, 2017; Thésée & Carr, 2016b). This stigmatization is also reflected in the Black communities' relationship with the police. According to Maynard (2017), Black communities are policed differently than others and are more likely to be subjected to racial profiling, oversurveillance, violence, and brutality. This conflictual relationship with the police is not without effect on the overrepresentation of Black children in youth protection agencies, detention centers, and prisons (Bernard & McAll, 2004; Bernard & McAll, 2009; Boatswain-Kyte et al., 2020). In Montreal, the proportion of Black children in youth protection agencies is at least 2.6 times higher than the general population (Sarmiento & Lavergne, 2017) and they are five times more likely than White children to be screened, brought to court and placed in out-of-home care (Boatswain-Kyte et al., 2020). Reports signaled to these agencies tend to come from the police or the school community.

A report issued by the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* (CDPDJ, 2011) brought to light the over-policing, racial profiling and enforcement of zero-tolerance policies (the execution of rigid and unforgiving codes of conduct) toward Black students in Quebec schools. These manifest in the form of heightened surveillance in common spaces where students congregate, or during activities that are popular among Black students such as sporting or musical events. Swift and excessive punishment such as suspensions and expulsions without reasonable recourse to less

permanent, restorative, or meaningful alternatives were also revealed. These types of practices can be linked to increased criminalization and engagement with the justice system (Maynard, 2017).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the inequalities emanating from the above-mentioned indicators for Black people in Quebec have been exacerbated, and their vulnerability to contracting the virus has been increased (Jean-Pierre & Collins, 2021). This was made evident through the overrepresentation of Black communities in 1) high-risk essential employment positions in the health field, where they are likely to occupy positions such as client-care attendants, aids, and cleaners, and 2) in disadvantaged neighborhoods where living conditions do not allow for efficient social distancing and other precautionary measures related to healthy ventilation. Black people were also more likely to be fined by law enforcement regarding COVID-19 restriction protocols (CCLA, 2020), and children who are already disproportionately placed in youth-protection were denied parental visitation as a precautionary measure. Schooling inequalities were also aggravated through complicated facilitation of distance-learning due to difficult access to the internet and other resources (Jean-Pierre & Collins, 2021).

1.1.3. Particularities of the Socio-Educational Context

The above economic and social indicators are not without impact on the academic success of Black students. The link between family structure and income, and high school dropouts has been established (Caldas et al., 2009; Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017), as well as the sense of exclusion that circulates among Black youth in schools (Celemencki, 2020; Collins & Magnan, 2018; Lafortune & Kanouté, 2019). Nothwithstanding, there are several gaps and creases in the literature pertaining to the existing socio-academic portrait of Black youth in Quebec. Firstly, ministerial and local statistical data on student populations do not allow for a direct race-based analysis as they are organized by country of origin or immigration status. Secondly, they are disproportionately based on data collected from the French education sector. This could be, in part, a result of legislation requiring immigrants to enroll their children in French schools (Bill 101) in conjunction with the high number of Black individuals among immigrant populations. Since the Black population in English schools would thus mainly consist of third generation immigrants and beyond (those unaffected by the implementation of Bill 101), these students remain unaccounted for, both in terms of their generational status and the English school sector they are members of (Mc Andrew et al., 2015). Therefore, in the following sections, a general portrait of what is known about Black youth (first and second-generation immigrants) in both education sectors will be presented. Further, an emphasis on English contexts will be made when

possible, and a discussion of how Black students have been represented in educational research in Quebec and the associated consequences will conclude this subsection.

1.1.3.1 Overview of the Socio-Academic Portrait of Black Youth

Overall, Black youth in comparison to their white counterparts in Quebec demonstrate inferior academic performance (Caldas et al., 2009), are generally underrepresented in advanced academic courses leading to postsecondary education and private schools (Kamanzi, 2021; Mc Andrew et al., 2011), and are overrepresented in general adult education (Potvin & Leclercq, 2014), which can hinder the pursuit of postsecondary studies, and increase susceptibility to poverty and socioeconomic exclusion (CDPDJ, 2011). Further, they are less likely to access postsecondary education, especially via a linear pathway to university (Kamanzi & Collins, 2018), and to complete postsecondary education (Kamanzi et al., 2018; Turcotte, 2019). Those who do graduate from university earn significantly inferior salaries than non-Black university graduates (Torczyner et al., 2010). Issues of particular concern emanating from the youth education sector include lower than average high school graduation rates and educational lag, as well as exposure to discrimination and racism.

1.1.3.2 High School Graduation & Academic Lag

In a province-wide study involving 6617 high school students (5747 in the French education sector and 870 in the English), Mc Andrew & Ledent (2008) investigated the academic portrait and educational outcomes of Black first and second-generation immigrant students. They isolated Black students as a sub-group based on their country or region of origin (namely the Caribbean or Sub-Saharan Africa) or language (Haitian Creole). The findings indicated that Black youth in Quebec had a lower graduation rate than the general population in both education sectors (51.8% versus 69% in the French sector; 58.3% versus 68% in the English sector). In the French sector, this group tends to accumulate significant academic lag. Those who entered their first year of high school (grade 7) at the normal age had an academic delay rate of 34.2% comparatively to 19.8% of the general population. Strikingly, when a delay before high school was considered, the rate climbed to 68.9%. The situation is not as startling in the English sector, wherein 17.9% of Black students accumulated a delay versus 15.8% of the general population. The differences between Caribbean (18.3%) and African (14.1%) students are however noted.

A number of factors can be attributed to the inferior high school graduation rates and school performance among Black students. For example, in the French sector, speaking a language other than French (including English) negatively affects high school graduation: students who require linguistic support graduate significantly less often than French-speaking students. The factors that distinguish the English sector from the French are: arriving to the host country at the beginning or during secondary studies, as well as place of birth. In fact, students from Sub-Saharan Africa graduate at a higher rate than those of Caribbean backgrounds. Additionally, being identified with special needs – especially when placed in non-integrated classrooms (to be further discussed in section 1.3) is the predominant factor of high school non-completion among Black youth in both sectors (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008).

Further, Caldas et al. (2009) found the average age of students' parents to be a significant predictor of school performance after controlling for school sector (public or private) and language (English or French). These researchers suggest a link between early childbearing and lower academic achievement. It is also suggested that higher levels of poverty play a role in dropping out of high school as youth are forced to shift their attention to earning income, usually at low wages (Torczyner et al., 2010). In a study using demographic data from the 2006 census, 34.3% of Black youth were found below the low-income cut-off, compared to 11.5% of White youth, which had a significant effect on high school graduation (Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017). These socio-demographic factors corroborate similar studies conducted in the U.S. (Kincaid & Sullivan, 2017; Shifrer et al., 2011). Anti-Black racism scholars in Quebec such as Howard (2014) and Thésée & Carr (2016) have highlighted the problematic practice of conflating racial inequity with sociodemographic factors, which, at best, produces a partial analysis of Black student success or failure, and leaves systemic dimensions unaccounted for. Qualitative studies have contributed to narrowing this analytical gap.

1.1.3.3. Discrimination, Marginalization, Exclusion and Anti-Black Racism

A number of school factors that can affect the performance and motivation of Black students have been brought to light through qualitative and mixed research in Canada. They entail lower teacher and administrator expectations toward students, less challenging and euro-centric curricula, lack of Black staff and faculty representation, racial academic tracking, antiblackness, and discriminatory disciplinary practices (Codjoe, 2001, Dei et al., 1997; Howard, 2014; James, 2012; Salole & Abdulle, 2015; Sibblis, 2014; Zaami, 2015). A striking example of the latter can be found in the expulsion rates over a 5-year period (2011-2012 to 2015-2016) within the Toronto District School Board, wherein

48% of students expelled were Black, despite only a 12% representation in the total school population (James & Turner, 2017).

Moreover, a perceived sense of discrimination and exclusion from peers and school staff are recurring themes in qualitative studies investigating the experiences of Black students throughout their educational pathways in the Quebec school system (Celemencki, 2020; Collins & Magnan, 2018; Lafortune & Kanouté, 2019; Livingstone et al., 2014; Louis, 2020). These findings converge with those from the rest of Canada (Briggs, 2018; Codjoe, 2011; Hamilton-Hinch et al., 2021), and the U.S. (Cone et al., 2014; Banks 2017; Wun, 2018). Relationships between classmates can be a source of tension as students sometimes judge and affiliate themselves according to skin color starting as early as first grade (Charette, 2009). In high school, a heightened sense of detachment often manifests as cultural differences (especially skin color) are perceived to become more explicitly highlighted (Collins & Magnan, 2018).

It would appear that Montreal schools have not yet succeeded in fostering a sense of belonging to a pluralistic society for these students, as a sense of ethnic and racial isolation continues. This manifests through many students' strained relationships with teachers and other school staff, who are perceived as lacking involvement, having lower expectations towards them, and regularly employing discriminatory practice (Collins & Magnan, 2018; Howard, 2014; Lafortune & Kanouté, 2019; Livingstone et al., 2014). Moreover, this sense of non-belonging extends to how students relate to the curriculum and how it is delivered. Specifically, in reference to the Quebec History course, Black students denounce the over-emphasis of the settler Quebecois content, and consequently, the blatant absence of their ancestors' contribution to Quebec history (Collins & Magnan, 2018). Although exposure to discrimination and racism have been recorded to motivate some students to achieve success and defy stereotypes (Abada et al., 2009; Collins & Magnan, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2014), the above institutional and structural aspects that foster feelings of exclusion are susceptible to compromising engagement and success in the navigation of a meritocratic school system (Livingstone & Weinfeld, 2017). Prior to discussing how these dimensions interact with special education identification (the main factor related to dropping out of high school among Black youth), it is relevant to consider how racialized students have been represented in educational research in Quebec thus far.

1.1.4. The Representation of Racialized Youth in Quebec Research: A Predominant Culturalist Approach

An understanding of how Black youth and their communities have been represented in Quebec educational research must entail the socio-political substance it is rooted in. The Quiet Revolution (1960-1966) represents a movement in Quebec society that propelled it into secularization while repudiating its rural past. Concurrently, the importance of the French language became a distinguished priority on the political agenda. This was especially evident when it came to the tendency of new immigrants who were often allophone, to integrate Quebec society through English-speaking institutions, despite French promotional and political efforts (Gagné & Chamberland, 1999). To counter this current, the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) was passed in 1977, delineating French as the official language of Quebec, thus rendering public French-language instruction mandatory by law for the schooling of new immigrants (with some exceptions), therefore ensuring a French cultural and linguistic based integration process. Nevertheless, Quebec's unique position as a French-speaking majority in interaction with multiple factors has given rise to an enduring sense of insecurity and injustice among the settler Quebecois population within the greater context of North America (Thésée & Carr, 2016b). These factors include demographic decline, increasing immigration, the omnipresence of the English language in business and economic domains, in conjunction with tensions between federalism and nationalism, and Canadian multiculturalism and Quebecois interculturalism (Thésée & Carr, 2016b).

Additionally, the parts of Quebec's settler colonial history involving the genocidal treatment of Indigenous groups and the human trafficking of Africans have been selectively peripheralized. Consequently, the dominant national discourse that once presumed the settler Quebecois struggles for liberation and social justice as equivalent to those of Black Americans, have now shifted to a narrative that denies the existence of race (Austin, 2010; Vallières, 1968). Racism has thus become "a thing of the past", while explanations for problematic social relationships stemming from unassimilable cultural differences are preferred (Howard, 2020). This culturalist perspective has been widely applied in educational research where euphemisms such as immigrants, ethno-cultural communities, or visible minorities are employed to refer to Black students. As such, studies concerning the educational success of immigrant students are rich and numerous (ex: Kamanzi et al., 2018; Kanouté et al., 2016; Mc Andrew et al., 2015; Vatz-Laroussi et al. 2008), whereas those addressing Black youth specifically, are very few.

These studies have provided relevant, yet partial information in understanding the educational pathways of Black youth. For example, in a statistical analysis specifically concerning Black students (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008) those whose mother tongue was either French or English were not counted since language (having a mother tongue other than French or English) was a key variable for defining the target group. Moreover, the student region of origin (Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa) was used to infer that the students belonged to a Black racial group. While this method is logical in terms of making approximations given the ministerial data available, it is susceptible of both over and underestimating the number of Black youth. On one hand, as previously mentioned, there are a number of individuals from Sub-Saharan Africa who do not self-identify as members of a Black community. On the other hand, Black students from any regions other than the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa were excluded and the existence of long-standing Black-Quebecois communities, whose history in Quebec can be linked beyond an immigrant generational status, were erased. As highlighted by Thésée & Carr (2016b), black skin acts as a peremptory social marker of non-belonging configured as "other": newcomers, Quebec-born immigrants, and those from long-standing generations remain challenged alike in the construction of a racial identity in Quebec society.

Thus, through the overemphasis of culture and integration, the understanding of the educational experiences of racialized students stays rooted in a perspective that implies culture as an obstacle to academic success and social participation, or even as a possible reason for academic failure and overrepresentation in special education, youth protection agencies, and prisons, while eclipsing socio-political and historical dimensions related to social power relations. Similarly, the possible effects of racism may be attributed to culture, rather than processes of school segregation, marginalization, discrimination and exclusion. Such a positioning essentializes culture and consequently essentializes race. To deny, trivialize, avoid, neglect, or reject racialization as a determinant sociological construct in socio-educational experiences, is to reinforce racism both in terms of the dynamics involved and the effects produced (Thésée & Carr, 2016b). Thus, it is important to recognize how schooling in and of itself is grounded in racist settler colonial principles which have propagated the ethnic and cultural inferiority of those configured as "other", as well as the eradication of their differences: residential schools designed to assimilate Indigenous children in Canada and Quebec (Milloy, 2017; TRCC, 2015) are clear examples. These same principles can be found at the root of special education structures, and are likely to play a role in the disproportionality among racialized students within it (Ellis, 2014).

1.2. Special Education Disproportionality and Racialized Youth

Special education disproportionality involves identification rates of specific social groups that are proportionally higher or lower than expected based on their overall representation in the student body (Gabel et al., 2009). It can take the form of underrepresentation or overrepresentation, that is, when specific social groups receive special education services at notably lower or higher rates than their representation in the overall school population. It is a "complex phenomenon that provides the opportunity to examine educational inequities for particular groups of students that are shaped by macro and micro forces" (Waitoller et al., 2010, p. 29). The following section will allow for a better discernment of this complex phenomenon via four components: geographical particularities, methodological distinctions, practices of school actors, and structural dimensions.

1.2.1 Geographical Particularities: Disproportionality as an International Phenomenon

International research on special education disproportionality has been the subject of a rather limited body of literature. Most studies regarding the disproportionality of minoritized groups in special education were carried out in the United States. Given the predominance of U.S. literature, as well as the contextual variation, the following subsection is organized geographically, by trends identified internationally (Australia, Germany, Romania, New Zealand, United Kingdom), in the United States, as well as in Canada[2].

1.2.1.1 Trends Observed Across Multiple Countries

Due to limited availability of disproportionality data, most researchers across the globe have employed documentary analysis methods to compare trends at various levels of operation (comparison by country, region, school board, district, etc.). The meta-analysis of Gabel et al. (2009) reveals an overrepresentation in special education of Serbian, Italian and Portuguese children in Germany, and Māori students in New Zealand. Similarly, Graham (2012) reported the overall school enrolment of Indigenous Australians at 5.5%, compared to a 13% representation in special education public schools, among which they represent 18% of the *behavioral school* population. Romani student overrepresentation has been reported in the Czech Republic and Sweden (Berhanu, 2008; Cashman, 2016). In England, quantitative analyses using multivariate (age, gender, socioeconomic status) logistic regression drawing from data from a census involving 6.5 million children and youth reveal

[2] The specific situation of Quebec will be elaborated in greater detail in section 1.3.3

Pakistani and Bangladeshi students to have a higher likelihood of being identified with a learning disability; the overrepresentation of Black-Caribbean students in behavioral, emotional, and social difficulties (2.28:1); and the overrepresentation of Chinese students for speech, language, and communication needs (1.95:1) (Strand & Lindsay, 2009). However, the authors underscore that an overall reduction in overrepresentation was observed when accounting for control variables such as SES, gender, and age.

1.2.1.2 Trends Observed in the United States

In the U.S., the special education disproportionality debate has been ongoing ever since Lloyd Dunn raised the flag in 1968. He argued that special education labeling, and placement in segregated settings of disadvantaged and "minority youth", was unjustifiable. Over fifty years later, much of the disproportionality research is intended to contribute to the debate on whether it in fact exists for racialized groups, especially when accounting for individual and contextual socio-demographic factors. As such, researchers have largely investigated patterns of identification in specific special education categories in interaction with gender and SES, with a focus on single disability categories, using quantitative designs, on a national scale (Cooc & Kiru, 2018; Waitoller et al., 2010).

Logistical regression analyses reveal race as a significant predictor for special education identification (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). In this study involving data from a large urban school district (n= 17 837), discipline policies emerged as an important factor in disability risk. Students with high numbers of suspensions were found to be at increased risk of special education identification. Further, risk was highest for Black males at a disadvantaged SES in specific learning disability, cognitive impairment, and emotional disturbance categories. Similarly, bivariate analysis of learning disabilities (dependent variable) and race (independent variable) indicated that African-American students were overrepresented in the learning disability category (Shifrer et al., 2011). However, the portrait differed when the same researchers conducted a multivariate analysis. While African-American students were 1.43 times more likely to be identified as having a learning disability than White students, the odds of identification were significantly lowered when SES, academic performance, and language background were accounted for. These researchers suggest that the overrepresentation of African-Americans in special education is entirely driven by SES, given their lower than average SES as a correlate of race. While it is plausible that SES can play a role in disproportionality, this interpretation appears rather simplistic, and may carry more weight if it were tested among African-Americans from higher than average SES backgrounds. For example, qualitative studies have determined that class advantage has

not protected racialized groups from institutional and structural obstacles pertaining to educational equity (Gillborn, 2015), dimensions that were not explored by Shifrer et al. (2011).

Further, certain researchers are more concerned with the underrepresentation of African-American youth rather than their overrepresentation (Hibel & Jasper, 2012; Morgan et al., 2015; Wiley et al., 2013). Black youth have been found to be less likely to be identified with disabilities than their White counterparts (Morgan et al., 2015). In alignment with researchers in the U.K. (Strand & Lindsay, 2009), the authors attribute differences in results (underrepresentation vs. overrepresentation) to the units of analysis in the methodology: individual vs. district or state data, for example. However, Wiley et al. (2013) who also used individual data, found that African-American children were underrepresented in the emotional disturbance disability category, but also found that lower SES was either unrelated or negatively correlated to minority representation in special education. These researchers attribute disproportionality to state conservatism[3] (the more conservative the particular state, the less minority representation in the emotional disturbance category) as they contend that conservatism is generally associated with low emotional disturbance identification rates. Finally, Kincaid & Sullivan (2017) employing similar methods, found that only Asian-American students were underrepresented in special education, but that SES was unrelated to special education identification.

In sum, the disproportionality debate continues in the U.S. The research findings appear to be significantly influenced by the researcher's methodological choices. The majority of studies in the U.S. employed quantitative methodologies, which relied on existing databases and/or questionnaires in which researchers underscored the importance of multivariate analyses, since bivariate results changed drastically when other variables were introduced. Nevertheless, Skiba et al. (2016) bring attention to the fact that these types of complex analyses "[do] not necessarily shed light on the multidimensional aspects of disproportionality, nor [do they] advance the theoretical understanding of this predicament" (p. 224). In fact, these studies that are grounded in a post-positivist paradigm involve an overall lack of clarity in terms of the theoretical framework. Only Kincaid & Sullivan (2017) explicitly explained their model of SES, which accounts for income, education, occupation, and status. Contrastingly, the remaining researchers defined SES in highly divergent ways such as whether students received free or reduced-price lunch (Sullivan & Bal, 2013); the highest parental education level and family income (Shifrer et al., 2011); parent-reported household size and income (Wagner et al., 2005); data obtained from community surveys in conjunction with federal poverty guidelines

[3] Due to the absence of an explicit theoretical framework in this study, the selection of state conservatism (versus liberalism) as a variable in the analyses is unclear.

(Wiley et al., 2013); and poverty rates retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau (Zhang et al., 2014). These types of inconsistencies inevitably make data interpretations complicated to say the least, and may exacerbate the debate related to whether disproportionality exists among racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, weaknesses in theoretical framing are susceptible of leading to oversimplified socio-demographic explanations of disproportionality, leaving important structural and systemic factors unaccounted for.

1.2.1.3 Trends Observed in Canada

Canadian research confirms the overrepresentation of racialized groups in special education, specifically for Indigenous and Black youth. In British Columbia, Indigenous students are overrepresented in all special education categories, except the *gifted* category (Gabel et al., 2009; Mattson & Caffrey, 2001). In Ontario, while the overall proportion of Black students in the general student population is of 14%, they represent 36% of students with behavioral problems; 33% of those with mild intellectual disabilities, 30% of those with developmental disabilities; and 24% of students with language impairments (Brown & Parekh, 2010). Moreover, Black students identified with a language impairment, developmental disability, mild intellectual disability, or behavioral exceptionalities were found to be more likely to come from lower income neighborhoods (Brown & Parekh, 2010).

Mixed methods analyses involving data from the Toronto District School Board (n = 50,811) reveal that among students with no special needs, 74% were Black, 81% white, and 89% racialized-non-Black. Furthermore, in the category of *giftedness*, Black students were underrepresented at 0.4% compared to 4% White students, and 2% racialized non-Black students (James & Turner, 2017). Moreover, results from community group consultations among parents, students, school personnel, and community members regarding the above portrait revealed the following themes: inappropriate testing and labeling; ineffective interventions and placements in segregated settings; and lack of adequate resources and support given to students (James & Turner, 2017). These findings cause concern given that professionals involved in the neuropsychological assessment of racialized students tend to be White (91%), among which almost one third report not having received any training regarding “ethno-racial minorities”, and attest to a lack of appropriate norms, tests, resources, and strategies when dealing with racialized students (Borri-Anadon et al., 2018; Elbulok-Charcape et al., 2014).

1.2.2 Methodological Contrasts: The Intersections of Race, Disability and Class

Among the quantitative inquiries of the reviewed corpus on special education disproportionality, identifiers such as gender and age surfaced as important variables. However, there was considerable attention placed on SES. In fact, this variable recurred as an explanation for disproportionality. As discussed in the sections above, although an emphasis was placed on rigorous methodological frameworks, especially the use of multivariate analyses, and individual data (Morgan et al., 2015; Strand & Lindsay, 2009; Wiley et al., 2013), a motley of results emerged including overrepresentation, underrepresentation, or neither; and with it, several implications. Firstly, a lack or absence of theoretical formulation of the problem was rampant in this subset, which inevitably weakened the analysis, as mentioned above. Secondly, in spite of the predominance of multivariate analyses, the *intersection* of the variables was not explored. In other words, each variable was either treated singularly, or analyzed comparatively and placed in a hierarchical manner of importance, resulting in a graduated list of most significant factors of disproportionality. This type of analysis reifies relationships between the categories of SES and race, ultimately foregrounding the former, and downplaying the latter. In compound, databases such as the ones consulted in many of the quantitative studies are human inventions that inevitably contain socially constructed units of meaning (Kozleski, 2016). Kozleski argues that "infrastructure itself (the categories for establishing and maintaining a particular view of students) informs the conduct of practice and the kinds of research that can be done" (p.113). Among the majority of quantitative studies, disability categories were foregrounded causing other variables (such as race) to be obscured. These combined factors are not only susceptible of advancing oversimplified explanations of racial and ethnic disproportionality but promulgate deficit views of ethno-racial groups while neglecting the role of systemic dimensions in disproportionality.

It appears that the interaction of race, disability, and class is better grasped through qualitative studies. For example, Walker (2008) attributed overrepresentation among Roma and African American children in part to SES, noting that both groups having lower SES backgrounds seem to arrive at school unprepared compared to the dominant group. Thus, these groups are more susceptible to an increased achievement gap and consequently, increased special education identification. In contrast, Black students from middle-class backgrounds were excluded from the benefits of special education in the form of resource allocation and support, but were subjected to unfavorable dimensions such as low expectations and segregation (Gillborn, 2015). In fact, segregation and social restraint were recurring themes in the majority of the qualitative studies concerning racialized students (Connor, 2006; Gillborn, 2015; Graham, 2012; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Walker, 2008). Overall, qualitative analyses

that took into account race, disability and SES revealed that the means of an oppressive social organization were being served, rather than the needs of racialized children in special education. Yet, these conclusions conflict with the results of a number of quantitative and mixed studies that advance SES as a primary cause of disproportionality and that do not mention oppressive social organization. Moreover, in these studies, there is a general tendency for school actors to focus on the students' home lives, and cultural and/or socioeconomic backgrounds rather than their professional practices or their roles and responsibility regarding educational equity and success (Ahram et al., 2011; Borri-Anadon, 2016). Prior to detailing the specific situation in Quebec, some plausible explanations to special education overrepresentation based on international studies will be presented.

1.2.3 Special Education Placement Processes: The Construction of Inequalities through Professional Activities in School Spaces

According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1970), school institutions are structured to reinforce and reward the cultural characteristics of dominant social groups. Therefore, behaviors and characteristics deviating from pre-established institutional norms are likely to be perceived as problematic, thus triggering the enactment of processes and policies. The literature review exposes challenges in considering institutional practices as possible factors concerning children's "difficulties", as well as the predominance of unclear and capricious determiners, guidelines, procedures and protocol, which are susceptible to contributing to disproportionality.

1.2.3.1 Referrals

Referrals made by teachers are at the genesis of the student special education construct. Notably, the vast majority of teacher referrals are retained and supported, in spite of significant variability in operations and standards (Harry & Klinger, 2014). For example, Connor & Boskin (2001) found that 100% of teacher referrals were recognized as valid in their inquiry among eleven kindergarten children in three different communities. This happened in spite of a lack of knowledge and bias demonstrated by teachers that was revealed through an analysis of their educational placement recommendations for the children, based on samples of their writing. Similarly, Harry & Klinger (2014) observed poor classroom management in conjunction with high referral rates and a clear pattern of higher referrals by white teachers, in their ethnographic inquiry. Within a total of six referrals from one class, all were retained and concerned Black children exclusively. Furthermore, these researchers also documented a "culture of referral" which encompasses the collective dispositions of personnel toward struggling students and special education. For Harry & Klingner (2014), referrals seem to reflect this culture

rather than the actual characteristics of the children, often involving individual perceptions and judgments stemming from white, middle-class norms. Assessment flaws further compound this problem.

1.2.3.2 Assessments

In the same vein, assessment practices are susceptible to identifying cultural differences rather than the actual difficulties or deficiencies they are intended for (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Community group consultations (see section 1.2.1.3) in Canada reveal lack of appropriate testing which has led to the attribution of inappropriate labels for Black students (James & Turner, 2017). Similarly, practitioners continue to employ a discrepancy diagnosis method that relies on standardized scores, which neglects other possible factors such as early childhood, or migratory experiences, and how they may contribute to children's behavior or learning "difficulties" (Borri-Anadon, 2016; Underwood, 2012). As such, misinterpretation and misinformed judgments can possibly lead to misidentification, contributing to overrepresentation. In contrast, qualitative analyses in the UK revealed that Black middle-class parents encountered numerous obstacles in getting their children's special needs assessed and recognized by schools. In fact, the only cases in which schools initiated assessment procedures involved behavioral issues (Gillborn, 2015). Hence, these results shed light on how overrepresentation and underrepresentation could manifest with regard to specific special education categories.

Furthermore, personal/cultural biases were revealed in assessments carried out by school psychologists (Harry & Klinger, 2014). These professionals hold the main mandate of determining what services should be attributed to students experiencing "difficulties" as opposed to diagnosing a disability. Through ethnographic observations of classrooms, psychological evaluations and case conferences among 12 students in 12 schools, many instances involving the contribution of psychologists were observed to be tainted by personal perceptions, especially involving their own assumptions regarding how children's extracurricular circumstances affect how they work or think (Harry & Klinger, 2014).

1.2.3.3 Identification

Special education identification usually takes place through case conferences consisting of child study teams or committees composed of some sort of combination of administrators, teachers, school professionals, support staff, and parents (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021; Dworet & Bennett, 2002; Losen & Orfield, 2002). Mixed and qualitative studies have documented several questionable practices stemming from these conferences. Special education researchers cite cultural deficit thinking, as well

as ambiguous and ableist conceptualization of disability as driving forces in institutional processes leading to disproportionality (Ahram et al., 2011; Banks, 2017; Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021). The materialization of these perspectives during case conferences has been mainly observed through the failure of school actors to give any consideration to classroom ecology or cultural differences, opting instead to place blame on the students themselves, or their home environments. This may happen in spite of inconsistent, inappropriate, or inadequate intervention practices within schools such as contextual biases; limited learning opportunities; poor instruction and classroom management; poorly maintained intervention records, and the absence of any clear and consistent criteria to identify students in need of interventions (Ahram et al., 2011; Harry & Klinger, 2014). For example, some documented interventions presented during case conferences simply involved moving a child's seat to the front so they would behave better, telling parents to read more books at home, or pairing a child with "difficulties" with a stronger peer reader (Ahram et al., 2011).

Furthermore, unbalanced memberships within child study teams compromise the legitimacy of identification processes (Ahram et al., 2011). In their ethnographic study involving two Ontarian primary schools, Bélanger & Taleb (2006) found parents to play a negligible role in the placement process. Many parents were absent from meetings, and very few demonstrated an understanding of the consequences of having their children identified, especially in terms of the label permanence. When parents were present, they appeared to be subjected to hierarchical dynamics in which they seemed pressured to agree to the school personnel's agenda. Similarly, personal and family elements such as parental marital status, and level or quality of involvement were often used to rationalize identification decisions made during case conferences.

While parents were found to have little influence among child study teams, at the opposite end of this spectrum were school psychologists. Yet, even in spite of their privileged status, like parents, they appeared to be under pressure to align their recommendations with the expectations of the school personnel (Harry & Klinger, 2014). Comparable observations were made among other school professionals such as speech therapists and social workers. Qualitative interviews reveal that speech therapists feel pressed by administrators to identify the special needs of students, in order to allow them to gain access to adapted services, which they perceive as coming at the expense of diagnostic accuracy in their evaluation processes (Borri-Anadon, 2014). Moreover, social workers have the means to help school personnel develop positive strategies in working with students while keeping parents informed about institutional policies, procedures and their rights. However, according to qualitative observations, most seem not to question practices and referrals determined by personnel (Bélanger &

Taleb, 2006; Mills, 2003). Instead, these actors tend to demonstrate an apathetic acceptance of the formalities of case conferences, possibly due to an unspoken hierarchy, which is mainly established by administrators (Mills, 2003).

As a result, student identification, especially in the categories of learning disabilities and behavioral problems, is often determined by the immediate school personnel. Once a label is officially attributed, it becomes the "master status" by which students are defined (Goffman, 1963; Harry & Klingner, 2014), and remains a permanent marker throughout their academic pathways (Bélanger & Taleb, 2006; Cartledge, 2005). In fact, in some cases, students were consistently referred to as having a behavioral problem even without an official identification (Underwood, 2012). These designations whether they concern cognition or behavior, diagnosed or not, often produce amplified marginalization for racialized students, as they feel perceived as inferior to both their racialized peers without disabilities, as well as their white peers with, or without disabilities (Annamma et al., 2016). The result is a long-lasting negative impact on student self-esteem; compromised social integration (Harry & Klinger, 2014); and the potential triggering of a process of systemic discrimination (Magnan et al., 2021a).

1.2.3.4 Placement and Service Delivery

The above processes (referral, assessment, identification) generally precede special education placement. Across Canada, there is a general emphasis toward inclusion in addressing the needs of students with disabilities (Sokal & Katz, 2015). In particular, the requirement that all students be taught in regular classrooms with their peers is standard policy. However, studies reveal an increased likelihood for racialized students to be placed in specialized settings, and to have reduced access to general education, resources, and treatment (Fierros & Conroy, 2002). These manifestations were confirmed in both quantitative and qualitative studies from Quebec, Canada, the U.S., and internationally (Banks, 2017; Graham, 2012; Harry & Klingner, 2014; James & Turner, 2017; Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Underwood, 2012; Walker, 2008).

Placement in specialized settings may lead to lack of exposure to rich and stimulating learning experiences, and compromise opportunities for social interaction (Banks, 2017; Connor, 2006; Underwood, 2012). Two case studies that examined placement in specialized settings (Connor, 2006; Underwood, 2012) revealed that this type of segregation likely compounds experiences of social exclusion based on race and the stigma of being designated as disabled. Moreover, students reported being exposed to repetitious work, disintegrating peer and self-behavior, and increased levels of

violence (Banks, 2017; Connor, 2006). Furthermore, even when labeled students were assigned to "inclusive" classrooms, this same segregation could be observed.

Furthermore, such placements seem to inadvertently trigger the enactment of zero-tolerance policies, particularly when students in such settings are designated labels such as *behavioral problems* or *emotional disturbances* (Alnaim, 2018; Cassidy & Jackson, 2005). Administrators tend to employ zero-tolerance policies without reasonably examining the root and context of negative behaviors (Williams et al., 2013), which seem to reinforce a cycle as students with high numbers of suspensions were found to be at increased risk of special education identification (Sullivan & Bal, 2013). In addition, teachers report feeling under or unprepared, and underscore a lack of resources when dealing with students with special education needs within inclusive settings (ABBE, 2006; Underwood, 2012). Furthermore, strategies mobilized in schools to address racial disproportionality include forming teams, developing action plans, and creating new programs in order to "fix" a problem (Ahram et al., 2011). These strategies, however, do not address what appear to be the structural dimensions at play in special education disproportionality.

1.2.4 Institutional Dimensions as Cause and Effect of Special Education Disproportionality

In the section above, the roles of professionals and institutions in the creation of special education disproportionality were discussed. In compound, the problem is not simply a question of student interactions with school personnel and policies, "but the misleading identification of them as having special educational needs as individuals when the difficulties they experience are systemic and structural in origin" (Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008, p.37). In this light, the institutional practices and policies, which seem likely to *cause* disproportionality, are also reified as an *effect* of an oppressive structure. Intersectional disability scholars have shed light on how individual and collective perceptions, practices and norms continue to be shaped by deeper socio-historical dimensions such as the enduring legacies of slavery, eugenics, capitalism and patriarchy (Annamma et al., 2016; Hernandez et al., 2018).

Moreover, these institutional practices can be viewed as the management component of a social power system that is grounded in structural and systemic racism, and ableism. In particular, schools perpetuate oppression "through system wide social policies managed primarily through bureaucracies'' (Collins, 2009, p. 302). Special education itself is a prime example of a highly bureaucratic system, which can be illustrated by the preordained standards of achievement and normalcy, and the ambiguity that is allowed to permeate referrals and assessments (Ahram et al., 2011;

Harry & Klingner, 2014; Underwood, 2012). This structure is susceptible of utilizing disability and race in the organization of oppression, through the exclusion and forestalling of individuals and families in the educational decisions being made about them (Harry & Klingner, 2014); the coercion of parents to concur with school professionals in these decisions (Connor, 2006; Underwood, 2012; Williams, 2007); the tendency for students to experience segregation (Banks, 2017; Connor, 2006; Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008) even within inclusive settings (Underwood 2012); and the enforcement of zero-tolerance policies at the expense of supportive interventions (Haight et al., 2016; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Williams, 2013). Thus, according to critical researchers, schools can be conceptualized as non-neutral zones in a structural domain wherein institutional practices operate to foster unequal social relationships compounded by race and disability, as well as other identifiers.

Historically, individuals with disabilities have been perceived as *pitiful, defective, deviant, threatening,* or *burdensome* to society (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). As such, most were overtly denied access to education, confined to asylums, and subjected to deplorable conditions and treatment in such institutions (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). Disabilities affecting the children of the elite are what gave rise to the earliest versions of special education. "Special" classes were designed to address sensory impairments such as deafness, or blindness of children of the wealthy, in order to improve their communication, so that they could manage their inheritances (Burch & Sutherland, 2006; Dworet & Bennett, 2002; Winzer, 1993). This mode of education would eventually expand to include cognitive disabilities, as well as a wider population (Giordano, 2007) in the form of special classes and schools. While an increased number of individuals with disabilities gained access to education, encompassing a wider range of disabilities, in many circumstances, the conditions were not ideal. Due to the widely prevailing negative and discriminatory societal attitude toward individuals with disabilities (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011), special education, in its initiatory form, often operated as a means of segregation and categorization. It is from these circumstances that the education of students with disabilities would eventually come to be seen as a human rights issue in Quebec.

1.3. Special Education in Quebec and Racialized Youth

The situation of racialized youth in Quebecois special education is unique in a number of ways due to socio-historical and linguistic dimensions that are not common to other parts of Canada. As outlined in section 1.1, the positioning of Quebec as a linguistic majority at a provincial level, but as a minority on a national level, entails distinct provincial policies pertaining to education, immigration, and diversity. In order to further demonstrate the social and scientific relevance of the research topic, the

following sections will elaborate the socio-historical particularities of special education in Quebec as well as the portrait of Black youth in this context.

1.3.1 The Development of Special Education in Quebec

In Quebec, the first evidence of public interest in special education can be traced back to the 1960s (Gonçalves & Lessard, 2013). In their documentary analysis of the evolution of special education in Quebec, Gonçalves & Lessard (2013) identify three major periods marked by significant developments in the special education field. The first period (1963-1977) is characterized by the influences of global human rights movements. One of the first legislations pertaining to the rights of disabled students can be found in the Parent Report (1963-1966), in which their educational rights are recognized, as well as the responsibility of public schools to serve them. This was achieved through a psycho-medical approach based on clinical diagnosis, which usually equated to the needs of students with disabilities being met outside of a "regular" classroom, in a specialized setting. During the second major time period (1978-1994), a mainstreaming (*intégration*) policy (MEQ, 1978) was adopted, with the goal of promoting common educational services for all, rather than special measures. As such, students with disabilities gained access to education via the most beneficial avenue according to their needs, whether through regular classes, special classes, special schools, home schooling, or hospitals. This period was also marked by tensions stemming from this policy due to complications in its application, lack of resources, and student school failure (CSE, 1996). The third major time period (1994-2010) can be best typified by the adoption of the *Adapting Our Schools to the Needs of All Students* (MELS, 1999) special education policy. In this policy, which foregrounds special education specifically, mainstreaming remains at its nucleus with the goal of promoting the schooling of pupils with disabilities within regular classrooms, and fostering success through prevention, early intervention, and evaluation practices.

The most recent *Policy on Educational Success* (MEES, 2017) reaffirms the above goals through a perspective that advances the recognition of, and the adaptation to, diversity and difference. As such, the importance of schooling children in "regular" settings, making quality services available to them in a preventative fashion, as well as providing teachers with the necessary resources and training are echoed in the policy orientations. In addition, access to equal opportunities is addressed and reinforced by the principles of the Education Act, which make it mandatory for schools to evaluate the needs of students so that they may gain access to the most suitable and advantageous services and support.

While these anchors constitute important steps in achieving a fully inclusive educational environment for all students, the continued dependence on the diagnosis and categorization of students suggests a fixation in the psychomedical model found at the inception of special education policies. Although this categorical approach has advanced the rights of students with disabilities, as well as greater access to regular classroom instruction and opportunity for socialization for certain students (Kalubi et al., 2015), the seemingly overreliance on diagnosis and categorization is susceptible of compromising the core values of the policy related to the "celebration of diversity". These types of diagnosis and categorization processes imply a causal relationship between students designated as having special needs and their deviance from the "norm", as well as the need to correct, treat, or accommodate an assumed deficit rather than "being open to others and valuing diversity" (MEES, 2017, p. 47). This was made evident, in part, through the pressure perceived by speech therapists in Quebec to provide recommendations that lead to the access of adapted services for students via a difficulty code attribution (Borri-Anadon, 2014). Similarly, the ministerial policy advances that

> [i]n a pluralistic society such as ours, schools must act as agents of social cohesion by fostering a feeling of belonging to the community and teaching students how to live together...They must likewise prevent exclusion, which jeopardizes the future of too many young people (p. 25)

While there is noticeable advancement in terms of achieving these goals, 30% of students designated with special needs remain in non-integrated classes (MEES, 2015). It is also noteworthy that among students designated with severe behavioral difficulties, over 60% are excluded from regular classrooms (MEES, 2015). The following subsections will highlight how the above-mentioned goals may be further compromised.

1.3.2 Students Designated with Special Needs

The Ministry of Education refers to students in special education as *élèves handicapés ou en difficulté d'adaptation ou d'apprentissage (EHDAA),* which officially translates to "students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties" (SHSMLD) (MELS, 2007). More recently, the term *besoins particuliers,* meaning "special needs" was introduced (MEQ, 2017). Here, some specifications beyond a footnote must be made regarding the translation of these terms. The term SHSMLD is a literal and direct translation, however, "handicap" in French does not carry the same pejorative connotation as it does in English. It reflects a situational approach, which emphasizes the social production of disability and the contextual nature of the experienced difficulties (Barral & Roussel, 2002; Fougeyrollas, 2002). In contrast, rather than a literal and direct translation of *besoins particuliers*

to "particular needs", the term "special needs" appears in English versions of policy, which also has a different connotation. In English, despite some contextual variations, the term "special needs" is "generally applied where medical or cognitive disorders exist which create barriers to learning and which require support for the learner on a long-term or ongoing basis" (Wallace, 2015, n.p.). In the educational context of Quebec, based on the French definition, it refers to diverse student needs related to an array of circumstances such as "handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties", "risks" related to socio-economic status, giftedness, etc. (MEES, 2017). Hence, this term could be considered the closest equivalent of what many other provinces call *exceptionalities* (Dworet & Bennet, 2002; Edmunds & Edmunds, 2018).

In any case, the adoption of these terms coincides with endeavors to 1) replace previous ones now perceived as negative or harmful, such as "retarded" or "handicapped" (English connotation), 2) shift the focus to student needs from a perspective of inclusion, rather than the medical labels or categories they are assigned to. However, critical scholars have demonstrated that these have not been achieved. In addition to a simple survey of the categories that explicitly entail negative terms such as *disorders, impairments*, and *difficulties,* the umbrella term of *special needs* can be considered an ineffective euphemism for disabilities, as the perceived negativity increases when it is employed (Gernsbacher, 2016). Moreover, the maintenance of psycho-medical concepts within the special needs framework renders the recognition of students' multiple experiences more complex (Bauer et al., 2019). In fact, recent studies have documented the risks of exclusion associated with certain educational interventions that target equity and inclusion (ex: Demeuse & Baye, 2008; Laville, 2019; Prax-Dubois, 2019; Trépanier, 2019). Considering these tensions, along with the possibility that students may be more likely to be institutionally assigned a label or to a special needs category, as opposed to self-identifying as such, the term *students designated with special needs* will be employed throughout this dissertation.

The process of designating students with special needs varies according to the subcategory they are assigned to. As stipulated by the MELS (2007), for students *at-risk*, "certain vulnerability factors that may affect their learning or behavior, and who may therefore be at risk, especially of falling behind either academically or socially" (p.24). For students with *handicaps and severe behavioral disorders* 1) a diagnostic evaluation must be performed by a qualified professional, 2) limitations to learning, autonomy and socialization must be identified with a link to the diagnosed disability, and, 3) support measures must be mobilized to ensure minimal disadvantages related to the diagnosed disability. Finally, for students to be designated with *learning difficulties and social maladjustments*, it must be demonstrated that remedial measures mobilized over a "significant period of time" (p. 24) were

insufficient in terms of helping the student successfully meet the minimum requirements of the French/English or Math program by the end of an educational cycle. Therefore, students designated with special needs may be assigned difficulty codes based on a diagnosis, or may not be assigned a difficulty code, but have an individualized education plan (IEP).

Individualized education plans are legal working documents detailing plans to support students designated with special needs. They entail data related to students' demographic background, educational strengths and areas of concerns, assessments, programs and support measures, and recommendations. They are part of a dynamic processes carried out with students and parents, involving consultations for planning and implementing interventions that aim to meet their students' special needs, in order to support their socio-academic development and progress (MELS, 2013). For students to be placed in special schools, an active IEP is required (MELS, 2009).

Despite the fact that student full participation in the IEP process has been identified as an effective measure in terms of making IEPs meaningful and promoting student engagement and success (Beaupré et al., 2003; Myara, 2011), their rate of participation has been identified at as low as 35% across the province (Beaupré et al., 2003). The total absence of, or passive, student participation have been documented to have a negative effect on the motivation, the development of self-determination, and the self-understanding of a growing population of students designated with special needs (Bergeron, 2012; Robert et al., 2016; Souchon, 2008).

1.3.3 Overview of the Special Education Student Composition

Students designated with "handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties" currently make up nearly 20% of the total student population (MEES, 2015). Between 1999-2000 and 2013-2014, the numbers of students designated with special needs were reported at 132,538 and 191,749 respectively, representing an increase of 30.9% (MELS, 2009; MEES, 2015) over that period. This increase is noticeable at all levels of education, but is greater in preschools and high schools (MELS, 2009).

In 2013-2014, the vast majority of these students (146 033) were designated with social maladjustments or learning difficulties and so, were not attributed a specific disability code but had an active IEP. Those remaining (45 716), were designated in the following categories in ascending order: disability recognized by law (319); visual impairments (568); profound intellectual impairments (614); severe behavioral disorders (1 207); severe motor impairments (1 342); hearing impairments (1 506); atypical disorders (1 746); moderate to severe intellectual impairments (2 790); psychopathological

disorders (3 499); mild motor impairments (4 733); non-declared category (6 141); language disorders (9 048); pervasive developmental disorders (12 203).

In this light, it appears that certain disabilities are less or more prevalent than others and can be qualified as what Harry & Klinger (2014) call low and high incidence categories. For low incidence categories such as certain “handicaps” as per MELS (2007), a diagnosis is required by a medical professional who works within a multi/interdisciplinary team. High incident categories such as “social maladjustments or learning difficulties” may entail verbal and physical aggression, low frustration thresholds, irresponsible behavior, endangering the safety of others, challenging authority, difficulties processing large amounts of information, and applying known concepts to new situations. These disabilities do not require a diagnosis from a general practitioner or a medical specialist; students are instead assessed by a multidisciplinary school team including either a psychologist, guidance counselor, and in some cases, a psycho-educator or a social worker (MELS, 2007). In contrast, they tend to rely on subjective evaluations and judgments involving intangible characteristics, which bring into question their higher prevalence. About 59% and 23% of students designated with “handicaps” or “social maladjustments or learning difficulties” are educated in special classes or schools that are segregated from regular school environments respectively (MEES, 2015).

Little is known about the educational experiences of students designated with special needs in Quebec. Recently, graduation and qualification rates have increased for these students (Kalubi et al., 2015). However, difficult academic trajectories, streaming toward vocational training pathways, academic lag, lower graduation rates, and higher dropout rates (MEQ, 2003; MEES, 2017; Rousseau et al., 2008; Tremblay, 2017) persist. In fact, less than half of students designated with special needs in the public education system obtain a high school diploma before the age of 20 (MEES, 2017). In addition, the risks of over or under-identifying racialized students as having special needs have been underscored (Borri-Anadon, 2019), and are of particular interest, especially in light of the absence of their experiences in the Quebecois scientific literature, as well as their overrepresentation in special education (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2011).

1.3.4 The Overrepresentation of Racialized Youth in Special Education

Consistent with the international portrait, research in Quebec confirms the special education overrepresentation of racialized groups in its public education system. In a study involving a high school cohort between 1998-2000, the higher special education identification rates of three groups were revealed: those from Central and South America (30.4%), South Asia (32.1%), as well as the

Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa (37.4%). These groups receive special education designations at a rate that is at least 10% higher than that of the general population (24.2%) (Mc Andrew et al., 2015). Among these subgroups, Black students have the most concerning portrait.

In a previous cohort (1994-1996), the educational portrait of Black youth was examined independently in French and English school boards, involving 6617 high school students (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008). In the French sector (*n* = 5747), Black students were represented at a rate of 14.8% in special education, which is not significantly different from the general population (12.6%). However, Black Creole-speaking students from the Caribbean specifically, were represented at a rate of 17.8%. These students also made up the largest group to be placed in non-integrated settings (14.8%) compared to the general population (8.9%); immigrant groups combined (6.4%); and Black African students (4.3%). As indicated above, the special education identification rate among the 1998-2000 cohort more than doubled (37.4%) that of the previous of a previous cohort (1994-19996) (Mc Andrew et al., 2015). While this increase may be reflective of an overall growth in the special education population, it is nevertheless a source of concern, given that special education designation is the most predictive factor in terms of high school non-completion among Black youth (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008). In fact, researchers classify first-generation, Creole-speaking boys from disadvantaged neighborhoods, designated as having a disability as the most "at-risk" student group for high school non-completion in Quebec.

In the English sector (*n* = 870), the representation of Black students in special education was relatively more significant. Among the 1994-1996 cohort, they were represented at a rate of 19.8%, while students from the total population and the total immigrant population were represented at 16.3% and 10.8% respectively (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008). Similar to results revealed in the U.K. (Strand & Lindsay, 2009), there are disparities between Black-African and Black-Caribbean students. Only 6% of Black-African students were designated as having special needs, compared to 22.3% of those from the Caribbean (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008). In contrast to the French sector, data pertaining to more recent cohorts are not available; overall, studies accounting for the English education sector in Quebec are sparse (Mc Andrew et al., 2015). When it comes to examining the educational portrait of immigrant youth, this situation may be somewhat trivial as the vast majority of the immigrant population is educated in the French sector. However, alternatives to a culturalist approach make this research gap worthy of address.

1.4. The Problem Statement

The analysis of the literature on Black youth and their overrepresentation in special education has provoked a decipherment of the dynamics at play in their educational life sphere. This section aims to provide a brief summary of what is known about Black youth in special education and to demonstrate the relevance of pursuing research on this theme from a critical perspective and its original social and scientific contributions. In conclusion, the general research question that guides the inquiry will be presented.

Overall, there is limited national and provincial data on special education and racialized youth, as separate entities. Hence, the empirical research on racialized youth *in* special education in Canada and Quebec is quasi inexistent, especially comparatively to the United States. The few studies addressing the subject were mainly accomplished as a secondary focus of wider-scale projects (Brown & Parekh, 2010; James & Turner, 2017; Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008; Underwood, 2012). As such, very little is known about the types of special education categories racialized students are assigned to, the processes of how they are placed in special education, whether special education programs prove beneficial, and their overall experiences.

Therefore, several arguments can be made to justify the social importance of the research topic. Firstly, the number of people belonging to racialized groups is growing in Canada, and Quebec, a trend that is likely to continue given the existing immigration policies and patterns (Statistics Canada, 2019). Secondly, to sum the Quebecois literature on Black youth, socio-economic, and academic indicators produce an overall disquieting portrait. Black students are part of a group that is more likely to face educational challenges that cannot be disconnected from socio-historical practices of colonialism and slavery. Academically, they experience educational lag and underrepresentation in private schools (Kamanzi, 2021; Mc Andrew et al., 2011); adverse high school experiences distinguished by a perceived sense of discrimination and exclusion from peers and school staff (Collins & Magnan, 2018; Lafortune & Kanouté, 2019); an overrepresentation in the general adult education sector (Potvin & Leclercq, 2014); high dropout rates and lower than average graduation rates at the high school level (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008); and an underrepresentation in terms of university access and or completion (Kamanzi et al, 2018; Kamazi & Murdoch, 2011) - factors that are closely linked to schooling in special education and disability designation (Connor et al., 2008). Thirdly, not only are Black students overrepresented in special education, but also in non-integrated/special classrooms (Mc Andrew & Ledent, 2008). Yet, the reasons for this disproportional representation remain unclear. Fourthly, they are also disproportionately subjected to over-policing and racial profiling in schools. In

fact, following a report issued by the *Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse* (CDPDJ, 2011) on racial profiling and its consequences which revealed that “a number of observers and experts from the education sector asserted that the processes for evaluating and categorizing students as [special needs] could be tainted by racial profiling” (p.65), a follow-up report issued one year later indicated that the majority of the actors involved observed no improvements pertaining to school practices of racial profiling and discrimination (CDPDJ, 2012).

Similarly, the scientific contribution of this thesis topic would manifest on multiple fronts. Based on the review of the literature, the special education experiences of Black youth specifically have not yet been investigated in Quebec, namely, from a qualitative angle. As mentioned above, a review of the educational success of immigrant students in Quebec over the past 10 years indicates that Black students from the Caribbean are a highly vulnerable group comparatively to all other immigrant groups (Mc Andrew et al., 2015). The authors recommend a further examination of the causes of their overrepresentation in special education specifically. They also confirm the absence of data pertaining to third-generation immigrants and those from long-standing settlements. This research thus aids in the interpretation of quantitative results by shedding light on the experiences of Black youth, as well as extending and enhancing the existing portrait of Black youth by providing information on those beyond first and second-generation immigrants.

Furthermore, the processes of racialization, race-based discrimination, and especially the nuance of antiblackness have been by and large underexplored in educational research in Quebec, in contrast to a culturalist approach which focuses on immigration status in the context of acculturation. In fact, critical perspectives in education remain at the periphery of the Quebecois research body. A critical intersectional investigation of blackness within social power relationships, imbricated with aspects such as country and language of origin and other identifiers, ensures social power dynamics and structural dimensions to be better accounted for, and contributes to advancing alternative frameworks in the existing body of research. Finally, conducting the study in the English education sector is an added value, given its scarce representation in Quebec research overall. Therefore, given the unsettling profile of Black communities in Quebec, as well as the gaps in the literature pertaining to special education, blackness, student experiences, and the English education sector, the research is guided by the following general question: *What are the experiences of Black students who have undergone special education placement in Quebec English schools*?

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework: A DisCrit Perspective Informed by (Anti)Blackness

This chapter will discuss the theoretical anchoring of the research as well as the suitability of the conceptual plexus stemming from it. In light of the systemic and structural dimensions highlighted in the research problem, to understand Black student experiences in special education, the research will be undertaken from a critical perspective. As such, this chapter will open with an overview of critical theory as a relevant mainspring for the research. Next the theoretical components allowing for the definition of the key concepts pertaining to disability and race will be presented respectively in terms of their evolution, operation and interaction in education. Subsequently, the framework selected for the study: Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) will be elaborated. As well, following the survey of the key concepts of the study, *special education, placement processes, blackness / antiblackness,* and *experience,* this chapter will conclude with the specific objectives of the research.

2.1. Critical Theory

The research problem exposed in the previous chapter incites a critical theoretical approach that goes beyond an ahistorical understanding of subjective experiences and their symbolic meaning, or structures and their effects. Critical theory rather seeks to understand and challenge dominant ideologies and the power structures that create and uphold them, while promoting awareness and emancipation (Bronner, 2011). This entails an analysis of "issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy; matters of race, class, and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions; and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (Kincheloe, 2012, p. 157).

For Kincheloe (2008), the term "critical theory" is frequently used, yet often confused. This could be explained by the fact that it encompasses different theoretical positions; it is continuously changing given its permeability to new perspectives; and it covers a vast body of work (McLaren, 2007; Rogers et al., 2005). Indeed, since its inception at the Frankfurt School in 1920, it has been under various influences, from which a great diversity has emerged both in terms of the objects of study and the frameworks of analysis that have been applied (Kincheloe, 2008; Lincoln et al., 2011).

In education, theorists such as Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and Joe Kincheloe have problematized inequalities and meritocracy through critical pedagogy (Burbules & Berk, 1999). Critical pedagogy, as detailed collectively by these theorists, recognizes educational institutions as

non-neutral political spaces where the ideology of the ruling class and social inequalities are reproduced, along with the liberating and transformational nature of education (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2019; McLaren 2007; Kincheloe, 2008). More specifically, according to Freire (1970), every society is affected by forms of injustice, discrimination, social marginalization, and exclusion, which divide society into oppressors and the oppressed. Oppressed groups must therefore recognize and resist their oppression through education and action. In the same vein, schools can bolster the emancipation and liberation of marginalized groups through a posture that values equity and social justice (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2019).

As such, critical theory lends itself as a foundation to theories of disability and race as it encourages critical reflection on discourses, ideologies, and social practices, to reveal contradictions, ruptures, paradoxes, as well as the dynamics and hidden mechanisms that constrain freedoms and maintain inequalities concerning these groups. Equally, it advances transforming social realities that hinder their development and quality of life, while encouraging agency to imagine and promote a future that is socially just. Recalling the general research question of this study: *What are the experiences of Black students who have undergone placement in special education in English schools*?, I draw on critical theories with a sharper focus on disability and race, which include disability studies, critical race theory, intersectionality theory, DisCrit, BlackCrit, and decolonial theory, to guide the analysis.

2.2. Disability Studies

Disability studies can be considered the academic component of the Disability Rights Movement (Ferguson & Nussbaum, 2012), which seeks equal rights and opportunities for all people with disabilities. Its development was largely influenced by the Civil Rights Movement for equal rights for minoritized groups in the U.S., and internationally. As an academic discipline, disability studies seeks to "augment understanding of disability in all cultures and historical periods, to promote greater awareness of the experiences of people with disabilities, and to advocate for social change" (Society for Disability Studies, n.d.).

The conceptualization of disabilities is currently undertaken via two predominant frameworks: the medical model, and the social model. The latter, which is at the foundation of disability studies, affirms disability as a social construct, and is largely a response to and rejection of the within-individual deficit view of the former. While this study adopts a social model perspective, the medical model remains preponderant in special education and is deeply engrained in the collective representations of school

actors (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021). Therefore, in the following subsections, both models will be elaborated and contrasted, with a focus on their implications for educational policy and practice.

2.2.1 The Medical Model

The medical model of disability, also known as the individual (Oliver & Barnes, 2012) or incrementalist model (Andrews et al., 2000) is grounded in positivist science, which assumes that disabilities are intrinsic to individuals, and emphasizes physical and/or mental deficits. For adherents of the medical model, individuals with disabilities possess some form of biological, psychological, or pathological problem caused by functional limitations. Consequently, these deficits are generally assumed to be in need of correction, treatment, rehabilitation, accommodation, or cure, in order to achieve as much approximation to "normality" as possible (Andrews et al., 2000).

Impairment is a key concept within the medical model, which refers to a physical or bodily dysfunction (Nussbaum, 2006; Oliver & Barnes, 2012) usually constituting a medically classified condition attributed to disease or trauma. Conceptualized in this manner, theorists who adhere to the medical model advance a within-individual understanding of disability arising from natural causes or misfortune.

The within-individual deficit perspective has been criticized for its implication that the sole causes of disability can be simplistically attributed to inherent physical and psychological factors (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). To this end, it leads to, and justifies a taxonomic system for categorizing disabilities, resulting in the attribution of labels that usually have an underlying, or blatant negative connotation. This posture is highly visible in special education. Students are conventionally categorized and labeled with some form of deficiency and offered services, adaptations, and accommodations to help them function in a manner which is as similar as possible to their "normal" peers in general education (Connor et al., 2008). This blame-and-save approach, fails to capture the complexity of disability, mainly by neglecting to account for social factor dynamics. In light of the underplay of significant aspects such as discrimination, prejudice, and oppression, the social model of disability directly challenges the medical model.

2.2.2 The Social Model

For social model theorists, the way in which disability has been historically conceptualized is inordinately medicalized, leaving important social factors unaccounted for (Oliver & Barnes, 2012).

The medical model is thus rejected in favor of alternative approaches for understanding the experiences of individuals with disabilities. At the core of this model is the conceptualization of disabilities as a social construction, as opposed to a diagnosable medical condition, or a labeling agent. Disabilities are not seen as intrinsic to individuals but rather the reflection of social attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions based on the observation of difference (Connor et al, 2008). As such, impairments are reconceptualized as "variations that exist in human behaviour, appearance, functioning, sensory acuity, and cognitive processing" (Linton, 1998; p.2), and disabilities, as "the product of social, political, economic and cultural practices" (Baglieri et al., 2011, p.32), rather than the product of an impairment.

Building on associated concepts such as racism and sexism, disability scholars developed the notion of *handicapism,* defining it as "a set of assumptions and practices that promote the differential and unequal treatment of people because of apparent or assumed physical, mental, or behavioral differences" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1977, p.69). Consistent with the departure from the medical model, which focuses on accessibility versus an individual's ability, the term would eventually be replaced with *ableism* (Devlieger, 1999). Broadly speaking, "ableism is stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and social oppression toward people with disabilities" (Bogart & Dunn, 2019, p. 651). It represents a social value system that venerates certain abilities, such as productivity and competition over others (Wolbring, 2008), that presumes ablebodiedness as the norm (Chouinard, 1997) and implies any distance from that norm as a distance from "being human" (Campbell, 2001). According to Wolbring (2008), the categorization and labeling of individuals with disabilities promotes ableism, by advancing a within-individual deficit view of disability. Critical disability scholars underscore the urgency of offsetting ableism by developing consciousness of the existing privilege and power among nondisabled individuals (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012), especially in education.

The social model of disability has produced favorable outcomes in terms of advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities, challenging discrimination and marginalization, and generally affecting social and political change (Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Nevertheless, some points of contention include its oversight of the effects of impairment and inevitably, an overemphasis on social aspects. By separating disability from impairment, the personal restrictions of impairment remain unaddressed, as well as the everyday experiences of individuals with disabilities (Terzi, 2005). Similarly, the emphasis on social aspects of disability leaves certain biomedical conditions requiring medical and psychological intervention unexplained (Bury, 1996). Moreover, Terzi (2005) suggests that by inordinately focusing on social factors such as oppression and discrimination, the social model's fundamental goal of avoiding exclusion is compromised.

2.2.3 Disability Studies in Education (DSE)

The tensions between the medical and social models of disability were exposed in the sections above. In both cases, policy and practical endeavors require continued investment with regards to achieving educational equality for students designated with disabilities. As a branch of disability studies, Disabilities Studies *in Education* (DSE) places a refined focus on how power dynamics happen in educational contexts, and necessarily provides a critical analysis of special education. DSE aims "to deepen understanding of the daily experiences of people with disabilities in schools and universities throughout contemporary society across diverse cultures and within historical contexts" (Connor et al., 2008, p. 441-442). Scholars in the DSE field place importance on engaging all actors involved in the education of individuals with disabilities, from teachers to policymakers and researchers, in contemplating how differences are perceived and addressed. By promoting dialogue about the nature of disability and the associated educational practices, DSE aspires to bolster epistemological boundaries of how knowledge is produced, and potentially dispel the uneasiness surrounding disability, the predominant deficit perspective in education (Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012), as well as the ideology that normalizes this perspective.

Therefore, DSE employs a social model approach to its reconceptualization of disability and special needs. It evaluates individual well-being and social arrangements, policy designs and proposals about social change in society, in its questioning of educational policies and practices in terms of providing respectful and equitable treatment. In particular, given the predominance of the medical model in special education and its ableist conceptualizations of disability (Banks, 2017; Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021), DSE emerged as a critical perspective best suited to question policies and practices that have been normalized, yet susceptible of producing inequitable outcomes, notably, for racialized students.

2.3. Critical Race Theory (CRT)

As a theoretical approach, CRT was founded by Latinx and African American attorneys and scholars concerned with racial inequality such as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Delgado & Stefanic, 1998). Grounded in critical legal studies and Black feminism, CRT concerns

> …a philosophical critique of the dominant frames on racial power. It [is] also a product of activists' engagement with the material manifestations of liberal reform. Indeed, one might say

that CRT was the offspring of a post-civil rights institutional activism that was generated and informed by an oppositionalist orientation toward racial power" (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1260)

As an interdisciplinary approach, CRT theorists advance a (more) race-conscious analysis of social issues, with a focus on institutional racism and its historical underpinnings, as well as how white norms disguised as neutral dimensions affect people of color (Crenshaw, 2011; Zellars, 2017). There are six tenets at the heart of the theory: 1) the permanence and ordinariness of racism, 2) whiteness as property, 3) storytelling and counter-storytelling, 4) interest convergence, 5) critique of liberalism, 6) and, intersectionality (Capper, 2015), many of which will be discussed further in section 2.4. Equally central to CRT and this research project are the social constructions of race and racism.

2.3.1. The Social Construction of Race and Racism

Race, which was once established as a biological phenomenon, is now scientifically accepted rather as the product of a social process (Gravlee, 2009; Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Weber, 1978). These processes involve the social construction of identities and knowledge by unequal social power relationships, which influence the social status of individuals or groups. They occur through a cognitive process of social categorisation, defined as the activation of pre-established cognitive schemes, by which members of a social group decode and represent actual or perceived differences of members of another group (McGarty, 1999; McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002). Further, part of understanding the social construction of reality is linked to understanding the social organization "that permits the definers to do their defining" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.116).

According to Thomas & Thomas (1928), "if [people] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (cited in Merton, 1995, p.572). Thus, although the concept of race is based on socially constructed beliefs and previous scientific fallacies, it nevertheless spews real consequences in society involving the superiority and inferiority of groups based on racial distinctions. Despite a recent surge in popular interest regarding the global Black Lives Matter Movement in the wake of the graphic murder of George Floyd by police officers in the U.S. in 2020, as detailed in the previous chapter, this notion seems to be quite elusive in Quebec and other French-speaking domains. It is thus still necessary to thoroughly detail the validity of race as a social category in these contexts. Hence, the relevance of the following subsections.

Race

Van den Berghe (1967) calls to attention that "it is not the presence of objective physical differences between groups that creates race, but the social recognition of such differences as socially significant or relevant" (p. 11). Thus, the definitions and meanings of race are in constant motion and contestation. Currently, there is no consensus on the definition of race, whether in reference to skin color, personal identity, or (differences in) social groups (Leonardo & Grubb, 2013; Smedley & Smedley, 2005), nor is there accord regarding how conceptions of race have evolved over time (Fullwiley, 2015). Overall, there is enormous contextual variability in the meaning of race, in both collective and individual activity, resulting from various historical practices. As such, its meaning generates, fluctuates, and transforms in the socio-historical substance it is embedded in (Omi & Winant, 2015).

From a historical standpoint, the processes of European colonization and imperialism can be placed in juxtaposition to current widespread understandings of race in Western societies, mainly based on skin color categorization. However, prior to the 18th century, race did not exist as a physical or social marker of difference (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). If a comparison is to be made, religion and language were the most significant criteria of identity (Hannaford, 1996). Lexically, the term *race* carried a similar definition to terms such as *type, kind, sort, breed,* etc.*,* conveying a meaning of general categorization in the English language (Allen, 1994; Hannaford, 1996). During the European colonial era, the term *race* steadily broadened as a reference to the populations in interaction in North America, namely Europeans (Whites), Africans (Blacks), and Indigenous people (Indians) (Allen, 1994, 1997; Smedley, 1998). Consequently, it can be said, that these populations had become racialized.

Racism

Racism concerns a complex set of processes, practices and relationships that exclude and inferiorize certain social groups. It represents historical developments in operation at micro and macro levels of society, and serves as an instrument that enables inequality and oppression of an "othered" race. It can be promoted through prejudices and stereotypes, and acted out in discriminatory behavior in order to justify disparities between social groups. Balibar (2007) attributes its proliferation to the effect of mediatization and globalization that feeds prejudices and fears, via a process that happens unconsciously through socialization and categorization. As such, racial prejudices may appear to be in downturn, yet subtler patterns of discrimination and oppression persist through social practices that are depersonalized through institutionalization.

Along the same lines, according to Daniel (2016), "colonizers […] structured society in such a way that their [white] racial group would be afforded all forms of privileges and rewards, and that this unequal distribution of rewards would be legally, socially, and morally justified" (p.18). As such, racism is not limited to individual or collective discriminatory acts that are overt in nature, such as the use of derogatory terms, or acts of violence toward racialized groups. Its institutional/systemic nature, allows for its embedding in policies and practices, which results in advantages for white people and disadvantages for those who are not. As mentioned above, much of the work of critical race actors involves bringing to surface and deconstructing these hidden forms of inequality and oppression.

2.2.3. Critical Race Theory in Education

CRT was introduced to the field of education in the 90s by Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995). Through their seminal intersectional analysis of race and property rights, they demonstrated the systemic nature of racism in schools. More specifically, they showed how whiteness as a form of property that can only be possessed by whites, 1) rewards non-white students for conforming to white norms and punishes them for deviating from them; 2) mobilizes masked language to maintain its "value" such as substituting "black" for "urban" in educational institutions; and, 3) has the power to exclude non-white students through business-as-usual processes such as academic streaming and gifted or honors programs.

Along with Ladson-Billings & Tate, critical race scholars in education continue to deconstruct policies and practices, challenge hegemonic ideologies, and advance strategies to recognize, maneuver, and resist racism in schools (Capper, 2015; Gillborn, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Leonardo, 2013). Rooting their work in the historical context it is carried out, CRT scholars in education unveil racism circulating in mundane ways and its impact on racialized students. In the US, the tenets of CRT have been used to demonstrated how racism is downplayed and ignored in predominantly white schools (permanence of racism), as well as how the athleticism of African American boys facilitated otherwise tense relationships with white peers (interest convergence) (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

In Canada and Quebec, CRT has been mobilized to show how anti-Black racism has circulated in schools and how Black students have been marginalized throughout history through racial biases, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and their invisibilization in curriculum and classroom spaces (Briggs, 2018; James, 2012; Zellars, 2017). Similarly, researchers have demonstrated how racialized students

experience multiple forms of microagressions[4] beginning in elementary school, as well as the resistance strategies (creating counterpaces, calling out) they use to cope with the resulting sense of alienation and demotivation (Louis, 2020; Magnan et al., 2021b; Valade, 2021).

While the utility of CRT with regard to structural racial (in)equity has been established in the above sections, it continues to be a site of critique, namely for being too simplistic, essentialist, divisive and even racist (Gillborn, 2015). Recently, in the UK and the US, there has been a call for a ban on CRT in schools. Framing it as an extreme political approach, the British Government has taken a definitive stance against CRT declaring:

> "We do not want to see teachers teaching their white pupils about white privilege and inherited racial guilt[…] any school which teaches these elements of critical race theory […] without offering a balanced treatment of opposing views is breaking the law" (Trilling, 2020, n.p.).

In the US, following the interpretation of CRT under the Trump government as "a cancer" (Meghji, 2021), nine states have either passed or attempted to pass anti-CRT legislation, which would prohibit educators from broaching topics regarding systemic racial inequalities and discrimination (Ray & Gibbons, 2021). Underlying this perspective is a postracial ideology wherein race and racism are dismissed as irrelevant things of the past, making it indeed possible to ignore racial inequalities and the history that gave birth to it.

Critical race theorists position such endeavors as patronizing and urge for a comprehensive interrogation of Eurocentric systems of thought and knowledge generation, as well as their implications (Chapman et al., 2013; Wane, 2011). From a non-oppositional stance, a more nuanced critique of CRT lies in the concept definition within the broader framework. At the core of the framework, the concept of race itself remains surprisingly under-developed. This poses a significant challenge as a scholar carrying out work in a Canadian French-speaking language minority context. Because science has invalidated biological explanations of race by demonstrating that racial distinctions are not genetically discrete, reliably measurable, nor meaningful, the concept has been widely expelled from the domains of French sociology as an object of analysis (Garneau & Giradau-Baujeu, 2018). Simultaneously, students and other members of society who self-identify as Black are contending with racism and its consequences as a social construct (Collins & Magnan, 2018; Howard,

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[4] The brief, everyday, and hidden slights, insults, and indignities and/or denigrating messages sent by people who perceive themselves as well-intentioned or harmless in their messages (Sue & Spanierman, 2020)

2020; Valade, 2021). It has thus been necessary to build an airtight theoretical foundation to advance a doctoral research project concerning race and racism in Quebec.

In light of the contestation of race as a valid concept, it is operating as an assumed category where it "becomes a proxy for social group, but there are other competing collectivities that organize people and schools, such as ethnicity or nationality" (Leonardo, 2012, p. 431) or, in the case of Quebec, language. Furthermore, the American socio-historical and political dimensions that undergird CRT and the central role of race complicate its application in Quebec. For example, when Latinx or Haitian communities experience discrimination and exclusion based on their accents, does this constitute racism, linguicism, or both, and how is this determined with such a fluid existing conceptualization of race? Answers to these concerns will be discussed in the sections that ensue.

2.4. The Intersections of Critical Disability and Race Perspectives in Education

In the previous sections, critical disability and race studies, as well as the associated perspectives and their limitations were presented in detail. At this juncture, it is relevant and necessary to pinpoint the areas of convergence between the two, as well as their implications in education. Firstly, it is possible to identify several overlapping dimensions between disability and race, especially through the reciprocal relationship between the two. The scientific endeavor of intelligence testing, with the goal of proving the inferior acumen of racialized groups, is an infamous example of how disability has been historically racialized (DuBois, 1920; Skiba et al., 2008a). Similarly, in the 19th century, a mental illness called *drapetomania* was constructed to label enslaved people seeking their freedom as defective (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Myers, 2014), illustrating how racism has validated disability and vice versa. Furthermore, the perspectives mobilized in disability and critical race studies are anchored in a social constructionism epistemology, which foreground how inequality and oppression are reproduced and redefined in camouflaged ways. Another notable point of convergence is the importance accorded to the voice of the concerned groups in scholarship (Slee, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Clearly, insights from critical race studies can reinforce disability studies and vice versa, to address issues of social justice in education. In particular, ableism is arguably one of the most significant "isms", as it can give rise to other "isms" such as racism and sexism by justifying dominance based on the ideologies of disability and normalcy (Wolbring, 2008). Furthermore, Erevelles (1996) posits that "the ideology of disability is essential to the capitalist enterprise because it is able to regulate and control the unequal distribution of surplus through invoking biological difference as the 'natural' cause

of all inequality" (p.526). Therefore, the ideology of disability becomes a justification of social and economic inequalities while setting the foundation for the construction of other forms of difference. Notwithstanding, the parallel yet distinct development of disability and critical race studies inevitably foregrounds one dimension of oppression while leaving another (or others) either unaccounted for, or treating them as add-ons. Given the documented dynamics within a *matrix of oppression* - a concept that recognizes the interconnection of different markers of social difference as they relate to oppression (Collins, 2009) - an intersectional framework is necessary in order to investigate the experiences of racialized individuals with disabilities or who are designated as such.

2.4.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality theorizes the complex ways multiple forms of inequality and identity interlock in different contexts (Cho, et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). Traditionally, single identity frameworks and social movements have failed to capture intra-group differences pertaining to various social identity markers such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, ethnicity, age, etc., which are not possible to untangle and address separately (Cho, et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). Instead, they are inextricably connected and mutually active in systems of oppression. In the same manner, systems of oppression such as ableism or racism cannot be problematized individually given that they inform one another. Collins & Bilge (2016) emphasize intersectionality as an analytical tool to examine the mutual construction and interdependence within power relations, as well as how they ascribe meaning to social identities.

In education, an intersectional analysis enables the examination of the complex experiences of racialized students identified with disabilities in the most comprehensive and critical manner. Such an analysis could lead to more effective interventions, especially in terms of the limitations discussed in the previous chapter pertaining to exclusion and segregation. Furthermore, an intersectional approach challenges the status quo and promotes resistance through the coalition among different groups (Gillborn, 2015). Nonetheless, intersectionality remains a highly complex substance, susceptible of adding complication to analysis involving multidimensional aspects, or inadvertently neglecting certain identity markers. Given that "identity categories are infinitely divisible" (Gillborn, 2015, p. 279), critical scholars stress the importance of utilizing intersectionality as a tool for analysis in a critical manner. A contemporary framework that does that with race and disability at its forefront is presented in the following section.

2.4.2 Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit)

DisCrit is a framework that addresses the interrelationship of race and disability, how they are socially constructed, and the associated consequences for people who are racialized and disabled (Annamma et al., 2016). It is a branch of CRT that grew out of the emanating need to make space for disability in intersectional analysis. Thus, while race and disability are foregrounded in DisCrit, classic dimensions of identity such as gender, class, etc. also maintain a sound bearing within the framework. The analytical focus is placed on the contextual dimensions of the dualities between normalcy and abnormality; whiteness and non-whiteness; and ability and disability. It considers how the social construction of these markers happens simultaneously, how they come to be defined as "natural deviance", and how they work in tandem to maintain systems of oppression (Adams & Erevelles, 2016). Therefore, DisCrit's dual analysis of race and disability acknowledges how these dimensions lead to a process of othering individuals and groups. As such, biological explanations of both race and disability are rejected while foregrounding the oppressive consequences of these same variables in order to reveal how racism and ableism operate as normalizing processes in society and schools.

In education, DisCrit examines how the above dualities are embedded into institutional procedures and discourses, and how racialized students who are disabled or identified as such are affected in their everyday lives (Annamma et al., 2016). Specifically, boundaries of normalcy are investigated in terms of how they are constructed, who is involved, how they change over time, and their impact on students, systems, and society (Annamma et al., 2016). Furthermore, a critique of historical and contemporary factions is advanced, namely regarding the medical model of disabilities, the within-child deficit view, and the pathologization and criminalization of youth. DisCrit therefore offers alternative explanations to prevailing issues in education concerning racialized students identified with disabilities, including academic achievement, behavior, and special education overrepresentation. The DisCrit Framework is organized according to seven tenets that will be explained, analyzed, and contextualized to the Quebec educational context.

1. Ableism and racism are interdependent and circulate in camouflaged ways that bolster ideologies of normalcy

Tenet 1 of DisCrit makes it possible to foreground the reciprocity between ableism and racism, how they uphold white able-bodied norms, and how they are insidiously embedded in educational policies and practices. In Quebec, educational policies have surrounded notions of human rights, integration and adaptation to differences (ex: MEES, 2021; MELS, 2017). These policies are grounded in a

medical model, which assumes that disabilities are intrinsic to individuals, and emphasizes physical and/or mental deficits that need to be corrected, treated, or accommodated. It also anchors the categorical approach at the heart of special education placement processes in Quebec (outlined in section 1.3.1 of the previous chapter), which entails pre-established standards for normalcy, and the identification, categorization, and normalization of students deemed deviant from these standards. While it is officially applied to make services available to students "in difficulty," which are intended to help them succeed, it also plays a role in making students vulnerable to stereotypes and prejudices, as well as their long-lasting effects (CDPDJ, 2018).

Similarly, the terminology used to refer to students involved in special education is equally problematic. As stated in chapter 1, two predominant terms are employed: 1) "students with handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties" (SHSMLD), and more recently, 2) "students with special needs" (MELS, 2007; MELS, 2017). While the latter may appear more inclusive than the former, both terms imply deficiency and reinforce the categorization and normalization of students designated with special needs (Bauer et al., 2019), even more so for those who are not from a settler Quebecois background. Modifying the terminology to designate difference, while maintaining the ableist and racist structure it is founded on, creates an illusion of its acceptance. Yet, these designations not only individualize school success, but also fail to recognize school and social inequalities that contribute to the social construction of difficulties in order to maintain the norms of the able-bodied, French, white, middle- and upper-class.

Further, researchers in Quebec have suggested that some assessment practices are susceptible to identifying cultural notions that run countercurrent to dominant norms, rather than the actual difficulties or deficiencies they are intended for (Borri et al., 2018). More specifically, the problematic use of French-only tools and standardized tests, as well as the unilingual practices of speech-language therapists responsible for assessing students from immigrant backgrounds, have been brought to light (Borri-Anadon, 2016; Borri-Anadon et al., 2018). These tests and practices that are perceived by their administrators as allowing for assessments based on facts and ensuring validity, can be qualified as ableist and racist from a DisCrit point of view. Not only do they reinforce a medical approach, but they are based on social, historical, political, economic and cultural conventions, stemming from categorization processes within unequal social relationships. Ableism circulates in such relationships by revering productivity, competence and success, while positioning anything countercurrent to these values as "abnormal" (Wolbring 2008). This posture adopted by assessment professionals acts as an obstacle to the recognition of other dimensions that may play a part in student performance such as

race and second (or third, or fourth...) language acquisition (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021; Borri-Anadon et al., 2018). Measuring the aptitudes of students from diverse linguistic and immigrant backgrounds based exclusively on supposedly objective norms without accounting for any funds of knowledge from their own cultural experiences or aptitudes in their mother-tongues constitutes another racist practice that is reinforced by ableism as they are placed at a distance from French Quebecois normalcy. These same test results that are deemed scientifically valid can also be used to justify disparities between settler Quebecois students and non-settlers despite reports that process these practices emanate from may involve racial profiling (CDPDJ, 2011).

2. Singular notions of identity such as race, ability, gender, class etc. are denounced; instead, multidimensional identities are given prominence and recognized in the social construction of disability.

The second tenet highlights the importance of an intersectional approach (detailed above in section 2.3.1.) when analyzing the educational experiences of students who do not belong to a dominant social group. DisCrit intentionally foregrounds dimensions that have been previously obscured in frameworks that examine unequal social relationships, while shedding light on the associated complexity and how experiences vary accordingly. Unlike the sociopolitical context of the U.S. where "disability has been [relatively] excluded from discussions concerning unequal and discriminatory treatment" (Liasidou, 2014, p. 724), in Quebecois educational research, policy and administration, both disability and especially race tend to be overshadowed by issues related to linguistic and cultural integration, as explained in in chapter 1 (section 1.1.4).

This does not discount the work done by researchers who have made significant headway in understanding the educational success of immigrant students from a culturalist approach. However, an intersectional lens provides an opportunity to better understand and reveal important systemic and structural obstacles to educational success and social justice that are otherwise obscured. Canada and Quebec champion themselves as pro-diversity and equality-driven societies, partially based on the outstanding academic portrait among immigrants, that is quasi unprecedented internationally. However, this portrait does not apply to all immigrants, notably those who are racialized (Kamanzi et al., 2016; Mc Andrew 2015). Furthermore, this stellar state of affairs can be widely attributed to selective neoliberal immigration policies, aimed at welcoming only skilled and educated immigrants, which are fundamentally ableist and racist.

3. Western norms must be challenged, while acknowledging the material and psychological consequences of the social constructions of race and ability

Tenet 3 sheds light on the fact that when certain identifiers such as having white skin, or being able-bodied, are perceived as the norm: "everyone is ranked and categorized in relation to these points of opposition" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). I draw on decolonial theory to show how this manifests in the settler colonial context of Quebec. Settler colonialism refers to an active system (as opposed to a historical event) which normalizes ongoing colonial claim, occupation, and exploitation of Indigenous lands through violent and oppressive means (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Wolfe, 2006). In order for this system to take root and thrive in the Americas, Indigenous people must be displaced and dispossessed of land, and Africans who were human trafficked rendered and kept landless (Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013). The dominant ideology that has made this possible is the construction of non-white people as morally and intellectually inferior to whites (Wynter, 2003).

Along the same lines, a settler colonial approach to disability associates it to deficiency and difficulty inherent to individuals. This view is divergent from previously predominant Indigenous views. For many Indigenous communities, the concept of disability did not exist as an individual condition, and in many cases, there is no word in traditional languages to designate it (Lovern, 2017; Senier, 2013). Historically, individuals deemed disabled by western standards would be valued in Indigenous communities (Pengra & Godfrey, 2001; Senier, 2013). In other words, the difference would be acknowledged as an experience that would benefit the whole community (Ineese-Nash, 2020) rather than demeaned and corrected. However, according to Kress (2017), this posture seems to have been largely overridden by dominant settler colonial influences, like many other aspects of Indigenous culture, as a result of assimilationist practices which have gravely harmed Indigenous communities.

Among Black communities, Frantz Fanon (1961, 2007) brought to light how antiblackness (see section 2.5 below for detailed definition) has contributed to perpetuating and exacerbating anxiety and suffering among its victims. His seminal analysis of the effects of colonial psychic violence on the psyche of the colonized has inspired critical scholars to challenge notions of educational perseverance and grit that inadequately address racial stereotypes, microagressions and assaults, as well as their impacts on the mental health and academic well-being of racialized groups (McGee & Stovall, 2015; Smith & Lalonde, 2003). This type of work remains of dire importance when considering the serious stigma associated to having a disability based on the collective historical trauma experienced by Black people, from being positioned as intellectually inferior on a global scale, through a fake and false (settler) colonial narrative. This ableist perspective that has been widely internalized prevents some

members of Black communities from having their needs recognized and accessing supports and services that may be necessary to their success and well-being. Critical race scholars have thus emphasized the importance of teaching multiply-marginalized students self-sustaining postures when it comes to their educational success (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

4. The marginalized voices of minoritized populations are foregrounded, without purporting to "give them voice"

In light of the invalidation and exclusion of those positioned as "other" through the colonial project in academic research, tenet 4 underscores the importance of recognizing that members of minoritized communities are indeed carriers of knowledge and valid points of view. This notion holds regardless of their national or racial origin, social class, level of education, or their mastery of an official language. In the same vein, Yosso (2005) argues that marginalized communities have cultural capital that is often underestimated and devalued. In fact, very often historically excluded communities are not consulted and their conceptions of social and political issues are considered insignificant and sidelined. Even when forums for dialogue are set up, their voices carry little weight, and their perspectives are often diluted in decision-making processes, or are invalidated entirely.

The intolerance, ignorance, and difficulty that exist when it comes to centering marginalized perspectives for dominant groups, and the importance of this tenet in Quebec can be illustrated through a highly sensationalized debate in 2020 concerning the use of racial slurs in academic contexts. Following a complaint made by Black university students regarding the use of the n-word by a white professor and her consequential suspension, a petition was penned by nearly 600 settler-Quebecois academics in defense of their colleague (Chapuis & Gauthier, 2020). The petition, which gained wide public support, including that of the Premier of Quebec, minimalized, discredited, and omitted the actual experiences and perspectives of the students concerned. The covert forms of ableism were also present. Not only did the petition dictate what does and does not qualify as racism, and how to combat it, but the students were also accused of being "incapable of making distinctions between the constituents of racism and a university education and making reasonable judgments on what qualifies as racist[5]" (Chapuis & Gauthier, 2020, n.p.).

[5] My own translation

This fourth tenet thus, "invites understanding of ways students respond to injustices (i.e. being constructed as deficient, or being segregated and stigmatized) through fostering or attending to counter-narratives and explicitly reading these stories against the grain of master narratives" (Annamma et al., 2013, p.13). Counter-narratives, also called counter-stories, can operate as a critical race theoretical framing, methodology, and method (Miller et al., 2020). As a theoretical framing, they constitute one of the tenets of CRT (as highlighted above in section 2.3) to challenge settler colonial notions such as meritocracy, neutrality, and colorblindness. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) argue that any analysis of education systems without the voices of minoritized groups is incomplete.

While the distinctions between counter-stories as a theoretical framing and a methodology are not super clear, CRT scholars such as Solórzano & Yosso (2002) suggest that they serve as an analytical framework based on "(a) the data gathered from the research process itself, (b) the existing literature on the topic(s), (c) our own professional experiences, and, (d) our own personal experiences" (p. 34). As a research method, counter-stories[6] are also used to counteract dominant discourse, which has traditionally underrepresented, misrepresented and invalidated the experiences of racialized people and their contribution to theory (Yosso, 2013). Annamma and colleagues (2016) underscore that DisCrit does not claim to paternalistically "give voice" to those whose voices have been historically excluded. It rather encourages highlighting their own interpretations of their own counter-narratives, rather than those of the researcher.

5. Race and disability have been used legally and historically to deny some citizens their rights.

Tenet 5 contributes to exposing hidden forms of domination and oppression in day-to-day life with recognition of how the rights of disabled and racialized people have been denied and violated throughout history, and how the law has operated in favor of such injustices. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the history of the human trafficking of Africans in Quebec and Canada has been largely the object of concealment (Cooper, 2007; Zellars, 2017) and tends to be mostly associated to its perceived racist American neighbors to the south. However, despite Quebec's general posture of slavery-denial or downplay, it is documented that over a 200-year period, Indigenous people and Africans abducted by colonial human traffickers were subjected to forced unpaid labor in oppressive, humiliating, and inhumane conditions (Cooper 2007; Maynard, 2017).

[6] Counter-stories as method will be mobilized in the methodology and elaborated in chapter 3

A relatively less disputed example of the mass violation of human rights in Canadian and Quebecois history lies in the institution of residential schools intended to assimilate Indigenous children into settler colonial culture. For over a century since the early 1830's, more than 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly uprooted from their families and communities to be placed in educational institutions run by religious authorities in collaboration with settler colonial governments, where they were prevented from speaking their languages and living according to their culture (Milloy, 2017). The survivors of these institutions, in large numbers, bear witness to enduring physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and spiritual abuse. The aftermath of these horrors continues to afflict these communities through various forms of intergenerational trauma (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRCC], 2015), as evidence continues to literally surface across the country. Approximately eleven of these schools are recorded to have been in operation in Quebec, although similar unofficial endeavors had been undertaken since 1608 (TRCC, 2015). An analysis of education in Quebec is thus incomplete and misleading when we fail to recognize the settler colonial principles in which it is grounded, and how it has propagated the inferiority of those configured as "Other". Although the education system has evolved over time, these principles did not suddenly evaporate when slavery was abolished or when the last residential school closed in the 1990s.

6. *Ability and whiteness are forms of "property" that benefit those who can claim them, and disadvantage those who cannot.*

The 6th tenet stipulates that ability and whiteness (or proximity to it) are forms of property, as discussed above in section 2.2.3. Those who are able to assert these forms of property are more likely to benefit socially, politically and economically, while those who are racialized and/or disabled are placed at a disadvantage to varying degrees. In the Quebec education system, whiteness and ability as property are instituted through exclusionary and segregating phenomena such as low teacher expectations toward students, disproportionate disciplinary practices, special education overrepresentation, academic streaming, and private school underrepresentation. Researchers have demonstrated the relationship between school markets and educational inequalities, and how they are influenced by student characteristics (Kamanzi, 2019; Maroy & Kamanzi, 2017). Black students are significantly less likely to attend private schools, while they are overrepresented in public establishments offering only basic academic streams as opposed to enriched programs (Kamanzi 2021). Conversely, settler-Quebecois students or those from French-speaking backgrounds are more likely to attend private schools and enriched programs in public schools (Kamanzi, 2019). These studies allowed for the conclusion to be drawn that the school market in Quebec places students with "difficulties" from

modest socioeconomic or racialized backgrounds at a disadvantage, and "serves as an instrument of segregation that allows middle and upper class families to preserve their privileges" (Kamanzi, 2019, p.24).

Moreover, DisCrit scholars have been actively resisting this type of neoliberal approach to education by reconceptualizing educational systems from an economic-policy based framework, to one that is ecological. Educational ecologies broadly refer to "the complexity of the human, material and organizational layers that interact and produce activity and outcomes recognized as schooling" (Kozleski et al. 2020, p.492). They can involve knowledge generation, how people function within communities, and social interactions among individuals, groups as well as their environments (Drayton, 2005; Kingsland, 2005). For Annamma & Morrison (2018) *dysfunctional education ecologies* are systems that fail to position students at multiple intersections of marginalization as valuable resources in an environment, which result in their disproportionate "outflow" from schools. These outflows occur in the form of suspension, expulsions, school transfers, disengagement with school, special education and disciplinary overrepresentation etc., and can be linked to postsecondary education access and youth incarceration. This reconceptualization allows for a critical systemic analysis of student "difficulties" rather than one that focuses on socio-demographic factors.

7. Activism and resistance are required and essential to the framework.

The final DisCrit tenet is a call to activism in order to avoid "sterile ideas being handed down from the ivory tower without practical application as well as 'studying the natives' wherein people who know nothing about the community suggest ways to fix it based on deficit perspectives (Annamma et al., 2013, p. 18). In other words, it is insufficient to document the stories of minoritized groups, interpret them, and produce articles, book chapters, reports, and conference and media output. Researchers are urged to move into action with the communities, families, and individuals their research concerns in order to humanize their experiences through meaningful endeavors so that there may be real benefits for them in terms of educational and social change. These actions may differ across contexts and are not limited to staple forms of activism such as marches and protests.

Synopsis

Collectively, the seven tenets of DisCrit harmonize with critical theory as they are "designed to clarify the power relationships and forms of oppression existing in a society or culture, and thus to serve as a guide to efforts to emancipate its members from those forms of oppression" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 637).

They are useful in provoking critical reflection and (re)imagining policies and practices that do not rely on deficit assumptions, punishments, exclusion, and settler colonial parameters of normalcy. DisCrit is thus accordant with a critical transformative and emancipatory paradigm based on its emphasis on socio-historical factors of inequality and oppression, the social construction of power, and the call for change toward social equity and justice.

DisCrit's disability studies and CRT roots along with its innovative analytical focus on the interdependence of disability and race provides a sound basis for questioning how they play out in interactions, policies, procedures and practices. These consolidated dimensions along with its applicability to the Quebec context as detailed above, indicate that exploring Black student experience at the intersection of the special education placement process in English schools in Quebec would be best situated within the theoretical scope of DisCrit. While the above section demonstrated how DisCrit can be used in a unique North American context such as Quebec, the next section will provide highlights on how it has been deployed in other educational settings, as well as its intended use for this research project.

2.4.3. Overview of DisCrit Applied to Socio-Educational Contexts and the Research Project

DisCrit has been used in a variety of ways in order to investigate the operation of macro and micro level issues of racism and ableism. For example, Collins (2016) analyzed how 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was positioned as dangerous, deviant, and criminal, during legal proceedings in Florida, resulting in a non-guilty verdict for the white man who fatally shot him; Fenton (2016) investigated how norms emanating from eugenics and pseudoscience are reproduced and maintained by amalgamating race and disability with criminality; Kozleski (2016) examined how data structures reify the social construction of difference; and Fears (2021) investigated the intersections of disability and race in the context of COVID-19.

In school contexts, DisCrit has been deployed to expose how racialized and disabled students are positioned in the school-to-prison pipeline[7] (Adams & Erevelles, 2016; Mahon-Reynolds & Parker, 2016); to understand practitioner beliefs regarding racial and cultural differences, and how they may uphold or disrupt inequities (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021; Fergus, 2016; Kulkarni et al., 2021; Schwitzman, 2019); to challenge deficit orientations of race and disability (Mendoza et al., 2016; Whitney, 2016); to understand racial and disability disciplinary disparities (Fisher et al., 2020); to

[7] The school-to-prison pipeline refers to a complex social system that results in the funneling of youth from schooling to incarceration (Meiners, 2010), which disproportionately affects racialized and disabled students (Mallett, 2016)

investigate the social exclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking students (Migliarini, 2017); and to examine special education placement and disproportionally, and student experiences (Adjei, 2018; Banks, 2017; Garcia, 2017; Gillborn et al., 2016; Padía & Traxler, 2021).

This dissertation is a further contribution to the growing DisCrit body of literature in education. Based on the literature review, this study constitutes not only the first in Quebec to examine the intersection of race and disability in education, but also the first using a DisCrit lens to achieve this. As such, the seven tenets of DisCrit, as recalled below, will be mobilized to analyze the intersections of race and racism, disability and ableism throughout the students' special education placement:

1. Ableism and racism are interdependent and circulate in camouflaged ways that bolster ideologies of normalcy.
2. Singular notions of identity such as race, ability, gender, class etc. are denounced; instead, multidimensional identities are given prominence and recognized in the social construction of disability.
3. Western norms must be challenged, while acknowledging the material and psychological consequences of the social constructions of race and ability.
4. The marginalized voices of minoritized populations are foregrounded, without purporting to "give them voice".
5. Race and disability have been used legally and historically to deny some citizens their rights.
6. Ability and whiteness are forms of "property" that benefit those who can claim them, and disadvantage those who cannot.
7. Activism and resistance are required and essential to the framework.

Tenet 1 is invaluable to the process of unveiling how ableism and racism are insidiously embedded in the policies and practices that undergird the special education placement process, including the coded language that is employed to position it as an empowering, rather than an oppressive, process. This tenet makes it possible to reveal how the entire process (referrals, assessments, identification, placement…) is normalized and justified, as well as its impact on Black students designated with disabilities, and how it may operate to harm and exclude them.

The second tenet will overlap with the CRT concept of the social construction of race to bring to light how the intersectionality of disability (explicit disability labels) and race (as an evaded social category) can lead to multiple oppressions. If Black students and those designated with special needs are at an educational disadvantage as separate entities as exposed in chapter 1, it is reasonable to assume that

students at these intersections will be more likely to encounter hidden systemic and structural barriers. This tenet will simultaneously allow for the intersectional analysis of disability as a socially constructed category, rather than a psycho-medical fact, and address the socio-political evasion of race, which contributes to the socio-historical erasure of Black students and their forefathers, the invalidation of their experiences, and the silencing of their voices. Hence the further contributions of the tenets 3 and 4.

The third tenet will engage with the concept of settler colonialism to situate the research in its historical context as per the CRT legacy. The "western norms" that must be challenged in Quebec schools and society are the manifestations of French settler colonial maneuvers that privilege and reward *Quebecoisness* and *able-bodiedness*. Tenet 3 allows for the analytical gaze to shift from acculturation, school performance, and other individual dimensions, to questioning how settler norms are linked to academic "difficulties" and the overrepresentation of Black youth in special education. Furthermore, given that race remains a highly contested social category, tenet 4 allows for the foregrounding of Black student voices who self-identify as such, despite the race-denial settler colonial discourse. This crucial component that also contributes to a research gap in Quebec regarding the experiences of Black students and those with disabilities, will be carried-out via a CRT counter-stories method, with a focus on preserving their authenticity by avoiding the notion of providing them a voice, as though their voices could not stand on their own. It also incites questioning of why it would be necessary to "give voice" in the first place.

These counter-stories in and of themselves can be a form of activism, resistance, and transformation, as delineated by tenet 7, which advances these as requirements. In response to a settler colonial discourse, which advances an argument that evoking blackness reinforces racism, DisCrit reminds that "oppressed people have the rights to name themselves, in contrast to privileged individuals and groups creating norms that perpetuate their privilege and labeling others in contrast to that norm" (Annamma et al., 2016, p. 29). Along the same lines, given Quebec's relentless denial of systemic racism despite the systematic oppressive treatment of racialized citizens and immigrants in various institutions and society at large such as Joyce Echaquan, Mamadi III Fara Camara, Jean-René Olivier, Nicholas Gibbs, Pradel Content, Pacifique Niyokwizera, Dora Quintero Sanabria, Mireille Ndjomouo, Seydou Diallo, Mamadou Gologo, Natacha Elie or the many cohorts of students from schools like l'école secondaire

Henri-Bourassa[8]…just undertaking this research from a perspective that disrupts dominant ideologies and interrogating how they are perpetuated in schools, constitutes activism and resistance.

Part of this interrogation concerns how the legacy of slavery persists in schools through the alienation, punishment, adultification, criminalization, and dehumanization of Black students. Tenets 5 & 6 provide a basis for understanding how students' rights rooted in a settler colonial historical context may be compromised in schools, and how disability and whiteness disadvantage them respectively. Specifically, these tenets will be used to analyze institutional dimensions that uphold or obstruct the rights to education and equality for all students prescribed by the Quebec and Canadian charters of human rights and freedoms, as well as the Education Act. They will also be mobilized to explore how school board personnel define, designate, evaluate, place, and respond to the institutionally identified needs of Black students within settler colonial institutions, and how they contrast with the experiences of these students.

Finally, the consolidated tenets within the DisCrit framework complemented by CRT and decolonial concepts, fundamentally provide the tools to disrupt the dominant settler Quebecois boundaries of social identity pertaining to disability and race. They provide a means to challenge normalized practices throughout the special education placement process, and to create a path toward transforming internalized settler colonial norms on the part of all school actors. The following section further illustrates how DisCrit helps understand Black student experiences throughout the special education placement process.

2.5 A DisCrit (Anti)Blackness Perspective of the Special Education Placement Process

In the previous section, the tenets of DisCrit were contextualized to the research project to demonstrate how the experiences of Black students who have undergone placement in special education would be apprehended from a critical perspective. The following sections further reflect this theoretical positioning by highlighting the key concepts of the research question from a DisCrit lens, namely: special education, placement processes, (anti)blackness, and their experiences. In conclusion, the specific research objectives will be stated.

[8] These students reported repeatedly being victims of racist, islamophobic, and hateful comments and treatment by a teacher, actions which remained unaddressed by the administration for many years (Madger, 2020).

2.5.1 Special Education

Special education can be broadly defined as a segment of general education, which serves the "special" needs of students that cannot be met through "regular" teaching and evaluation practices. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2013), "it includes specially designed instruction, supplementary aids and services, related services and early intervention" (cited in Edmunds & Edmunds, 2018, p.21). However, as per DisCrit, it is important not to dissociate the special education construct from the settler colonial norms and history it is rooted in. As discussed in chapter 1, people with disabilities were historically considered "mentally defective", "feeble-minded", "sub-normal", and thus menacing and uneducable (Ellis, 2014; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). Beginning in the early 20th century, Canadian institutions heavily influenced by the Eugenics movement[9], undertook endeavors to control this perceived deviant, dependent, and dangerous population (McLaren, 2015; Read & Walmsey, 2006). Special education was largely conceived and operated as a means of segregation, categorization, while promoting "the idea that the learning difficulties that children with disabilities experience are caused by these children's natural deficiencies – that they are not caused by a school system that is not well adapted to the needs of many different children" (Ellis, 2014, n.p.).

Generally, special education has departed from an apportioned design, and is now perceived to be an integrated part of general education with the intent of ensuring educational inclusion for all (Salend & Garrick Duhane, 2011). However, the racist and ableist principles at the inception of special education still undergird current practices and policies, even in the context of inclusion (Bejoian & Reid, 2005). This is made evident through the continued dependency on the medical model of disability which advances a child deficit perspective (Valencia, 2010), the widespread operation of classificatory practices (MacKay, 2002), and performance-enhancing styles of intervention, in attempts to "fix a problem" (Andrews et al., 2000), which are often counter-inclusionary, and equity hindering, from a DisCrit perspective.

DisCrit therefore positions special education as an oppressive settler colonial construct that obfuscates whiteness and dislocates racialized children. It opposes conceptualizations that are perfused with colonial substance, through the recognition of all disability categories as socially determined, whether

[9] A movement based on racial enhancement through the elimination of people from the gene pool who were perceived inferior or less desirable, using extreme measures such as birth control and sterilization. A central concern to this movement was that the "feeble-minded" population would outgrow the "moral and superior" population (Baumander, 2009).

physical, cognitive, behavioral, or emotional, with or without medical diagnosis. The overrepresentation of racialized students in special education is an indicator of how social constructions of race and disability manifest through labeling, when student learning and behavior do not coincide with normalized propertied whiteness (tenet 6). Mendoza et al. (2016) argue that such reductive notions of learning not only disregard student funds of knowledge (knowledge gained from family, peer groups and cultural backgrounds over time) and critical thinking, but can also produce an overreliance on the social norms at the genesis of special education placement. In fact, Thomas & Loxley (2007) suggest that special education has become the *de facto* intervention for students whom teachers find difficult to teach. However, because special education is heavily anchored in settler colonialism, it is accepted as a legitimate intervention based on "the enduring belief that impairment and disability are empirical facts" (Reid & Knight, 2006, p.19). While special education is purported to provide equal opportunities for all, its ideological anchors such as meritocracy and educational opportunity reproduce social inequalities in schools. These are particularly salient in special education processes, which operate as cryptic forces of oppression masked through seemingly well-intended practices and policies to "help" those in need.

2.5.2 Placement Processes

Placing students in special education is a complex process involving multiple school actors, intended to develop solutions to student "difficulties" through the adaptation of educational services. This process is based on a categorical approach, which essentially involves defining, identifying, classifying and categorizing student "difficulties" (Edmunds & Edmunds, 2018). In Quebec, though undocumented in the English education sector, four phases of this process have been identified in the French sector (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021): 1) the referral phase, which corresponds to requests made by school personnel for complementary educational services[10]; 2) the implication of (at least one) complementary services professional, typically involving the assessment of student needs and the related procedures (ex: obtaining parental consent for assessment); 3) the professional reports phase, in which different evaluation conclusion are made; and, 4) the decision-making phase, which concerns student identification as having "handicaps, social maladjustments or learning difficulties" (MELS, 2007) and special education support services and/or placement options.

[10] These involve a wide scope of student support services including, but not limited to, psychological, psychoeducational, speech therapy, remediation, health, and social services (MELS, 2002).

From a DisCrit perspective, the special education placement process constitutes a series of dislocating practices that conceal dominant ideologies and enable deficit-perspectives, cultural biases, and othering to pass as normal everydayness carried-out by well-intended practitioners. According to Harry & Klingner (2014):

> …the process of determining children's eligibility for special education is anything but a science. Rather, it is the result of social forces that intertwine to construct an identity of "disability" for children whom the regular education system finds too difficult to serve (p.9).

Therefore, the acts of referring, assessing, identifying, and placing students in special education, and mobilizing services for them, all reflect social processes that reinforce each other while reifying a newly constructed identity of difference for students, based on dominant settler colonial ideologies that present these social constructions as biological facts based on credible evidence. This is not very different from how race has been historically broached and thus points to the interdependence of these two social constructions of inferiority from a settler colonial lens and how they meld to sustain racial and ability hierarchies. DisCrit seeks to smoke out these hidden forms of oppression, and the discourse pertaining to racism and ableism camouflaged by the jargon of special education within the placement process. Additionally, it should be noted that DisCrit intends not to demonize practitioners as "racist" (Fergus, 2016) or "ableist", but rather to expose the ways in which race is invalidated through special education processes and business-as-usual practices, and disability is decontextualized from the social processes that contribute to exclusion and oppression in schools and reproduce social inequalities on a larger scale (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021).

2.5.3 Blackness and Antiblackness

While the concept of blackness is rooted in settler colonial ideologies of white supremacy, Black scholars continue to theorize blackness beyond the simple notion of race to encompass "an identity and experience with shared, contested, and contingent histories and specific geographies" (Dei, 2018, p. 120), surrounding Black socio-historical and political consciousness, affirmation, agency, radical love, and resistance (Cooper, 2007; Dei, 2017; Johnson et al., 2017; Mazama, 2001; McKittrick, 2016; Sexton, 2008). Similarly, antiblackness extends beyond the simple notion of racism against Black people to encompass the antagonism that exists between humanity and blackness on a global scale (Dumas & ross, 2016). More specifically, antiblackness stems from the work of disconnecting blackness from humanity, carried out by white colonizers by fabricating whiteness as perfection and blackness as diametrically opposed to it (Fanon, 1961, 2007).

Theorists of antiblackness have detailed how the "emancipation of slavery" was rather a reshuffling of domination, wherein African hostages' social positions were reconfigured from *slave* to the *racialized Black subject* (Wilderson, 2017). Subsequently, Black existence occurs in *the afterlife of slavery*: "Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (Hartman, 2007, p. 6). Therefore, while racial inequality is one element related to antiblackness, there exists a primary concern for survival based on being under the constant threat of anti-Black violence in its various forms. Just as colonialism has left no part of the world unaffected, the slavery afterlife should be considered a global phenomenon, not one that is exclusive to the U.S.

Pertaining to (anti)blackness in the special education placement process, the first tenet of DisCrit, which aims to expose camouflaged forms of oppression, makes it possible to account for general racism and ableism simultaneously. In particular, it highlights how racialized students can experience special education differently than those who are non-racialized, the types of labels they tend to be assigned (emotional and behavioral), their hyper-surveillance, and their overrepresentation in non-integrated classes are examples. As mentioned above, discourses of disability have been intricately linked to a racial hierarchy and the justification of dehumanizing practices such as slavery and settler colonialism (tenet 5). After all, "without racialized notions of ability, racial difference would simply be racial difference" (Annamma et al., 2016, p.14). However, these notions in DisCrit merit to be nuanced within the context of this study.

It can be contended that Black students specifically, not only experience disability differently than others, but also experience racialization in very distinct ways. In other words, "there is a hyper-visibility of African/Black people that is not accorded to any other community of color" (Dei, 2013, p. 4). According to Dei (2017), race-as-biology and the Eurocentric social construction of blackness (and whiteness) make it possible to subjugate Black lives and maintain white supremacy in society. Therefore, Black people are thus reserved a place on the "dark" side of White/Black dualisms regarding good/evil and superiority/inferiority. Further, Broderick & Leonardo (2016) underscore *goodness* as a vehicle for disabling students, mainly through the overvaluation of whiteness and the undervaluation of blackness. In this light, practitioners' perceptions of *goodness*, such as (but not limited to) compliance or attentiveness, become associated with perceived *smartness*. Thus, institutionally scorned behavior that is medicalized as deficiency and defect fosters student alienation and reinforces the stereotype that individuals with mental illnesses are inherently violent; the same stereotype also

extends to Black people along with criminality and deviance. This type of racial pathologization leads to ability profiling[11], which operates in tandem, and in the same manner as racial profiling (Collins, 2013). Moreover, this form of racism that is embedded in a White/Black color dichotomy targets Black people specifically, and constitutes a large part of antiblackness (Dei, 2013).

Black Canadian scholars have mobilized antiblackness theory to map out how it circulates in educational contexts and its impact on students. They have brought to light, for example, the curricular and pedagogical exclusion of blackness (as well as the colonial violence towards it despite multi/intercultural educational anchors that champion diversity, equity and inclusion) (Nelson, 2020); how Black children are adultified (Howard, 2013; Maynard, 2017) through “transgressions [that] are made to take on a sinister, intentional, fully conscious tone that is stripped of any element of childish naïveté” (Ferguson, 2000, p. 83); as well as the unresponsive stance adopted by personnel when anti-Black incidents are reported (James et al., 2010). These current constituents of antiblackness in schools are but a few illustrations of the remnants of the legacy of settler colonialism in education that has operated as a force to negate the humanity of Black people.

The postracial context that exists in Canada and Quebec makes it possible to ignore antiblackness and the history that gave birth to it. In the same vein, it substantiates a culturalist approach that makes it possible to refer to Black people through euphemisms such as "visible minorities", "immigrants", and "ethno-cultural minorities" (as outlined in section 1.1.4 of the research problem). While DisCrit flows in opposition to this current by acknowledging race and racism and the socio-historical substance it stems from, it insufficiently captures the specificity of antiblackness. In other words, while referring to "racialized individuals/groups" may help understand the experiences of Black students at the intersections of race and disability, an analysis that does not account for antiblackness would be, at best, incomplete. Similarly, in accordance with DisCrit tenet 2 which rejects single notions of identity, incorporating the concept of (anti)blackness fosters a richer and more nuanced intersectional analysis that accounts for multiple identity dimensions, including culture, country of origin, etc., as well as multiple systems of oppression.

[11] Ability profiling is the process of responding to students as though they are disabled, that is, regarding all actions and interactions through the lens of deficiency (Collins, 2013, p.xiii). It is a
bidirectional process: students’ actions and interactions can also be regarded through capacity, privilege, pardon, and entitlement (most often accorded to White students).

2.5.4 Experience

As discussed in the research problem, little is known about the experiences of Black students in Quebec, much less about their experiences at the intersections of blackness and disability (designation). Critical scholars have substantiated the importance of naming and describing minoritized experiences in research, to challenge settler colonial understandings of social phenomena, including the invalidation of the lived experiences of minoritized groups as theory (Collins, 2009; Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995; Slee 2010).

The concept of experience involves socially specific and ongoing interactions that are constitutive of the relationships between individuals and their environments (Roth & Journet, 2014). In other words, it involves both individual and collective phenomena, affectively imbued across time and space (Dewey, 2007). According to Wynter (1995) Black experience is unparalleled in human history since "without it the ideological fictions of the contemporary world order that consign the vast majority of its population to a subhuman status [have] remain[ed] uncontested and [have grown] every generation in weight and power" (Kamugisha, 2016, p.130). As such, Black experience is simultaneously the embodiment of an anti-norm as well as the struggle of refusing it (Kamugisha, 2016).

In schools, Black experience involves colonization, alienation, violence, and trauma (Bath, 2008; Coles & Powell, 2020; Maynard, 2017). However, as critical scholars point out, schooling can also entail experiences of resistance, empowerment and transformation. For Dei (2017), being Black is to experience:

> …an embodiment of struggle and resistance challenging White supremacy and dominance…calling oneself "Black" or "African" is claiming an identity that is synonymous with struggle, politics, oppression, and resistance. Evoking Black identity or Blackness for anything else is betrayal. The logic of survival for Black bodies rests on a preparedness to define, fight, and insist on oneself and the collective, the existence of our collective humanity and destiny. In fact, Blackness finds its authenticity through the participation in anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles. When some of us reinvent our Africanness in a diasporic context, we do so in the spirit of healing, transformation, critique, and resistance (p. 20).

As such, some general points worthy of consideration may be: how do Black students, who seem to encounter so many challenges, experience school? How do they interpret their position in special education? What special education categories are they assigned to? What practices, policies, and

procedures are involved in getting them there? Are they at increased risk of criminalization through these processes? What agency do they have in these processes? How are they seen by school personnel? Are special education processes beneficial to these students? Are they harmful? What are the traces of the settler colonial legacy with relationship to antiblackness in the special education placement process? Is the education operating as a tool of white supremacy as per its original design?

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors in Quebec English schools.
2. To document Black student experiences of the special education placement process.
3. To analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process.

Chapter 3

Methodology: A Critical Composite Counter-Story Approach

In this chapter, the methodological framework, which guided the inquiry and allowed for the research objectives to be attained, is presented. Firstly, the epistemological substance the research is grounded in, including the researcher's positionality will be discussed. Then, a description of the type of research that was conducted and the methods that were used will be presented, along with the context and participants of the research, as well the data collection and analysis strategies. The chapter concludes with the ethical aspects of the research.

3.1 Epistemological Dimensions

This section aims to specify the foundation on which the methodology is built. As a Black, critical qualitative researcher, my intersectional historical, political, and social experiences bring me to position myself in a way that challenges oppressive structures that circulate in society - undertaking research from a critical-emancipatory perspective unfolded organically. A critical-emancipatory approach is geared toward social justice (Habermas, 2015). It involves critiquing and challenging power and privilege issues in education and society to create transformation, empowerment, and socially-just situations. As such, some guiding principles include recognizing embodied and reflexive ways-of-knowing, rather than those that are abstruse and objective; prioritizing critical consciousness in order to decipher social power relations; challenging dominant ideologies, processes, and practices that marginalize individuals or groups based on race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, etc.; and promoting activism and empowerment to instigate transformative change (White, 2015). This posture bridges the methodology to the theoretical framework guided by DisCrit, which underscores all of these dimensions as necessary research elements.

The philosophical underpinnings of positivist and hermeneutic approaches to research, as well as their dichotomous relationship and its development, are well established in the scientific literature (Denzin, 2016). As stated above, a critical-emancipatory approach rejects notions of objectivity and generalizability typically associated with quantitative methods, in favor of looking beyond assumptions in order to expose hidden forms of power and oppressions that are normalized in everyday life (White, 2015). Therefore, a critical qualitative approach was undertaken to investigate Black student experiences throughout the special education placement processes, using critical-race methods. Researcher positionality is a key component of critical qualitative research and will be elaborated in the sections that follow.

3.1.1 Critical Qualitative Research

According to White (2015), "putting the 'critical' in qualitative research intends to challenge even traditional approaches to research, including qualitative" (p. 5). The emergence of critical qualitative methods is, in part, a result of this challenge. Not only does the predominance of positivism render qualitative researchers susceptible of inadvertently employing quantitative terminology and approaches (White, 2015), but the colonial anchors of qualitative research are particularly problematic:

> Sadly, qualitative research in many, if not all, of its forms (observation, participation, interviewing, ethnography) serves as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth. The metaphor works this way: research, quantitative and qualitative, is scientific. Research provides the foundation for reports about and representations of the other. In the colonial context, research becomes an objective way of representing the dark-skinned other to the White world. Colonizing nations relied on the human disciplines, especially sociology and anthropology, as well as their field note-taking journaling observers, to produce knowledge about strange and foreign worlds (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 5).

In harmony with the theoretical framework, critical qualitative research thus places due emphasis on the socio-historical and socio-political dimensions of research. It positions research as a means to expose and disrupt processes of oppression through interpretive, multi-voiced representation, which incites reflexive, emancipatory engagement and social change (Denzin et al., 2008; White, 2015). Prior to presenting the counter-stories research method chosen for this study, my positionality as a researcher will be discussed.

3.1.2 Researcher Positionality

Critical researchers are called upon to undertake a continuous self-reflexive process regarding the role of their own beliefs, experiences and social location in the research project (Jean-Pierre & Collins, forthcoming). Milner (2007) suggests a critical race reflexivity framework in which researchers of various racial and cultural backgrounds activate and persist in "1) researching the self, 2) researching the self in relation to others, 3) engaging reflection and representation, and 4) shifting from self to system" (p. 395) in order to undertake educational research from deeper levels of consciousness.

1) Researching the self

Between the beginning and the end of this research I've gone through many changes, and much intellectual and spiritual growth. The inception and design phase of this research was shaped by my "self" through my positioning as a teacher and administrator in a special school for students designated as having behavioral and/or learning disabilities. Throughout my career, I observed disturbing situations and outcomes for many of the students who were in my care, especially concerning those who were Black. Similar observations were made from my position as a parent, aunt, cousin, godmother, and family friend of Black children who have consistently faced alarming situations in education systems across Canada and the U.S.; as a woman who self-identifies as Black; as a bilingual Anglophone minority in Quebec; and as a 7th generation Canadian and a descendent of the victims of colonial human trafficking. All of these aspects have had an impact on how this research was conceived, conducted, and concluded.

2) Researching the self in relation to others

When it comes to self in relation to others, I consider my position as both an insider and outsider researcher. As a member of the Black community, I can conclude that I was at a strategic vantage point throughout the research process, in terms of understanding and interpreting the experiences of Black youth. I was able to quickly build relationships of trust with the student participants. This came into contrast with my role as my "self" as an educator. Unlike my experiences with blackness, I had no direct point of reference in terms of the students' experiences pertaining to being identified as having special needs. Considering the position of authority I once occupied with relationship to the students I interacted with over my career, undertaking this research triggered a critical rumination of my professional practice. I developed a consciousness of deficit-views I once harbored toward my former students designated with special needs, and troublingly contemplated how those views may have impacted their educational pathways and the choices I made in my research design.

3) Engaging reflection and representation

Milner (2007) presents reflection and representation together as a joint endeavor with the researcher and participants, in terms of examining their shared and divergent perspectives. As such, despite the fact that I as the researcher and the participants belong to a common community, I have an understanding that our perspectives may or may not converge. It is for this reason that counter-stories are a crucial component of the methodological framework (further discussed in section 3.1.3). They

head way for tensions between participant and researcher interpretations, while allowing space for both of them. In other words, they ensure that participants' views are not compromised as theory, through the interpretation of the researcher that might differ.

4) *Shifting from self to system*

Finally, in terms of shifting from self to systems, my realization of how settler colonialism has permeated most, if not all, aspects of life as they relate to both blackness and disability has been an ongoing process that has been amplified through my work as a researcher. While I already had a consciousness of the systemic nature of antiblackness, this reflexive work has helped me shift from within-individual view of disability to one that considers how ableism upholds power structures in a similar way. I have also undertaken a critical reflection on how Eurocentric epistemologies constitute an obstacle to the recognition of African people in the diaspora and their educational rights. In particular, I am concerned with the insidious legacy of epistemological racism in its various forms in research such as "inquiry as invasion", the commodification of affliction and humiliation (Tuck & Yang, 2014) and the eclipsing of systemic barriers to socio-academic success. These reflections have reinforced my interest in identifying approaches that facilitate emancipatory research and foster resistance to dominant narratives, as well as affirmation, healing, creativity and love for Black people at their various identity intersections. One of these approaches consists of counter-stories.

3.1.2 Counter-Story Method

As highlighted in the previous chapter, counter-stories can have various applications (Miller et al., 2020). In this study, they were utilized as a research method. Grounded in CRT and approaches to the study of discourse such as life stories, narrative inquiry, and authoethnography, counter-stories as a method recount the experiences of socially marginalized individuals and groups (Miller et al., 2020; Yosso, 2013). In particular, they restore storytelling traditions among racialized communities (Bell, 2004), they reposition "othered" types of knowledge from unscientific or folklore to a valid contribution to research and theory (Dei, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and they create an arena to question dominant assumptions that uphold and legitimize racial injustice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Leonardo, 2013).

Early CRT scholars in education have identified three types of counter-stories: autobiographical (personal stories), biographical (retelling others' stories), and composite counter-stories (a synthesis of many people's stories) (Cook, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2013). The last type, which

was adopted for this study, “puts [the participants’] voices in dialog with the researchers’ knowledge and experience, including their own experiences as members of a marginalized group” (Miller et al., 2020, p. 280). Composite counter-stories involve strategies such as interviewing, observing, and studying documents, much like other discourse analysis methods, and are achieved by creating what Solórzano & Yosso (2002) call *composite characters*.

Creating *composite characters* involves drawing on multiple data sources, positioning them historically, socially, and politically, and blending aspects together to create a collective story rooted in lived experiences (Cooke, 2013; DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this light, composite characters shift the focus to systems and structures rather than on individuals. CRT scholars stress that in creating composite characters, “we are not developing imaginary characters that engage in fictional scenarios. Instead, [they] are grounded in real-life experiences and actual empirical data and are contextualized in social situations that are also grounded in real life, not fiction” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36).

In the context of this study, composite counter-stories highlighted the shared and intersectional experiences of antiblackness of the participants and the researcher through a single composite story. The composite characters were reflected in the analysis as detailed below (section 3.4). This specific method was chosen based on the dimensions highlighted in the precious section (3.1.2) in conjunction with the experiences shared by the participants, as it is “representative of various political ideologies and […] written as composites of many individuals” (Delgado, 1995, p. xix).

Furthermore, a literature review conducted by Miller and colleagues (2020), highlights how counter-stories tend to manifest through a *whole narrative approach* or a *narrative factors approach*. These researchers describe a *whole narrative approach* as the elicitation of narratives to counteract dominant discourse, which can be conceived by participants and researchers individually or collectively. In contrast, a *narrative factors approach* concerns the elicitation of various types of data such as interviews, ethnographic observations, institutional documents, etc. in order for a counter-story to be constructed by the researcher. In this approach, the participant narratives are treated as “one data source among several from which the researcher constructs counter-narrative” (p.279). As such, counter-stories are a process of co-creation involving the literature related to the research, and the experiences of the participants and the researcher, rather than the simple act of collecting data from a neutral standpoint (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Therefore, a narrative factors composite counter-story approach was used to humanize the empirical data in conjunction with the theoretical concepts discussed in chapter 2, and my own personal and professional experience as a researcher, to deepen our understanding of hidden structural barriers (Cooke, 2013; DeCuir-Gunby & Walker-DeVose, 2013). In concordance with DisCrit tenet 4 which cautions against "giving voice" to marginalized individuals and groups (Annamma et al., 2016), this approach allowed for the foregrounding of the participants' unique perspectives in conjunction with my own interpretations, as part of a composite story based on our lived experience, and collective voice, as opposed to an entity that could be "given". In the following sections, the individuals that participated in the composite counter-story will be described.

3.2 Context and Participants

The socio-academic portrait of Black students in Quebec was brought to light in the first chapter, as was the lack of representation of them beyond the second generation immigrant population, and of the English education sector overall in Quebecois research (refer to section 1.1.3). Given that the vast majority of the Black population of Quebec resides in Montreal (Statistics Canada, 2019), the research was conducted in four regular schools and seven special schools across English Montreal school boards and its suburbs. Like their French counterparts, English schools adhere to an integration model mandated by the Ministère de l'Éducation when it comes to special education. However, when it is determined that the special needs of a student cannot be met in regular schools, special schools offering specialized services and supports are available to respond to these needs. Since English schools in Quebec are relatively very small in numbers, and even more so for specialized schools, I opted to omit a statistical portrait of each establishment for confidentiality purposes.

3.2.1. Recruitment

Recalling the research objectives 1) *to describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors; 2) to document Black student experiences of the special education placement process; 3) to analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process*, 21 members of school personnel and 20 students were recruited in English schools across Montreal and its surrounding areas.

The general recruitment process for both school personnel and students began in March, 2019. I began by contacting principals in regular and special schools through email (annex 8) and progressed using a snowball strategy, which involves referrals for the research made by existing candidates or

participants (Patton, 2015). Once principals expressed an interest in participating in the research, I met with them to explain the project in detail. They, in-turn, either shared the call to participation or gave me authorization to contact members of their teams directly. Once this connection with the school team members was established, arrangements were made with those who worked in special schools to present the research project to the students in their respective schools. The manner in which this was done varied from one context to the next. In some schools, I was accorded time during class to present the project, and in others, students were introduced to me in small groups, or individually, depending on what the personnel was comfortable with.

The advantages of the snowball technique were made apparent as it not only provided access to "information-rich" and "critical cases" with regards to the research objectives (Patton, 2015), but the recruitment process itself was rapid and uncomplicated. Furthermore, there was much diversity among both the personnel and the students who agreed to participate in the study, as will be detailed below.

3.2.2 Participants

As stated above, composite counter-stories may entail various data sources. To meet the objectives of the research, institutional data was collected to contextualize the master-narrative of the special education placement process as it unfolds in English schools in Quebec. Students were also consulted as part of the composite character creation. A description of the participants from each of these groups follows.

Personnel

The selection criteria for the school personnel were that they had to be employed in the youth sector of an English school board, and have participated in the process of placing students in a special school. Among the 21 educators the recruitment yielded there were eight administrators, eight teachers, three guidance counselors, one consultant, and one behavioral technician. Among these educators, three of them sat on a special education placement committee. Seven of them worked in regular schools, 11 in special schools and three of them worked in both regular and special schools throughout the academic school year. Nine of the participants were men and twelve were women. There were two Black teachers, one Black guidance counselor and one Black administrator. The rest of the participants self-identified as white/Caucasian or "white-passing". Table 1 below summarizes their profile as it was reported in a socio-demographic questionnaire (annex 7).

Table 1: School Personnel Socio-Professional Profile

Participant code number	Pseudonym	Gender	Age group	Racial self-identification	Current job title	Type of School (Regular, Special, Both)
01*	Linda	F	36-45	White	Administrator	Special
02*	Rita	F	46-55	White	Guidance counsellor	Special
03*	Jennifer	F	46-55	White	Consultant	Both
04	Max	M	26-35	White	Guidance counsellor	Both
05	Denise	F	36-45	Black	Guidance counsellor	Both
06	Doug	M	36-45	White	Administrator	Special
07	Hugh	M	46-55	White	Administrator	Special
08	Clarice	F	46-55	White	Administrator	Special
09	Maria	F	26-35	White	Administrator	Special
10	Leo	M	26-35	White	Administrator	Regular
11	Justin	M	26-35	White	Administrator	Regular
12	Shayna	F	36-45	Black	Teacher	Regular
13	Rhonda	F	36-45	White	Teacher	Regular
14	Mandy	F	36-45	White	Teacher	Regular
15	Valerie	F	36-45	White	Teacher	Regular
16	Devon	M	36-45	Black	Behavioral Technician	Special
17	Gerald	M	46-55	Black	Administrator	Regular
18	Leila	F	36-45	White	Teacher	Special
19	Kristian	M	36-45	White	Teacher	Special
20	Conrad	M	36-45	Black	Teacher	Special
21	Renée	F	36-45	White	Teacher	Special

*sits on a special education placement committee

Students

The selection criteria for student participants were 1) self-identified as Black, and 2) enrolled in a special school at some point during the 2018-2019 school year. Self-identification made it possible to avoid assigning a socially constructed label to individuals, and for the same reason, enrollment in a special school implied that the student had gone through or was going through a special education placement process. The participants consisted of 12 boys and eight girls between the ages of 14-18. Two of the participants were not born in Quebec, seven had parents who were born outside of Quebec, and 11 were in Quebec for at least 3 generations. Their backgrounds were from various places across the African diaspora, and they were mostly senior high school students (grade 10 or 11). Some were placed in special schools at the elementary level, but most were placed in high school. Their individual profiles are summarized in table 2 as self-declared in a socio-demographic questionnaire (annex 6) or during interviews. The shaded portions of the table represent information that was obtained from institutional documents (student files).

Table 2: Student Socio-Academic Profile

Assigned Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Grade Level	Place of Birth	Immigrant Gen. Status	Parental Country of Birth/ Origin12	Religion	Grade Level at Placement	Special Needs
Ryan	M	18	11	Montreal	3	M: Canada F: Canada/ Grenada	Christian	High School	Learning disability
Laura	F	18	11	Montreal	2	M:St-Vincent F: Guyana	N/A	High School	Severe receptive and mild expressive language delay
Marcus	M	18	10	Montreal	2	M:Jamaica F: N/A	Christian	Elementary (French sector)	ADHD, Behavioral disorder
Evelyne	F	18	11	Montreal	2	M: St-Vincent F: Canada	N/A	High School	NA
Kendrick	M	18	10	St Lucia	1	M: St-Lucia F: St-Vincent	N/A	High School (French sector)	NA

[12] For the students who declared their immigrant status as third-generation, they specified that even though their parents were born in Canada, they were from an immigrant origin, and did not perceive them as “Canadian”.

Anthony	M	18	10	Montreal	2	M: Trinidad F: St-Vincent	Christian	High School	Anxiety and Depression
Duane	M	15	10	USA	1	M: Senegal F: Senegal	Muslim	High School	NA
Khamiah	F	16	10	Montreal	2	M: Canada F: St-Vincent	N/A	High School	NA
Savannah	F	14	8	Montreal	3	M: Canada F: Canada	N/A	High School	NA
Chris	M	18	11	Montreal	3	M: Canada F: Canada	N/A	High School	NA
Karyn	F	18	10	Montreal	2	M:St-Vincent F: St-Vincent	Christian	High School	Speech impairment
Elijah	M	17	11	Montreal	2	M: Jamaica F: N/A	Christian	Elementary	ADHD
Richard	M	18	11	Montreal	3	M:Canada F: Canada/ Trinidad	Christian	High School	ADHD, Behavioral disorder
Kevin	M	17	10	Montreal	3	M:Canada F: Canada	Christian	High School	ADHD
Andy	M	17	10	USA	1	M: Haiti F: Haiti	Catholic	High School	NA
Juliette	F	17	10	Montreal	3	M:Canada F: Canada	Christian	High School	Autism, ADHD
Raquelle	F	16	10	Montreal	3	M: Canada/ St Vincent F: Canada/ Jamaica	N/A	High School	NA
Isaac	M	17	10	Montreal	2	M: Ethiopia F: Jamaica	Jewish	High School	NA
Amiyna	F	17	11	Ottawa	2	M: Somalia F: Jamaica	Muslim	High School	NA
Jeremy	M	14	8	Montreal	3	M: Canada F: Canada/ Jamaica	Spiritual	Elementary (French sector)	Severe behavioral disorder

3.3 Data Collection Strategies

Similar data collection strategies were employed to apprehend the special education placement process from school board personnel and student perspectives. In order to understand the institutional perspective as per objective 1 (*to describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors*), three tools were utilized: 1) individual semi-structured interviews, 2) semi-structured group interviews, and 3) access to student files. Within the counter-story approach, these constituted the contextualization of the master-narrative. When it comes to the student-participants, semi-structured interviews were also used, which served to create composite characters.

Institutional data collection

Semi-structured interviews with open-end questions were primarily utilized to collect the institutional data. Semi-structured interviews place the participants in the role of a narrator during the interview, while the interviewer probes as needed based on prompts from a pre-established interview guide (annex 2) (Burrick, 2010; Heck, 2011). Following multiple challenges communicated by the research candidates in terms of scheduling, the options of participating in the interview individually or in a group were mad available. Among the 21 participants, four opted for individual face-to-face interviews (three administrators [06, 07, 17] and one behavioral technician [16]). As such, focus groups were organized among common groups of professionals to minimize the effects of institutional power differentials, which may cause some participants to temper their responses or result in others dominating the exchange (Heck, 2011). This also proved to be a convenient solution as common groups of professionals often had similar availabilities. In total, six focus groups took place among the following: 1) special education placement committee (n = 3), 2) guidance counselors (n = 3), 3) special school administrators (n = 2), 4) regular school administrators (n = 2), 5) regular school teachers (n = 4), 6) special school teachers (n = 4) The details of these focus groups are summarized in table 3.

Table 3: Focus Group Summary

Group Code	Group Description	Participant code number
FG-001	Special education committee members	01, 02, 03*
FG-002	Guidance counselors	03*, 04, 05
FG-003	Special school administrators	08, 09
FG-004	Regular school administrators	10, 11

FG-005	Regular school teachers	12, 13, 14, 15
FG-006	Special school teachers	18, 19, 20, 21

*Guidance counselor 03 requested to participate twice as she wished to convey the distinct experiences related to her role as a member of a special education committee member

The individual and group interviews lasted between 60-75 min and were carried out in the schools where the participants worked. In some cases, participants traveled to a school other than their own place of work, to participate in a focus group. During the interviews the educators were invited to give their views on special education, the placement processes itself, special schools, their relationships with students and families and on whether race has any impact on student experiences in special education (annex 2). These interviews were audio recorded, rendered anonymous, and stored in a secure file with restricted access. Recalling the first research objective, *to describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors,* the interviews were not intended to ascertain the educators' point of view on any specific student cases, especially not those involved in the study. This choice was made, namely, to avoid any breach of confidentiality and negative impacts on students and educators.

Rather, with regards to the third research objective, *to analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process,* institutional documents were consulted for this purpose. Documents are:

> "written material…[that] can provide an important indication of an organization in action. The organization's culture leaves its imprint on most of the printed material that is produced […] Getting access to documents, finding out where they are kept, and verifying their authenticity and accuracy are important parts of the data collection process (Heck, 2011, p.27).

The documents consulted for this research were academic and confidential student-files. I was given full access to the *academic files* (attendance records, progress reports, report cards) in terms of making copies for my own records. While student and parental consent was given for access to their *confidential files* (IEPs, medical, psychiatric, psychological, behavioral reports, referral forms) as well, some schools required a professional, such as a guidance counselor to be present when I was consulting them. In these cases, I was given permission to read the files and take notes. However, copies of the

documents were not permitted. The documents that were available in the consolidated files during the data collection are summarized in table 4.

Table 4: Student File Summary

Name of document	Total Number of documents available	Student(s) associated to document
Individualized Education Plan	9	Ryan, Laura, Marcus, Evelyne, Kendrick, Anthony, Duane. Khamiah, Savannah
Referral form	5	Duane, Khamiah, Savannah, Chris, Kevin
Behavioral contract	4	Duane, Khamiah, Savannah, Jeremy
Psychological evaluation	5	Ryan, Laura, Marcus, Richard, Jeremy
Other (incident reports, notes, emails)	8	Ryan, Laura, Marcus, Duane, Khamiah, Savannah, Richard, Jeremy

Student Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews were also used to elicit counter-stories with the students to generate "useful information about lived experience and its meanings…[as] a negotiated text – a site where power, gender, race, and class insert" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 641). To conduct the interviews, I coordinated with the administrators at the schools the participants were attending, to arrange an appropriate date and time on the school premises. The interviews generally took place in unoccupied classrooms or meeting rooms during official school hours. Before each interview, I re-explained the research and the information in the consent letter (annex 3) and invited the students to complete a demographic information survey (annex 6) with the understanding that their information would always be kept confidential. The student participants were invited to give a retrospective account of their experiences from elementary school to their placement at the time of the interview (annex 1). These interviews varied according to the comfort level of the interviewees. Many discussed their school experiences at length, while some were more reserved, especially in the first part of the interview. In some cases, those who were more reserved, were willing to share a lot more details at the end of the interviews. All of the interviews occurred near the end of the academic school year (May-June). They lasted between 45-90 min. Like the interviews conducted with the personnel, they were audio recorded, anonymized and stored in a secure file with restricted access for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Strategy

The data analysis is presented here according to the research intentions that were pursued. Before detailing the analysis strategy, it should be noted that collecting and analyzing the data happened as simultaneous processes that overlapped in non-linear ways. Therefore, while the analysis is presented here in a concise and structured manner based on the previous sections of this chapter, it did not manifest as such during the actual research. However, in a general sense, as per the narrative factors composite counter-story approach, the analysis unfolded through a multi-level process. It began with the contextualization of the master-narrative based on the interviews with institutional actors, followed by the development of composite characters from the student-generated data, and progressed to a contrast of these two dimensions, concluding in a composite counter-story.

3.4.1 Analysis of the Institutional Data: A Thematic Approach

In further concordance with research objective 1, *to describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors,* the individual and group interviews with the personnel-participants were analyzed via a thematic approach. Braun & Clark (2013) define thematic analysis as a theoretically flexible analytic method for the identification and analysis of patterns within qualitative data. Further, these authors recognize six iterative and non-sequential phases in the thematic analysis process: 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) coding the data, 3) exploring themes, 4) revising themes, 5) naming and defining themes, and 6) storying the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). These phases were useful in mitigating the diversity and complexity of the institutional data in conjunction with the guiding principles of the theoretical framework exposed in the previous chapter, as they allowed for the data be storied as a DisCrit master-narrative.

Familiarization with the data was achieved through the transcription of the individual and group interviews. While transcribing the audio recorded interviews, I took “transcription notes” and identified dimensions related to the placement process, professional practices and perceptions of Black youth. Following the transcription, the data were coded deductively (Miles et al., 2014) using the QDA minor software according to the phases of the special education placement process that were documented in the literature reviews: *referrals, assessments, identification, placement, and service delivery* (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021; Harry & Klingner, 2014). In addition to these phases, some supplementary themes that emerged included 1) *non-punitive disciplinary measures*, 2) *special school personnel’s negative perceptions of regular schools,* 3) *discomfort talking about blackness.* Given that the various groups of educators occupied specific roles at specific periods of the special education

placement process, this analysis allowed for a detailed reconstitution and description of the process from the institutional point of view.

At this stage of the deductive analysis, the volume and complexity of the institutional data presented some challenges. Given the massive amounts of data regarding professional practices that were specific to each group of educators in their respective sectors, the institutional dimensions appeared to be taking precedence over the student experiences. For this reason, in the next steps, the goal was to avoid comparing the institutional perspectives with the student accounts, and move to an inductive thematic analysis of the student data.

3.4.2 Analysis of the Student Data: A Thematic-Typological Approach

The student data was primarily analyzed using two methods to produce the most comprehensive interpretation of the results, while keeping the student voices foregrounded. Firstly, given the flexibility of the thematic analysis method described above, it was reapplied to the student-generated data. This option is in alignment with the findings of Miller and colleagues (2020), who through their CRT literature review, identified the tendency of CRT scholars to "use standard qualitative methods for data collection, typically a combination of semi-structured interviews and field observations, with the resultant data coded to produce a thematic analysis" (p. 277). In the data familiarization phase of the thematic analysis process, I sequentially reconstructed the educational pathway of each student-participant, within a timeframe spanning from elementary to special school placement, while linking them to their surrounding social and school dimensions. Following the transcription of the individual interviews, all the details concerning the participants' experiences in schools were compiled in *educational pathway matrixes* summarizing each participant's experiences individually (an example is provided in annex 10). Cook (2013) underscores the importance of gaining insight into the histories and personalities of the individual participants prior to creating composite characters. This is a necessary step in order to minimize the possibility of the researcher's voice (interpretations) drowning out the voices of the participants, instead of amplifying them. Thus, this first step not only allowed for the dense familiarization and capturing of the participants' essence, but also an assured foregrounding of their experiences.

In contrast to the institutional data, the student interviews were coded inductively (Miles et al., 2014). Thus, a cross comparison between the 20 counter-stories was conducted, extracting the similarities and/or differences within the corpus, through a coding process also using the *QDA minor* software. Distinct themes emerged among the participants, concerning each phase of their educational

pathway (elementary, high school, transitions to special schools, and special school placement). The six main themes that emerged were: 1) *regular schools as unwelcoming and unsafe; 2) special schools as supportive and welcoming; 3) special schools as disappointing and discriminatory; 4) experiences of direct and covert racism; 5) experiences of depression and anxiety; 6) unawareness of special education placement process.* However, while specific themes emerged regarding the educational pathways overall, after revising them, there was still much variability in how the students were actually placed in special schools. This prompted a typological analysis to better ascertain this specific dimension of the pathway in relationship to the other segments.

The typological analysis allowed for the concentering of the student experiences in the framework and a deeper understanding of the complex social and abstract processes and experiences carrying underlying meanings and rationales within the corpus. It also allowed for further reduction of the data and the creation of the composite characters. This was accomplished through a comparison of the student social realities to profiles known as *ideal-types*, established through the construction of a typology (Weber, 1978). An *ideal-type* can be characterized as an abstraction of individual characteristics and their relationships to social contexts in opposition to an exact representation, or a typology of individuals (Schnapper, 2012). Therefore, to arrive at a cohesive typology, a *piling method* was used, by generating core meaning units inductively through a cross-sectional comparison between the educational pathways (Schnapper, 2012). The typology that was formed consists of four profiles whereby each of the 20 biographical counter-stories was classified within the profile that was most characteristic of their experiences. These profiles constitute the composite characters of the research. As such, a broad interpretation of the past, structural, and social dimensions revealed in the data was possible in juxtaposition with the components of the thematic analyses. This dual analysis also made it possible to meet the second objective of the research: *to document Black student experiences of the special education placement process.*

3.4.3. Student Data in Cross-Reference to Institutional Data: A Contrasted-Composite Approach

Once the student and institutional data were analyzed as separate components, they were cross-referenced to reveal the convergences and divergences between the dimensions of the special education processes and those in the students' experiences. This contrasted approach made it possible to partially meet the third and final objective of the research: *to analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process.* By highlighting the convergences and divergences between the master-narratives and the counter-stories multiple hidden barriers were revealed.

In this phase, I determined that the student files were a necessary element for the triangulation of the data. However, while I obtained consent to consult all 20 of the student files, many of them were incomplete and in some cases, not available during the data collection phase. Scholars have noted that in research contexts documents

> …might be fragmentary, might not fit the purposes of the research, or might be difficult to authenticate (Merriam, 1988). It is important to keep in mind that such items have a definite organizational "slant" to them, so the investigator should be aware that documents are evidence about the organization or group as seen through its eyes (Heck, 2011, p.12)

Given that this situation made it impossible to conduct a thorough analysis of the files, I opted to use the information that was available as a complementary institutional data source rather than a triangulation method. In some cases, this allowed for a thicker description of certain general details provided by the students (convergence), in others, contradictions were revealed (divergence). For a deeper contrast, the tensions between the main themes from the thematic analyses of the institutional (master-narrative) and student data (counter-stories) were identified and analyzed according to the segments of the special education placement process (regular school, transitions to special school, special school) (annex 11).

Thus, layering all the phases of the analysis (thematic, typological, contrasted) produced a critical composite stratum that facilitated a DisCrit-antiblackness analysis of the special education processes. This phase of the analysis was done at a relatively greater distance from the data than the other phases, meaning that my own interpretations as the researcher were the most pronounced at this level. This composite phase of the analysis operated through a deconstruction and reconstruction of the meaning that all the participants gave to their experiences in the special education placement process by focusing on how they position themselves and the actors they interact with throughout the process. This last phase made it possible to interpret the social power relations at play in the special education placement processes and the positioning of Black students within this matrix from my own point of view as a researcher. The result is the achievement of the final research objective of the research *to analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process* and the creation of a composite counter-story of the special education placement process concerning Black youth. The consolidated analytical endeavors discussed throughout this chapter are summarized in table 5 below.

Table 5: Critical Methodology Summary

Research Objective	Data Sources	Counter-Story Intention	Composite Analysis Approach
		Participant Voice	Researcher Voice
1. To describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors	→ Individual and group interviews with school personnel	...ation of ...ster-narrative	Th... *deductive ca...*
2. To document Black student experiences of the special education placement process	→ Individual interviews with students	Amplification of ...rginalized voices	Thematic *inductive categori...*
3. To analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process	→ Results from thematic analyses → Student files	...reation of ...site counter- ...haracters ...of the ...tive	Typologic... *composite ch...* Cont... *combi... an...*

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The ethical aspects of the research were approved by the the *Comité plurifacultaire de la recherche* (CPÉR) of the Université de Montréal (annex 9). Additionally, each school board involved in the research provided approval to conduct research in their establishments, as per their various internal protocols. However, I believe it is notable that while some boards were quite welcoming, accommodating, and supportive, others were hesitant, suspicious and resistant. In one case, I was questioned about why I was focusing on Black youth since special education exists for “students of all races”. My request was rejected and I was invited to reapply with some imposed modifications. While in this case my request to conduct research was eventually approved with the support and presence of my white research supervisor at a concertation meeting, in another case, my request was simply denied without the possibility of re-applying. Despite these obstacles, it is possible to affirm that this thesis respects the ethical standards of research carried out on human subjects: in particular, the conditions related to consent to research, confidentiality and possible risks for the participants.

In further concordance with ethical protocols, prior to carrying out the interviews with any participants, a consent form compliant with ethical standards was presented to them. This document (annex 3) was intended to introduce the participants to the goals and objectives of the research and to confirm their consent to participate in the research and to be audio recorded. It detailed that their participation was voluntary, the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, and their right to refuse to answer questions as they wished and to delete details from the data transcripts. It also confirmed that anonymity would be fully upheld by replacing participants' names, educational establishments, and any other revealing dimensions, with pseudonyms or codes in the data analysis, and that the data would be stored in a secure file. Cook (2013) draws attention to the fact that composite characters can also operate as an additional layer of privacy and protection for participants.

Additionally, the student-participants who were under 18 were asked to sign the consent form along with their parents (annex 4). While in Quebec, the age of consent for research participation is 14, I determined that it would be respectful to involve parents in their child's participation decision, given that parents often do not have access to information for navigating their children's educational endeavors (Magnan et al., 2019). Only one parent refused to give consent and that candidate was not retained for the study. In-person, before beginning the interviews, I re-explained the research to the participants, and went over their rights with them. Once they confirmed they understood, if they hadn't done so already, they were asked to sign the letter of consent, guaranteeing their anonymity and ensuring that they could stop the interview, and withdraw from the study at any time. In a few circumstances some participants who were under 18 arrived on the day of the interview eager to participate but had not obtained parental consent. In these cases, I phoned the parents and obtained consent verbally. In the next two chapters, the fruits of the analyses will be presented.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Results: A Master-Narrative of the Special Education Placement Process

From a broad perspective of the thesis, this chapter aims to establish a master-narrative of the special education placement process based on the individual and group interviews with school board personnel from regular and special schools. More specifically, the data generated from the 21 school board professionals were used to reconstruct the general special education placement process. Given that this process is sequential in nature (though, not necessarily linear), this presentation of the results is organized chronologically. While the special education placement process could be described differently by each of the 21 personnel-participants based on their individual and group functions and responsibilities, this section highlights the commonalities that were revealed in the deductive thematic analysis pertaining to the specific phases of the process. It will entail the personnel-participants' perceptions of how the process begins in regular schools; the practices and procedures involved throughout, including how and why transitions to special schools occur; the service delivery once the placement in a special school has culminated; as well as their reflections on how the process unfolds for Black students. As indicated in table 5 of the previous chapter, my interpretations of these results were largely reserved, and will be presented in chapter 6.

4.1 Referrals from Regular Schools: Meeting Student and Institutional Needs

Institutional actors agree that special education exists for students who cannot be successful in a "regular" or "traditional" setting. According to them, special education provides accommodations, adaptations, modifications, and individualized support measures to ensure an equal level playing field, equity and inclusion, as well as to help students achieve their maximum potential.

Chronologically, the participants understood the special education placement process as beginning with referrals from regular schools:

> *[Students] get placed in our system by other schools referring them out, right? They can't come to us [in special schools] unless the [regular] schools have referred them out* (Kristian, teacher 19, SS[13])

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[13] The sociodemographic and professional details for each participant can be found in table 3 of the previous chapter (p. 77). For quicker reference, in this chapter, SS denotes special school, RS denotes regular school.

Something happens in their [regular] school or usually a series of events or something like that, and then that school tries or we hope tries several interventions, you know, if it doesn't work out, either the guidance counsellor there or a principal or vice-principal will fill out a referral (Clarice, admin 08, SS)

As explained by a regular school teacher, all possible options are carefully explored before initiating a placement as a last resort, out of concern for the students:

We really do our best to give [the students] what they need before we're asking them to leave, like we really kind of like to hold on, but we will hold up our hands if we can't meet their standards and meet their needs and say it's not because we don't want you here, we just need you to get better help than we can provide in our school. So from somebody who's not in on the case, meaning that's my perception, that's what I see, and sometimes it can be really difficult to see a student leave, especially when we know they have the potential but we're just not accessing it from our perspectives as a teacher (Shayna, teacher 12, RS)

The main reasons cited by the participants for student referrals to special schools were related to academic and behavioral difficulties, and to a lesser extent, social difficulties. Regardless of the reasons, students were perceived by regular school participants to be referred to special schools for their own well-being. In contrast, special school participants questioned whether it was the needs of the students or the regular schools that were being prioritized.

4.1.1. Concerns for Individual Student Academic Needs and Well-being

In terms of academics, Justin, an administrator (11, RS) explains:

So, we often transfer students to other schools based on their academics, and it's when we realize they may not be successful at our school or continuously experience failure and lack of success, that's when they are identified to go to other programs that our school doesn't provide (Justin, admin 11, RS).

More specifically, those who are considered in academic lag by at least 2-years tend to become candidates for special schools, as described by a special school administrator:

[Students] often aren't passing anything unless phys ed and art generally speaking. They're rating more than two levels under their grade level, usually their Math scores are around the same levels, so not their grades necessarily but their literacy when they're bench marked [...] Français langue seconde, we have students that are functioning on a kindergarten level [in special schools], I'm not exaggerating, at the age of 14 (Doug, admin 06, SS).

A regular school teacher provided an example of how this manifests wherein it was perceived as no longer possible for the student's needs to be met in a regular setting:

[...] Honestly no vocabulary and no reading...reading is a skill that is required before grade 3, right […] and so, that is something that is not a skill that we can give, something that a speech language pathologist needs to work with, that's more medical in nature, that's not something that we could deal with, right? Students that have MI [mild intellectual disability], so those ones are also... That's also something in the brain that's more difficult, there's ways to work around that, right? And you can develop many different skills around that, but concretely it is that student that is sitting in your classroom that you can tell is not engaged, and not engaged not because of lack of interest but inability to maintain focus or to literally comprehend, right? It's almost as though they are second language students, but their mother tongue is English, and those language difficulties are hard to overcome (Valerie, teacher 15, RS).

Ultimately, the personnel appeared concerned about the impact of failure on student well-being, and measures that would provide an experience of success:

If [a failing student] had stayed at our school, they would have maybe had failed multiple grades and just been pushed up, and then spent their academic career at a below standard success rate, whereas they are transferred to another school they can be with a cohort and an experience that reflects some sort of successful process for them instead of just always being in a failing position (Leo, admin 10, RS)

An adapted and individualized experience that is understood as something that is typically accessible in special schools, was perceived as a means of directly responding to the students' needs, rather than allowing them to fall through the cracks of the system.

[Students are] at the point where they'll be pushed up no matter what, because you can only fail one grade per secondary or elementary. So instead of constantly being failed, they go to this [specialized] program and you can do secondary 1-2 work and then get those classifications when you're 15 and that gets you into WOTP [Work oriented training path] (Justin, admin 11, RS).

However, while regular school personnel underscored compromised student well-being and success as precursors to special school placement, some administrators in special schools questioned the validity of the designation of students as "failing", especially in terms of their academic capabilities. They suggested that the students' basic needs not being met as a more relevant dimension with regards to their demonstrated academic performances:

I mean we get a lot of kids [in special schools] for academic reasons, but often when you dig, it has almost nothing to do with their ability to learn, everything to do with what they've been through, what their environment is, things they need (Maria, admin 09, SS).

As previously mentioned in chapter 3, these contrasting perceptions between regular and special school personnel emerged as a common theme during the data analysis, and thus appear throughout the reconstitution of the special education placement process from the institutional vantage point.

4.1.2 Concerns about Individual Student Behaviors and for Collective Student Well-being

In terms of behavior, regular school principals confirmed that this dimension was a predominant reason for students to be referred to special schools.

I think in this school board in my personal opinion, it's generally behavior, very rarely is it, you know, a kid that's, you know, not a behavior type kid (Gerald, admin 17, RS).

Kids who are showing like issues, behavioral issues in school, and maybe an incident that occurred that would, you know, exclude them from actually being able to stay here for whatever reason, but usually it's behavioral (Justin, admin 11, RS).

The types of behaviors that led to referrals ranged from an accumulation and combination of trivial behaviors deemed unacceptable such as:

[...] chronic absenteeism, lates, not bringing material to class, you know, not performing or not showing willingness, like clearly not, just not experiencing any success in this environment. You know you have to be looking at all those little things together, cause only one thing like chronic absenteeism isn't necessarily going to have, you know, lead to us referring him out of the school. So you have to kind of look at all the little things that are happening and why, and sometimes, you know, the context like what's happening at home, if a student is being placed in a group home for example, you know, all those things (Justin, admin, R11).

While the institutional actors expressed a preoccupation for being unable to meet individual student needs with regards to behavior, a preponderant concern for the safety and well-being for the collective student body was expressed. These perceived disruptive or dangerous individual behaviors that precipitated referrals varied from small classroom disruptions to more drastic behaviors such as violence, possession of weapons, and drug-dealing:

It can be classroom disruptions, drawing the teacher's attention so much so that the class cannot operate in a successful way, ruining the other students' educational experience through bullying or through persistent kind of negativity, kind of dangerous behaviors that are presented in class that don't make the learning environment safe (Leo, admin 10, RS)

One student of mine threw a desk and that was...it wasn't the first offense, cause that, I don't think would be a suspension...or dealing drugs...but it's also for the students in the rest of the population, right? Like to remove that person from basically their clients is important (Valerie, teacher 15, RS)

Expulsion I don't really necessary believe in, but I believe we have the resources outside of school. For example if there's a tremendously violent kid that brings in a weapon, automatically I would refer that to [special] schools or for expulsion, because with the school violence and school shootings and things like that, I feel that's also something that's really, really important and that we have to provide safety for all of our students and staff within the school (Gerald, admin 17, RS)

The administrator's reference to his non-belief in expulsions is related to the broader theme of non-punitive discipline that emerged in the analysis. It is relevant here because, based on the administrator accounts, behavioral incidents lead to consequences in the form of discipline, which in turn lead to referrals. This constitutes discipline as an integral part of the placement framework, notably as it relates

to ensuring the safety of the larger school community. In particular, regular school administrators perceive themselves as taking students' life circumstances into account when dealing with behavioral issues, while avoiding punitive discipline.

> *I'm a firm believer in in-school suspensions. Out-of-school suspensions for our type of kids here is not the greatest because a lot of the kid's home lives are not the greatest and they are not supervised at home, if at all possible, we try to stay away from that* (Gerald, admin 17, RS)

> *I guess punishment is out-of-school suspensions, then again, we always try to avoid being just at home. We use alternative suspensions programs, we have student mentors… teachers identify students who are having issues with behaviors that don't match our code of conduct, so we send that mentor on a one-to-one basis. We have behavior technicians, guidance counsellors who pull kids out to have conversations and make plans, we have an in-house social worker to deal with problems that are a little bigger than the school, that the school can't address within the school day* (Leo, admin 10, RS)

Thus for these administrators, in-school suspensions are not punitive. Leo (admin 10, RS) explains the benefits of in-school suspensions, which provide students with the behavioral support they need to succeed:

> *In-school suspensions are more of a learning process, kids are not left alone just doing school work, they are always with an adult who's addressing that behavior on a one-to-one basis, or one-to-two, or one-to-three basis[…] For students with behaviors, we try and increase their accountability to their behaviors, so we often sit with them and try and make a schedule that works with them to increase their academics, so attending tutorials and remediation with specific teachers, developing individual reward programs that are unique to the students, getting to visit special parts of the building, or getting the gymnasium to themselves, which is kind of like, the idea is to try and reward cause it's very easy to punish behaviors, but you've got to draw the student away from the behaviors, not kind of slam it out of them with consequences* (Leo, admin 10, RS)

Despite the regular school personnel's seemingly strong commitment to non-punitive discipline, even with the numerous resources available, it is not always possible to avoid punitive discipline, which for the institutional actors, seem to be limited to off-site suspensions:

There have been cases where we do still give [off-site] suspensions, normally when there's fighting, situations with drugs, insubordination with teachers, and after these suspensions we generally have a meeting with the parents, but it's very few and far between that we actually suspend students (Gerald, admin 17, RS)

Hence, whether the disciplinary measures are framed as punitive or not, actions such as these are perceived as part of the process of exhausting all measures and providing students the opportunity to "change their behavior":

We have detentions to kind of adjust behaviors, in-school suspensions...we have athletic contracts and behavior contracts that kind of stipulate demands of student behaviors through different parts of our school, but that are more positive, so if [students] don't participate in these kind of positive experiences they are not demonstrating a commitment to change their behaviors (Leo, admin 10, RS)

[Students] go on contracts, and there's, you know, conditions in the contract and then their expectations, and they have an opportunity to change their behavior before they move out (Mandy, teacher 14, RS),

These actions are perceived to benefit both the individual student exhibiting the behavior that is deemed necessary to change, as well as the larger school community. Behaviors that are considered dangerous or as compromising the security and success of others result in more severe forms of punitive discipline such as expulsions, which can be considered a synonym to a special education referral. In other words, when the behavior doesn't fall within the institutional norms or the stipulations of the code of conduct, after personnel believe they have exhausted all measures including discipline, the behavior becomes a special need.

4.1.3 Prioritizing Institutional Needs

The narratives from the regular personnel regarding the referral process are centered on their perceived inability to support students in a traditional environment. This focal point not only indicates that they feel professionally unequipped to deal with students who do not meet institutional norms, but also brings into question whether the needs of the students are being prioritized during the referral process, or the needs of the schools.

Regular school staff members tended to frame special school referrals as benevolent practices that were beneficial to the students, all the while acknowledging their own limited capacity to meet the needs of the students:

> *There are mechanism at our school to try to help the students with these issues, but if there is a failure of our system or perceived failure of our system and it's not working, sometimes it's viewed as we are doing a disservice to the student, we can't…everything that we can provide has failed, so perhaps another institution can be more successful then, because with what we have, our wheels are spinning and we can't make the structural change to kind of match what the student needs* (Leo, admin 10, RS)

> *There's some students that we're like "we're not helping you", and that's the part, I think that's something that's very unique to Beaver Lake Academy, we don't say "you're driving us crazy", maybe we do, but we also say "we're not helping you and it's very frustrating to us, like when we're not helping you". We want them to succeed, we start from that, that's our default position, we want you to succeed, but if I can't help you, I can't help you and I feel like we're torturing them sometimes by holding on to them* (Shayna, teacher 12, RS)

However, a special school administrator suggested that student difficulties are in fact manageable in regular schools when financial matters are a factor of the process. When funds are allocated to schools by the *Ministère de l'éducation* they are based on the number of students enrolled in an establishment on September 30th of each academic school year. Hugh (admin 07, SS) observed that only once this date passes and the funds are allocated for those students, do special schools start receiving referrals related to concerning academic and behavioral issues:

> *How should I put it? I want to think that [regular schools] don't do that [strategically maintain students for budgetary reasons], I want to think that doesn't happen, I don't want to think a lot of other things that happen as well, because of the September 30th deadline and how all of a sudden, we end up with other kids, right? I want to believe that there is good will, and I don't want to go to that extreme and say it, I want to believe that there's integrity out there and that they're actually serving that student's needs as appropriately as it should be, that's what I want to believe* (Hugh, admin, S07)

The sarcasm and hesitation in the participant's delivery of the information, as well as the fact that the issue was raised without being prompted, seems to indicate that this administrator finds it hard to believe that regular schools are always acting in the best interest of the students.

In terms of difficulties in meeting student academic needs, both regular and special school personnel pointed to the stakes of meeting school success rate goals that are largely impacted by ministerial exams:

> *We don't see the long term of [students who are failing academically] meeting Ministry exams…and so sometimes we'll have to recommend a more specialized school* (Mandy, teacher 14, RS)

> *When [students] get older and all of a sudden [regular schools] have to administer the government exams, I'm sure schools at a certain point...the bottom line is that concern, if they know students are not going to be successful, they get pushed to [special schools]* (Clarice, admin 08, SS).

In terms of behavior, according to special school personnel, students can become candidates for special education based on an accumulation of actions that are directly linked to personnel's perceptions of what constitutes a misbehaviour, as well as their level of tolerance and ability to manage a large group of students.

> *[Students] get on the wrong side of a teacher [...] They make it difficult for teachers to do their job in the broadest sense, because I have to respect that the teacher with 32 kids in the room can't always attend, but I'm sure it's the ones that make the most noise and are the most disturbing [who get referred]* (Clarice, admin 08, SS).

Essentially, these behaviors are perceived as preventing the classroom from operating in a functional manner. Therefore, referrals to special schools would be advanced as a solution; the behaviors perceived as obstacles would be removed. Furthermore, Hugh (admin 07, SS) questions referrals based on

> *...disciplinary reasons. The disciplinary reason there is such that, not that I don't feel that student is entitled to come to a [special] school, but if it's a straight disciplinary issue, I don't think that student should be coming... I think that student, for whatever rules he broke, for whatever mistake he made, to send him to a special school is occupying space of another*

student who would require specific support to their learning needs, wherein this case, if there is a student who has broken a rule or did something wrong, well that's a wrongful transfer, I mean, apples for apples...Let's say for instance if my team is on penalty, before serving a penalty I want my next players to be there to serve, right? I need them to be there to do a specific job. This kid is not coming here for specific needs, he's coming here for that disciplinary action. In other words, I'm not putting the special team at work to serve the appropriate need for this kid (Hugh, admin 07, SS).

Essentially, this administrator seems to be suggesting that regular schools are using special schools as a disciplinary measure rather than a support measure, a practice that he is clearly opposed to. The sports analogy he used illustrates that he believes regular schools are not adhering to the fundamental principles of healthy teamwork and dynamics. Instead of dealing with the "violations" made by an individual as a team with integrity, by perhaps training that individual and sensitizing them to the rules of the game, some regular schools are hastily kicking those individuals off the team and passing their perceived weak players onto another team in the league. Framed differently, a regular school principal corroborated this practice:

Sometimes students are sent to [special schools] from our school because of their behavior, but they're not all necessarily identified as special needs students, there just happens to be like a venn diagram over a lap, students who have special needs that are behavioral, and sometimes they fall into there, but we've sent students who are behavioral but not at all on the special needs dossiers to [special schools], while the kids who go to the specialized programs like [the ones available in the regular school], more often are not demonstrating a high level of misbehavior (Leo, admin 10, RS).

In contrast, another regular school principal shared the same concerns expressed by these administrators:

I think where it kind of breaks down sometimes is that kids make mistakes and then they're automatically just sent to [special] schools and sometimes there's no way out or back, and I think administrators and teachers have to learn not to label and totally write off those students (Gerald, admin 17, RS).

As such, referrals may operate as a strategy to maintain a high student academic success rates as well as the status quo when it comes to behaviors. However, contrary to what the personnel on the front

line perceived, according to a member of a special education placement committee, there are unspecified measures in place that would prevent these practices:

> *If there's a situation where there's been a serious behaviour issue or there's been an incident that has resulted in the initial...the regular school, the referring school saying: "this student cannot come back", the case is brought to the placement committee and the decision here is "well, this student is not fitted for a special school setting", then it goes back to the original school and they would then communicate with their regional director to find another school within the regular network of schools to place that student* (Linda, admin/PCM[14] 01, SS).

Thus, the diversity in perspectives among the various members of the school personnel is evident. While regular school teachers perceived referrals as last-resort practices that are enacted for the benefit of the students, special school administrators who are on the receiving end of the referral process perceived them as a way of ridding regular schools of "unmanageable" students, in many circumstances. Regular school administrators did not seem opposed to this view, but also seemed concerned with appeasing the personnel under their management. However, placement committee members expressed that special schools do not operate as a catchall for students who are deemed as behaviorally problematic. Below, the process of how students were transferred from regular to special schools will be detailed.

4.2. Transitions from Regular to Special Schools

In this section, the process of how students were transferred from regular schools and the roles of the participants in this process will be discussed. The special education placement process can be characterized by referrals from regular schools, the implication of placement committees, as well as assessments or lack thereof, and the attribution of a ministerial difficulty code (MELS, 2007). Thus, the general transition process will be detailed, highlighting the role of liaison between regular and special schools occupied by the placement committee, the non-participation of regular schools, and the interests of the regular schools that seem to be prioritized in terms of the committee implication.

4.2.1 Implication of a Placement Committee

Once a referral is initiated by a member of the regular school personnel, a special education placement committee consisting of various professionals of the school community (administrators, guidance

[14] PCM denotes Placement Committee Member

counselors, consultants…) collects information about the students and determines the best placement for them. The process is described as follows:

> *Ok, so the process is that we get referrals either from other schools or from social workers for students who are having difficulties in their school where they are attending, and we then meet with the people involved with the students who best know the students. You know we try to get as much you know...background information, so we try to have the people that come to talk to us about the student be the people that have actually had firsthand experience working with the student, because often you know that doesn't happen...not often...sometimes it doesn't happen and then we have to do it again with people that do know the student. And then we discuss school behavior, any psychosocial issues, academic issues, what has worked, what hasn't worked, what kind of support services the students have had in their previous school, what kind of support services they feel would help or things that haven't been tried. You know we try to match I guess from the schools that we have available to us, we try to match not just the academic profile of the student but also even the personality of the staff, so that the student will be supported* (Rita, guidance counselor/PCM 02, SS)

Moreover, guidance counsellors may or may not become involved as a sort of liaison:

> *The guidance counsellor's role I mean it varies between schools in terms of how much the guidance counsellor gets involved, in some schools they might not get involved very much at all unless the applicant comes with some kind of flag of special education or something like that, and so normally though the guidance counsellor would be looking at the needs of the student, you know? So academic, behavioural, psychosocial, anything like that, and maybe contacting schools that he was at before, trying to get a profile for what kind of services, if they are any, what kind of services or if they are any services that the student would need* (Rita, guidance counselor/PCM 02, SS)

According to this guidance counselor, the role of the committee is to decide what school would be most appropriate for a student based on information given by the referring party. It is noteworthy that this seems to be the only information required for a placement decision to be made. In other words, there was no mention of any baselines in terms of behavior or any assessments or evaluations; placements seemed to be determined through anecdotal reports from personnel from regular schools. Overall, the participants exhibited difficulty in terms of explaining how students get placed in special

schools, especially in terms of the decision-making that leads to these placements, as illustrated by a regular school administrator:

> *So, sometimes we have students who are really struggling and repeat or fail a year twice in a row, and then we don't keep them at the school, we refer them out at that point, and that could be, they would go through the [placement] committee at that point and I guess the best... I mean they come up with their own way of deciding where a student would go* (Justin, admin 11, RS)

4.2.2 Non-Participation of Special Schools

When it comes to special schools, teachers explained that they were "not at that table" (Kristian, teacher 19, SS) or "[the students] arrive at our doorstep, that's it" (Renée, teacher 21, SS), and that it was all in the hands of the placement committee, which was also elaborated by special school administrators:

> *[The placement committee members] have a discussion with someone from the previous school about what the presenting issues are and usually the parent as well gets on the phone or comes in person to discuss the placement or discuss the issues, and then choose a placement, and then we get like a... Maybe if we're lucky we get a phone call with the description of the kid, but in my experience sometimes you have to pull for it and we don't always pull for it, but I just get an email with the referral and possibly it's about the student and what they need, and they give the parent our phone number and then the parent calls us [...] And sometimes with me, I don't want, like not that I'll fight [the placement] often, but sometimes it doesn't make sense when a student is sent my way* (Maria, admin 09, SS).

Therefore, not only do special school teachers and administrators seem somewhat uninformed about the placement process, but general information that is deemed helpful to the staff, doesn't seem to be communicated in an effective way.

4.2.3. A Committee at the Service of Regular Schools

One member of a placement committee, explained that they in fact, have little to do with decision-making processes but simply act as a liaison between regular and special schools:

> *The only reason why this committee would get involved is if the regular school that's been working with the student... And often they've gone from one regular school to another and where it's been decided by the school team that they're not meeting the needs of the student, you know? That the student needs something more, a smaller setting, a different approach, you know often it's just a matter of creating a better attachment with the student, so in our small schools we're able to do that, because we get to know the students very easily, quickly and easily, so a lot of the times it's really about exhausting all off the resources that a regular school can provide and then they'll come to us and ask: Ok, what's different about you guys? What can you guys provide that we haven't been able to and that's where that all gets discussed* (Rita, guidance counselor/PCM 02, SS)

While the role of the placement committee is a liaison between regular and special schools, there seems to be an imbalance in this relationship. The committee appears to operate predominantly in the interest of regular schools, leaving the special schools to decipher what to do with the referred students on their own.

When further probed on specific details of student transfers, a committee member re-iterated that the placement committee doesn't make actual placement decisions:

> *We don't make the decision as to whether the student is no longer able to stay in their regular schools, that's really up to the regular school to make that decision, and sometimes it involves the regional director or whoever, if it's a contentious case and the parents are not in agreement, or if it's a severe behavior case, we don't make that decision* (Linda, admin/PCM 01, SS)

Thus, it appears that the role of the placement committee is to find a suitable alternative for students who have been referred out by regular schools, without contributing or contributing very little to any decision-making about the rationale of the actual placement. However, both regular and special school personnel seem to think that this is where the decisions are being made. Based on these personnel-participants' accounts, it can be concluded that placements are largely based on the needs of the regular schools, supported by placement committees, and imposed on special schools. The placement process is at best ill-defined or ill-understood. Although the placement committee declared that it doesn't make placement decisions, based on the personnel-participants' accounts, their implication seems to act as a deciding factor in itself.

4.3. Student Assessments, Non-Assessments, Coding and Non-Coding

The deductive thematic analysis of the results indicated a tendency for student assessments to be absent from the placement process or to be carried out informally after the transition to special schools. Regular school personnel highlighted the complications involving assessments and the fact that they are not necessarily a placement requirement. A regular school administrator suggested that the placement process should start with assessments, which seemed to rarely be the case:

> *Well I guess that everything starts with assessment, that we hope that there's an early assessment that can happen with every student, but we know that's not the case, it's expensive... I mean in an early childhood context I think that there are going to be some warning signs, obviously during the child development there are going to be...pediatricians might catch on to things that might suggest, I assume, that might suggest some kind of testing, that would be ideal, to catch some of these things early, some of the needs early, but we know that that doesn't really happen, often kids fall through the cracks and then you know don't get assessed until they are in high school a lot of the times* (Justin, admin 11, RS).

He added that difficulties related to assessment delays are particularly accentuated for lower income families:

> *When we identify that a student has issues at high school that hasn't been identified before, or maybe the assessment expired or whatever, especially for lower income families, the process of actually getting that assessment done or renewed is either you do it at the school, in which case they might be waiting for over a year, and at that point that's like it's too long, or you're paying thousands of dollars to get this assessment done as soon as possible and then you get the code and then wheels start turning, so that's a huge problem that I see from my perspective in terms of disparity, especially from the wealthier students to the poor students...They don't get that little box ticked off quick enough* (Justin, admin 11, RS)

This posture was echoed by regular school teachers, who underscored that students may be transferred without any formal assessment due to lack of resources:

> *It does happen that some students are not coded and they don't have formal assessments and it could be strictly financial, that some parents or guardians could not afford to get that assessment done* (Mandy, teacher 14, RS)

These assessments are considered important because, officially, they ensure a budget allocation for support services when they are validated by the *Ministère de l'éducation* through the attribution of a difficulty code. A regular school administrator highlighted how some students may be placed at a disadvantage when they are not coded:

> *Well essentially, [students are] categorized which seems kind of strange, but it's categorized often in terms of behavior, learning disability, language, auditory processing, autism, psycho pathology, all of those different codes. Kids are classified into those codes, that's how we do it in this school board, but there's also kids that don't have those codes that may be at-risk or may be undiagnosed that could fall under the special education sort of parameters, so I think all those codes and also the at-risk kids that aren't identified, I think it's important for schools to recognize and to create an educational environment that those kids will thrive in* (Gerald, admin 17, RS)

Overall, the participants seemed unsure about how assessment or coding procedures took place:

> *Asides from maybe a form that we fill out based on observations [for coding purposes], honestly in the admin I fill out very few of them, it's usually the teachers and the guidance counsellors who are involved, but I think my role in designations is when staff comes to me with observations, starting the proper process to get that documented and get the kind of specialists involved, so I think that's it, and asides from that and the code being enforced well into what the students are owed, there's not much involvement in the designation of the codes* (Leo, admin10, RS).

Although one participant described the special education placement process as a "process [that] is pretty much set, as in assessing and identifying the needs of the individual" (Hugh, admin 07, SS), the assessment of the student special needs does not seem to have any major impact on whether a student is placed in a special school. These dimensions tended to be negotiated after the students were transferred to special schools. Therefore, students can be placed in special schools without being assessed, diagnosed or coded. While, regular school personnel were concerned with the difficult accessibility to assessments, special school personnel grappled with addressing student needs without

access to helpful information that could orient interventions, which will be elaborated in the next section.

4.3. Special Needs in Special Schools: Obstacles, Interventions, and Strategies

Within the scope of this study, the special education placement process, from an institutional perspective, culminated in student placements in special schools, where staff would be responsible for addressing the student needs that were deemed unmanageable in regular schools. This section outlines the special school personnel's perspectives on the segments of the process with regard to assessing student needs, welcoming new students to special schools, the service offer and interventions strategies, as well as the challenges that arose throughout the process.

4.3.1. Challenges in Student Transfers from Regular to Special Schools

As previously mentioned, regular school personnel perceived special schools to be better equipped to serve students with learning and behavioral difficulties. However, special school personnel raised a number of obstacles that jeopardized their ability to meet this mandate. From the onset, they underscored the challenges they encountered when preparing for the arrival of new students, especially in terms of the lack of information that would help them understand and respond to the needs of the students, as well as the effects of a lagging transition process on students.

Special school administrators underscored how the incomplete or inaccessible student files they were often faced with impacted their ability to support new students:

> *One thing I also find that can be a struggle is some of, like not just the social, the emotional environment and stuff, but like the testing they have had in the past, I mean it's supposed to be in the [file], but it's not always in the [file], or sometimes depending on what kind of guidance counsellors you had. This year, like I had a different one every single year I've been in the system [...] So there, that's the problem, right? So, there's all these things that you might not find out about. A lot of them unfortunately just never had the proper testing though, and when they did you should be able to like [access the information]...It's a hassle [to get the student file], and for someone who's really busy, which we are, it's easy to accidentally skip past that, or kind of give up on it or whatever, so I have a pretty good counsellor this year who really looks through this stuff and tells us [relevant information]. When you're teaching, you have to keep whatever in mind, but the last 2 years [the students] didn't benefit from that as much and*

I feel like I missed important things in terms of like actual learning disabilities or things in their psychological assessment that we should have probably known (Maria, admin 09, SS)

While it appears that "good guidance counselors" could aid as liaisons between regular schools and special schools, one counselor detailed the professional constraints she experienced when it came to this part of her practice:

I think it can be frustrating sometimes because you feel like the [special school] teachers are coming to you and the staff is coming to you, you want to give them support but you don't even know much, you don't have much background information, you don't really know what the skill level is, because if you can't find info, you don't have reports, you don't have things like that, so it puts pressure on us to move quickly to either evaluate or to have to start to piece it together a little bit...So now, it just adds extra work that if that was done upfront, it would be easier on us, it would be easier on the staff and on the students, because as things start arising, that's when you're dealing with it, so you're doing more I guess a crisis management as opposed to an early intervention (Denise, guidance counsellor, 05)

Therefore, this inaccessible information not only seemed to cause contention between different professionals in the process, it also appeared to make their jobs more challenging with possible negative effects on students.

In fact, in the overall process, the assessment of the student needs seemed to fall on the immediate special school staff, at least unofficially. In other words, the special school staff tend to *"look and see if [they] can make the puzzle pieces fit*" (Hugh, admin 07, SS) a posteriori, in order to determine appropriate strategies and interventions without necessarily going through the administrative evaluation process that could eventually lead to the attribution of a difficulty code:

We spend a lot of time the first month of the school year identifying our students needs profiles behaviorally, socially, affectively also, like kind of what works one on one, and how they interact with adults best, how they interact with subject matters in classes, and then for the most part our students who are in the WOTP pathway, they have a clear set of objectives that they are expected to meet, and so we differentiate assignments, we differentiate instruction styles, and we differentiate as much as we can to get them ready for relatively undifferentiated year evaluations, and I guess that's how the process works (Doug, dmin 06, SS).

Further, teachers in special schools also highlighted the challenges of welcoming new students without having a sense of their background:

> *When these people are arriving at my doorstep, and more often than not, they're arriving without any marks, without any background, I don't have access to their file, and sometimes I find out what grade they were in the day that they are sitting in my classroom, I wish, I wish that I could say there was a little bit more, maybe there's a lot of force that's put into it, but in actuality, how it plays out, I will maybe receive an email the day before and the next morning this kid is waiting at my door to go to the locker that I assign to him* (Leila, teacher 18, SS)

Moreover, students can be transferred to special schools at any time of the academic year, up to the month of June, when end of year evaluations are taking place. They also tend to be away for several weeks, and in many cases, several months, before they start the new leg of their educational pathway in special schools. The reasons for these gaps could be explained by, as one teacher put it, *"anything...it could be anything, in lock-up, in the hospital, at home, there's every type of situation, I don't understand how they're allowed to be at home for 2 months"* (Leila, teacher, S18). These transitional gaps are especially difficult when it comes to senior students who are expected to perform academically in terms of ministerial exams:

> *Quite often they've been out of school for one month, 2 months, 3 months, more often than not, they've been out of school, so they've got huge gaps in learning and so I'm not trying to be one of those teachers that just say, ok, well, what do you expect me to do, this is impossible, but they're coming, we've just spent 4 months doing a math course covering 4 months of material, they've been out of for school for 1 to 3 months off, and then I'm supposed to… I'm expected to get them ready. I've actually had emails sent to me saying just get them to do some catch up and so they can do their exams in 3 weeks. So, these are situations that we're faced with time and time again and I don't think I'm alone* (Leila, teacher 18, SS)

> *And the gaps are two-pronged, right? Like on the one hand there's a gap because they've been out of school for this time, so they are out of the habit of being students and they missed that learning, but also it took so long for them to be referred to us and there's all the gaps that they developed in that time that they weren't being properly addressed in the context they were in before the time they came to us, and that can go back years* (Kristian, teacher 19, SS).

These teachers are not only pointing out the unreasonable expectation of having students prepared for standardized exams after being out of school for months but also the compound of the time students spent in regular schools where their needs weren't being addressed. So, instead of months of lag simply related to their transfer, it's actually years of educational neglect in regular settings that are also expected to be "fixed" in special schools. Overall, the beginning of the special school component of the placement process was described as difficult due to inconsistent and unclear communication, not only between personnel in regular and special schools, but also between the regular schools and the students who were referred.

4.3.2 Offering Support and Services to Students

When students begin the special school segment of their academic pathway, the personnel communicated that they must determine and understand the students' special needs, and respond to them accordingly. In the following section, the ways students were supported emotionally, academically, and behaviorally (or not) in special schools will be elaborated.

4.3.2.1 Fostering an "Alternative" Environment: Challenges and Benefits of Prioritizing Student Well-Being

Special school personnel are expected to offer alternatives in order to support students through their difficulties. However, administrators pointed to the fact that many staff members who are expected to handle such cases, don't actually have any specialized training to do so:

> *The reality is that there's that perception, and it's a good perception, in that [special] schools are... You know? They're going to help the most challenging kids, and I think that's a great perception to have, but the reality is on the ground, that the majority of the staff and teachers who work in these schools have no more training in special ed than any other teacher in any other school. It's on the job training, it's trial by fire, it's you know you have a gut instinct for it, and it develops, and you own your skills over time* (Linda, admin/PCM 01, SS)

In a focus group with special education teachers, only one confirmed that they previously had training in special education. In one case, one teacher was not even aware that he was working in a special education context:

Conrad (teacher 20, SS)*: Cause I only started in 2017...and I was just a math teacher.*

Leila (teacher 18, SS)*: Ok, so you didn't answer an ad for special education?*

Conrad (teacher 20, SS)*: No, I just went to the meeting and I saw that there was an opening, it was math, and I knew somebody on the staff so I talked to him, the [administrator] was there, I talked to her about what would be expected, and I was like ok, I'm going to try it*

Leila (teacher 18, SS)*: But nothing about special education?*

Conrad (teacher 20, SS)*: No, when I got my pay slip and it has your teacher number or whatever, I was like, "oh, what's this? Oh, special education".*

Leila (teacher 18, SS)*: You didn't even know...*

Conrad (teacher 20, SS)*: I had no idea*

An administrator explained how personnel who don't fully grasp the relational expectations of working in a special environment can compromise a healthy environment for the entire school community:

I think the hardest part of the job is not dealing with kids at all, it's dealing with the adults. You have to expect that [the students] are going to question authority and you have to be willing to have that conversation with them [...] I mean I just find it so weird how worked up people get sometimes when kids...they're just testing you a little bit, relax a bit and this whole situation will go away [...] I don't really understand why they want to be in this system, why they are unwilling sometimes to change the way that they teach for these kind of kids, or just not supper empathetic to what those kids go through [...] Just one really negative person on your staff, like that can really ruin [the collective dynamic] (Maria, admin 09, SS)

In contrast, personnel who understand that prioritizing the emotional needs of their students through building positive relationships and adopting a tolerant, understanding, and caring posture are perceived as paramount to success:

I think just using your relationship with them is the most powerful thing there is and that's why it's super crucial to have that [...] If the one thing that is similar to all of our students, it's the fact that they haven't got good experiences in regular schools, I think all of our schools work very hard to make going to school and being in school a positive experience, a place where

they can feel safe. We nurture them, we tend to the other needs as well, and we're so very lucky that the ratio of teachers to students is all about building relationships with these kids (Clarice, admin 08, SS)

In fact, the low student-teacher ratios are a distinguishing element between special and regular schools and are perceived to produce numerous positive effects such as a more intimate environment, the possibility of employing an individualized approach, better communication, and fostering more meaningful relationships where the student is not just a number:

In terms of the, of our effectiveness […] I can say I've heard the most from the students as well as the parents, is "I was always too scared to ask questions. So it's just the nature of a learning environment where there is 35 students, if you feel weak and you feel self-conscious, then you are not going to ask questions and then it's just a vicious cycle and in the end you're going to be completely disengaged. So […] our schools are so small, and we have the time and the opportunity to make those personal connections, but regardless of what I do, I think just the fact that there's only 10 of them in the class, just the nature of the school, makes it more conducive for them to be able to engage and to get passed all of this other stuff, but regardless of what I do, or what they are doing, just the nature of the school, just the fact that there so few kids in the school, I think that's the most important factor (Leila, teacher 18, SS)

Additionally, low teacher-student ratios made it possible to effectively tackle safety issues and various forms of intimidation that may go unaddressed in regular schools, according to Maria (admin 09, SS):

The first while in school, especially with the junior schools because we have a little more time, obviously we have to teach them things, but we're not preparing for like crucial exams, we spend a lot of time just making school a nice place again, somewhere they want to be and actively look forward to, really tackling like this idea of being safe, just like more emotionally, there's a lot of like sort of lower level racism and homophobia and that kind of stuff I think that slips through very easily in bigger schools, but when you're 20 kids, that's how small we are, you hear it all and so you can actually tackle it all and make it safer in that sense (Maria, admin 09, SS)

4.3.2.2. Support for Learning Difficulties

The perceived positive effects of low student-teacher ratios and their consequences of fostering meaningful relationships overflow to the support offered specifically related to learning difficulties:

> *It's individualized, so we're specifically addressing individual students, so it's more, I mean we've always been taught that education is student-based, but when you're teaching 30 students [in a regular school], I don't think it is student-based, you're really just trying to find some common ground to be able to teach them the method, so maybe it's something that could be, it could be considered more student-based education, but in the real sense, because we're given a physical situation where it's possible, whereas in a regular school, you don't have that possibility* (Leila, teacher 18, SS).

While individualization emerged as one beneficial learning support measure, the ease of differentiating due to small class sizes was perceived as a significant benefit and was also the main strategy employed to support students with their learning difficulties:

> *I think most of our teachers, but not always, are a lot more willing to try to do things in the class as opposed to typical sit in the front and teach with the PowerPoint or whatever, not to say that doesn't happen, but in general I think that people are really trying a lot of different things, differentiation like that would be impossible in a class of 35* (Clarice, admin 08, SS)

However, even with successful differentiation strategies, ministerial protocols that require all students to follow a common program with common evaluations were perceived as unrealistic expectations in terms of preparing students for them in special schools:

> *Because we don't have the option of actually modifying the curriculum, which is something that I thought going into special education, I thought there would be more flexibility with the actual curriculum, but that's not, that's been the one door or the one gate that has never been opened...Sometimes it makes [my job] impossible* (Leila, teacher, 18, SS).

When a student receives a difficulty code, in some cases, the curriculum can be modified from the common prescribed program (as opposed to adapting the existing program). However, as previously mentioned, since student assessment and coding processes or information pertaining to them are often unavailable, curriculum modifications are not possible, as detailed by Leila (teacher 18, SS) above.

Moreover, government administered end-of-year evaluations appeared to add further hindrance to student success since the differentiation strategies that were employed were perceived as inadequate supports in terms of meeting the pre-established ministerial evaluation standards. Teachers sometimes felt like they were faced with an impossible task:

> *[The students] just get aged forwards, aged forwards, but once they are in secondary 4, well that's impossible cause there's a government exam, so every single other teacher has just pushed them forward, I'm not blaming anybody else, this is the system, this is how the system is, it's more conducive for them, maybe there's pressure on them to follow their age group and then we have students that have never passed their math course in their life and they are up against the same government exams that the whole province is being, so when you ask me what do we do, I find that I kind of do backflips and try to perform magic* (Kristian, teacher 19, SS).

Therefore, despite the benefits of easier individualization and differentiation made viable through low student-teacher ratios in special schools, teachers continue to perceive systemic obstacles that make meeting students' academic needs difficult to impossible.

4.3.2.3 Support for Behavioral Difficulties

Given that behavioral difficulties was one of the main reasons that students were placed in special schools, this final subsection outlines the strategies that were put in place to address them. Overall, personnel cited anger management, restorative justice and non-punitive discipline as the main supports. However, the distinction between the latter and the practices employed in regular schools were not always apparent, as will be detailed below.

In line with the attachment-based approach that seems to be a defining characteristic of special schools, anger management strategies were mobilized in order to maintain attachment and promote dialogue through physical activity:

> *So, when I see two kids have a conflict, I'm literally going to say […] "so what we're going to do now, is we are going to do push-ups", and they look at me all like "what? What do you mean we're going to do push-ups"? […] "You have all this tension in you, but you need to redirect that in a positive way, you're using a weak skill set, let me give you a strong skill set, take that energy and build you up, so we're going to go down, we do 50 push-ups". They actually do it, cause I do it with them. Then there's a conversation that happens afterwards*

[…] because, if you're going to act like that which is to me, the lowest of the low, I'm going to tell you how to get up from that low, up and down until you realize that if you go that low ever again, and you feel like you can't control yourself, I want you to understand you can get up from there, you can get up from anything (Devon, behavioral technician 16, SS).

Other ways of addressing certain behaviors that were deemed unacceptable by school personnel while maintaining attachment included employing a restorative justice approach. This entailed responding to student outbursts with consideration for their life circumstances and restoring the student-staff relationship subsequently as illustrated by an administrator:

*I spoke to the staff member [who was the target of the outburst]...and I asked them quite simply "what do you need for it to be made whole", you know? And just a simple conversation and acknowledgment that, you know, the student owning the things that she shouldn't have done was sufficient...The staff member didn't expect a formal apology, I think he might actually have gotten one, but he didn't expect one, and so when we were taking the student back in the school, we also made it clear to her that she had to have conversations to make it right, but that's it, that's all, there was no extra suspensions, there was no expectations of a letter of apology would be written or any of those sort of things[...] So it's about repairing a relationship with the person who is wronged. (*Doug, admin 06, SS).

In this case, the restoration is not about paying a debt for a wrong-doing, but rather about addressing the relational component and making sure that the attachment is maintained through dialogue and caring. The incident did not go unaddressed, but it did go unpunished, while the student was reassured that she remained a part of her school community, even though the behaviors she exhibited went against the expectations of the school.

Further, special school personnel underscored the importance of a non-punitive disciplinary approach: *There's no punitive, there's nothing punitive, at least I don't see it as being punitive, the students may* (Hugh, admin 07, SS). In fact, special school personnel drew contrasts to how they handled discipline comparatively to regular schools. According to special school staff, their specialized setting allows for the consideration of emotional aspects, which incite a more compassionate approach, rather than one that condemns the students:

Naturally I do it differently because I have a lot more flexibility. Whereas in the bigger [regular] schools, things are a bit more black and white, whereas here I'm dealing with the

emotions, the happiness, the sadness, the extremes of how a person may feel, and so basically what it means is that I like to bring it in and have a sit-down or the support staff has a sit-down and says: "Ok, what happened? How?" You know? So, you can't punish or discipline something that is already in pain, when something's in pain and feeling bad. You can't go more than that, when something is hurt, you can't give it more pain (Hugh, admin 07, SS)

So what happens is that students don't stop having outbursts when they get into [special schools], but the price of those outbursts drops almost down to zero, because the adults who are either the target of the outbursts or at least around when the outburst takes place are not going to make a mountain out of a molehill. The child won't be suspended for some, you know, a certain amount of time, and the child won't be made to feel as though they've like broken some law or permanently damaged a relationship, and therefore what that does is if you think about it like a speed bump, if a behavioral outburst is a speed bump on the road, the child being placed in [a special] school drops that speed bump as close to the ground as possible, and so that will help them to get back to focus on academics as much as possible and to enjoy focusing on academics and to be less and less defined by the negative behaviors and more and more defined by just who they are as human being if that makes sense (Doug, admin 06, SS).

However, despite the specificities that characterize special schools as alternative spaces for students with behavioral difficulties and the participants' seemingly strong convictions about the negative effects of punitive discipline, such practices were in fact present. Like regular schools, terms such as *suspensions* and *expulsions* were avoided and thus perceived as non-punitive and beneficial to students and families:

So, it's not a suspension, so they go to a different program where the behavior gets addressed...Just that so they're are not in school the next day, but maybe they're working with somebody else in another space or maybe they are in a different program for a week to work on that issue, whatever that issue is (Kristian, teacher 19, SS).

We don't want anyone to feel as though we gave up on them, so we hang on to them and then it's at that point where their parents or guardians contact the school or the principal and say: Listen, it's not working. We may come to that, but it won't be on a piece of paper saying "expelled", it will be bringing in the parent, sensitizing him to the fact that "you know what? It's not working here so well, the potential is there, but the dynamics that exists here are... This is like an unhappy individual right now and by keeping them here, I don't think it would be

conducive to making them succeed, so perhaps in another place it can be done". In most cases, when things are approached in that matter, when there are no tempers and we understand that we're not happy, we're not succeeding, what can we do to help? Well at that moment something is done in such a way that it doesn't feel like an expulsion but more like a transfer to another department or another unit or some other floor at a service place (Hugh, admin 07, SS)

While the terms were modified or framed otherwise, essentially the actions of removing and excluding students remained the same, and converged to those employed in regular schools. In some cases, the reasons for removal from school were not as clear. Clarice (admin 08, SS) explained that anybody that she perceived as polluting the school environment would be excluded:

The one place where I have a line is if there is a child who's poison to the other children. They've got to go...they are a bad influence on other students, they are creating an ugly climate in the school, whatever it is, that's when I wash my hands, when they are harmful to other children (Clarice, admin 08, SS).

Further, in alignment with the regular school protocol, special school participants expressed a zero-tolerance view when it came to drugs, violence and a concern for the safety and security of others:

Well I think in most cases it was dealing drugs [that resulted in an expulsion]... this guy had his legs wrapped with marijuana in Zip-lock bags, so he was expelled. There was another kid who came with a knife, he was expelled. Yes...safety, when the population is at risk, yes, we try to take care of that, absolutely, when there's been threats, things of that nature, or fights where they can't be in the same building (High, admin 07, SS)

Given that special schools tend to receive students that have been expelled from regular schools for behavior-related reasons, one might question what would happen to a student who gets expelled from a place that could be considered the "last possible stop" of their educational journey. One administrator explained that these students risk ending up in the adult education sector:

So, here it's adult ed and I have a big problem with that, because I think there has to be... We used to, and I still think we do, get the more difficult kids and there needs to be some place between [this school] and adult ed, because the kids don't survive in adult ed and I think there has to be someplace set up for the kids who really are difficult (Maria, admin 09, SS)

However, members of a placement committee suggested that there are measures in place that prevent students who have been expelled from special schools from ending up in adult education:

> *We've created a lot of different programs in order to meet the needs of even those kids that can't function in a [special] school, you know? And even if they're over 16, so even if we don't have an obligation like to...You know? Cause it's been determined that they are a disruption to others, where you know. they're not allowing other students to get their education by being in class or whatever, we've actually created programs where it's even smaller than a [special] school and it's more one-on-one support just to get the kids through their exams and their education, so we have sort of a net (*Rita, guidance counselor/PCM 02, SS*)*

Although special schools are deemed by the participants as better equipped to deal with behavioral issues than regular schools, punitive approaches to discipline such as suspensions and expulsions tended to be reproduced. In sum, students who were placed in special schools for behavioral difficulties who continued to exhibit them were in turn placed in *special–special schools.* This practice raises concerns as they sometimes lead to students being placed in juvenile detention centers, a situation that seems to affect Black students more than others:

> *We have four students in lockdown right now and four of them are of color...one of the schools is a [juvenile detention] center[...] They are placed there by the court, so we're not involved in their placement, but many of them have come from [special] schools often...I would say that they are a disproportionately represented group* (Linda, admin/PCM 01, SS).

Therefore, based on the administrator's account, there appears to be a link between blackness, special school placement and the criminalization of Black youth.

4.1.3 Reflections on Black Student Referrals

The concerns expressed by the institutional actors about individual student behaviors and collective student safety and well-being entailed reflections on how Black students may be specifically affected throughout the entire special education process. According to regular school administrators, referrals based on behaviors do not emanate from a single occurrence, but rather a widespread analysis of multiple situations that are determined to hinder student success and school safety. It is noteworthy that administrators commented on the differential treatment toward Black students that may be circulating in terms of said behavioral disturbances:

We have a lot of students who struggle...Black students who struggle in terms of the code of conduct, and you know, you think about how it's written and like what cultural context it's coming from, and how that might differ from other cultural context, like if this was a school in Jamaica, would it be a different code of conduct, like what would be different between our school code of conduct and in a school of different, of similar academic whatever in Jamaica, what would be different? You know? And like we have kids who get sent to the office for dunking on the rim [a popular basketball manoeuvre], no white kids can dunk, but we have a lot of Black kids who can dunk, and they get sent to the office, and I wonder like, is that fair? But like if I could dunk, I would dunk every day, you know? (Justin, admin 11, RS)

The administrator's reflection on the code of conduct illustrates that he is questioning the dominant cultural norms of the school and the disadvantage they may cause for Black students. He also has difficulty ascertaining how demonstrating athletic prowess would hinder student success and warrant disciplinary action, further illustrating his concern regarding differential treatment of Black students in the referral process. In further compound, a special school teacher shared:

I would definitely say that [Black students] do experience things differently. There's, a view of them, like there's less tolerance for them. Like two students can do the same type of behavior, [Black students] will get harsher punishments for reasons that they're not sure of. So they attribute [getting kicked out of regular schools] to race, or they'll get, you know, like the reasons that they have been referred to [a special school] (Conrad, teacher 20, SS)

Interestingly, although this teacher pointed to the differential treatment Black students are subjected to, she underscored that they may attribute their placement in special schools to race, but did not acknowledge that herself. An administrator made a relatively more explicit link:

I do think there are a lot of staff around Black students who have a certain attitude or tonal, or wardrobe or slang bias, or whatever. The last time I taught in a mainstream environment, which was a long time ago, the average Black student had a much larger chance of being stigmatized for those things I mentioned than anybody else, maybe that plays on how they get identified as needing a special education placement and that's probably not fair for them (Doug, admin 06, SS).

Thus, the administrator not only raised a possible element of injustice in the placement process but seems to suggest that the needs of the Black students are not being considered, as stipulated by regular school personnel.

In terms of a general sense of belonging to the school community, a special education teacher noted the sense of alienation Black students may contend with and how that might play a part in their special education placement process:

> *We talk about a sense of community...Feeling safe, a safe space, and if you don't see, if you don't find any sense of community in school, you're not going to be safe in school, so perhaps Black students because they are a minority, if they are a minority in school, in high school, perhaps it's that lack of community that makes it difficult to engage in school, they will engage in a lot of stuff in school, but perhaps maybe on the curriculum, and that's basically what is going to send them in the [special education] system, so perhaps it is that, that just lack of sense of community or safe space, because if you feel like you're always being targeted, you don't feel like you're in a safe space, and we've done, we've done des formations [trainings] where anytime you're in a sense of, if you're feeling any stress or any sense of fight or flight, you're not learning, so that's when you're not able to learn when you're in that, in that state, and if you spend your, most of your school time in that state, then they're not learning and that could be perceived in many, many different ways and quite often the solution will be to send then to [a special education]system* (Kristian, teacher 19, SS).

Along the same lines, another special school teacher suggested that Black students may use aggression as a defense mechanism when they feel a sense of non-belonging or insecurity:

> *It triggers something and then quite often they put up a defense and bad behavior. Aggressive behavior is quite often a very effective defense* (Leila, teacher 18, SS).

As such, special school personnel seem to take into account the events leading up to aggressive behaviors. In this case, Black students may be referred to special schools for simply coping with feelings of alienation and unsafety rather than a "behavioral problem". This is particularly noteworthy when considering the concerns raised about some assessment and coding practices:

> *I've even seen in terms of who gets a code 2*[15] *and who gets a 12*[16]*, you remember what the codes are too right? The difference between a code 2 and the 12 is the color of the child's skin, like it's just something that I've seen* (Clarice, admin 08, SS)

> *Some of the codes that come with [the students]...I'm reflecting on some of the students that I've taught [in special schools] and some of the students I was like, "what are you doing here? Like, what are you doing here? You don't fit the description of a [special needs] student like that". We had this one [Black] student who came to us with a behavioral code, disruptive, nicest kid I ever met, not one behavior problem with him, smoked too much weed, but outside of that, like not one negative interaction between him and an adult in our building and he was beloved. So where did this behavior code come from? Where? He didn't fail anything, so where did the reference come from? Like we were stumped* (Conrad, teacher 20, SS)

Both of these members of the special school personnel are highlighting the impact that race, and more specifically, blackness, can have on code attribution. Notably, there is a perceived increased likelihood toward a behavioral difficulty code for Black students, which leaves Conrad (teacher 20, SS) feeling baffled. Along the same lines, a special school administrator shared:

> *I have a strong suspicion that Black students are massively overrepresented in the [special education] network. Now, how they come, because we don't select students, because they get sent to us, I don't want to indulge speculations as to how that takes place* (Linda, admin/PCM 01, SS).

The administrator's suspicions were based on her observations of the student compositions in various schools. Her use of the terms "strong" and "massively" seems to indicate that there may be more certainty underlying her statement. Yet, her discomfort talking about race prevented her from giving any serious attention to this observation or elaborating on this matter, as she explained:

> *I as a Caucasian woman feel uncomfortable labeling somebody's race or ethnicity, so I don't feel comfortable saying "well this is a Black kid, and therefore this Black kid needs extra help because they're a Black kid", I don't feel comfortable saying that, right? Like that makes me very uncomfortable because who am I to place a label on somebody's ethnicity? That would be problematic for me. And as a classroom teacher and as an administrator, I have my entire*

[15] A "catchall" special needs code that may be attributed to a student for a very wide array of reasons

[16] A code that specifically designates a behavioral difficulty

career, worked very hard to treat my students equitably understanding that they are individuals, and if they need something different than what I'm giving somebody else, they'll explain that to me, but I'm very hesitant to put labels or constraints on a student based on their outward physicality (Linda, admin/PCM 01, SS).

This sentiment was echoed by most of the participants who self-identified as white or white-passing:

I'm feeling uncomfortable, I'm feeling like I want to, I need to say things in a certain way or it's going to be perceived as, as being racist and I'm not White, but I'm not Black, and so I feel uncomfortable having this conversation, I think it's an important conversation to have, I'm glad I'm having it, but just to be honest with you, I'm uncomfortable (Leila, teacher 18, SS)

Nevertheless, special school personnel perceive their schools as overall better environments than regular school for Black students:

Black students are being stigmatized and treated a certain way in the mainstream school system and therefore are more likely to end up in special education placements, that shouldn't be happening. That requires fixing at the level of the mainstream school system and as long as it continues to be unfixed, well it's better for them if they end up here where they stop getting stigmatized, they stop getting treated a certain way , and when they speak with a tone in their voice that isn't necessarily inappropriate but it's just culturally different (Doug, admin 06, SS)

Thus, despite the various organizational challenges perceived by special school personnel discussed previously, they believe that they are providing a better option in terms of relationships with students and their general physical and emotional well-being, especially for Black students who they acknowledge are at a disadvantage in regular schools.

4.4. Synopsis of the Special Education Placement Process

From an institutional perspective, the special education placement process begins in regular schools based on personnel's perceptions of students' academic and behavioral difficulties. When they are perceived as not meeting the school's standards, a referral is made. Regular school personnel perceive this as a last resort following various unsuccessful interventions, with the goal of ensuring their well-being. In contrast, special school personnel believe that these referrals may often be done in haste without any acceptable justification and may be serving the needs of regular schools rather than the students. Once a referral is made, a special education committee is implicated. Both regular and special

school personnel believe these committees make decisions about student placements. However, according to the committee members, these decisions are limited to where students might be placed, rather than whether or not they are placed. These decisions seem to be made by default through the referral. In further contrast, regular school personnel were concerned that students were not gaining fair access to assessments, while special school personnel believed there were racist coding practices at play that unjustifiably targeted Black students for behavioral difficulty codes. However, in many cases, students are not assessed.

In terms of transitions to special schools, according to the personnel in these milieus, students are often left waiting for unreasonable lengths of time before they are placed, costing them valuable instructional time and further fragilizing their academic success. Moreover, effective communication between the referring and the receiving schools rarely happens. Student files are often inaccessible or incomplete; determining the student's needs falls on the special school personnel through a trial and error approach.

In special schools, personnel contend with bureaucratic barriers, as well as team dynamics that compromise their ability to meet the special needs of their students, notably when it comes to ministerial exam and managing behavioral incidents. Nevertheless, special school personnel perceive themselves as advantageously positioned in terms of their low student-teacher ratio, which allows them to spend more time building and nurturing interpersonal relationships and differentiating their teaching with more efficiency. In terms of discipline, they believe they employ a non-punitive approach. However, despite the positive wording of their disciplinary measures, some of the exclusionary practices they denounced in regular schools, such as suspensions and expulsions, were replicated. Although students were referred to special schools for behavioral issues, they were referred out of special schools for these same issues. The impact of these practices on Black students is particularly concerning as they are linked to their criminalization. In the next chapter, the special education placement process will be exposed from the perspective of Black students.

Chapter 5

Presentation of the Research Results: Counter-Stories of the Special Education Placement Process According to Black Students Experiences

Following the institutional description of the special education placement process, this chapter concerns this same process based on the students' experience in the form of a counter-story. More precisely, the results based on 20 interviews with students enrolled in special schools across the island of Montreal and its suburbs, who self-identified as Black, will be presented. It begins with the general findings from the thematic analysis surrounding the collective representations among the participants regarding their school experiences throughout their placement process, followed by the results of the typological analysis which allowed for finer precisions to be made in terms of how the placement processes unfolded. In coherence with the theoretical framework and methodology previously presented, this chapter is meant to foreground the student experiences as they stand on their own, rather than to compare their stories with those of the personnel. However, some major contrasts between these two perspectives will be highlighted in chapter 6.

5.1. General Findings Among Student-Participants: Mainstream Misery

While the corpus of this study consists of 20 students' unique counter-stories from diverse Black communities and educational pathways, several common experiences were revealed through the data analysis. As such, the student experiences in regular schools with regards to their well-being and relationships with their peers, as well as their collective perceptions of the placement process, will be elaborated.

5.1.1. Regular Schools: Compromised Safety and Problematic Peers

Regardless of the level of affluence of the neighborhoods where they attended school across the island of Montreal and its suburbs, the academic program, or the linguistic sector[17], regular schools were described by the participants as distressing places, where they often had their first encounters with drugs, bullying, various forms of violence, and engagement with the police. Despite some positive aspects such as stimulating academic and extracurricular programs, the participants' pathways

[17] While this research was conducted in English schools, several students began their educational pathways in the French sector prior to transferring to the English sector.

beginning in elementary school, can be generally characterized by exposure to emotionally and physically dangerous circumstances, as well as negative and traumatic interactions with peers.

The environment in regular schools was described as chaotic, overwhelming, and unsafe. Students were confronted with hostile and sometimes life threatening circumstances circulating in the school hallways. As described by Karyn, fighting was rampant and people carrying weapons was not exceptional:

> *Like you'd walk down the hallways, you can't walk down the hallways without seeing someone strapping someone [threats made with weapons], like someone was always fighting...there's fights, there's drama* (Karyn).

Participants recalled regular public schools as places where they first became involved with the "wrong crowd", where they were encouraged to skip school and experiment with drugs, as described by Amiyna and Andy:

> *So Atwood Academy was the school where I found out about drugs. Oh Lord! Atwood Academy. That was a different vibe. There was like nobody really to hold your hand or telling you to get in line. It's mostly about doing your own thing...I met a few friends, I smoked weed...I think high school really fucked me over because that's when I seen so much diversity that is just like everybody wants to be a part of. I was smoking weed, skipping school because all my friends were skipping school (*Amiyna).

> *I mean at first I was good, like I wasn't really getting in any trouble but eventually I started to realize, like I don't know, I was just like acting reckless maybe because I was just in sec 1[grade 7], I was experimenting. But like I first smoked weed in River Heights, I don't know if I like became a bad kid but like definitely, I did not have the same mentality as before. Like before I thought it was like very important to like go to school, finish school. (*Andy).

In addition to peer pressure, participants reported various types of bullying, intimidation, and violence at the hands of their peers. These circumstances tended to occur through sexist, racist, and discriminatory linguistic remarks and actions. Some female participants endured sexual harassment from boys in their age group, involving general remarks about their anatomy as recounted by Evelyn: *I was like mostly bullied...Like I went through a fast growth, so obviously I was tall or like my boobs*

were starting to grow, so like I didn't look like everybody (Evelyn); to full-blown smear campaigns led by "boyfriends" intended to humiliate them, as described by Amiyna:

> *I had a boyfriend, and one day he asked me "send me a nude" so I sent him pictures of my titties...the next day I come to school, the whole school knows about it. Whatever. Now, I'm just being called a hoe, I'm being called a thot. My sister's laughing at me - like "you're an idiot". Everybody just doesn't want to be my friend anymore. And then my grades start slipping down (Amiyna).*

Further, many students encountered racism and its psychological and academic consequences as early as elementary school. For Khamiah, being singled out by peers as "mulatto" had an impact on her confidence:

> *I didn't really like it...I don't know, it was making me feel like something was wrong with my skin or something...like I didn't really like people like calling me up like on my skin you know?* (Khamiah).

Similarly, as a new immigrant from St-Vincent, Kendrick reported becoming aware of his blackness for the first time in his elementary school in the French sector, when children from his class refused to play with him:

> *I didn't understand racism until I was at least 10 years old because I used to like, everyday after school, like my mom, she used to tell me why these kids [were] acting like that. So she told me like "it's because of how you're Black"...so it kind of took me some time to like understand why those children were acting so different [...] like "brown skin, you guys like, you guys are not allowed to play here", those kind of stuff* (Kendrick).

Marcus, who also began his educational pathway in the French sector, encountered both racism and linguicism from peers as a Black anglophone boy in grade 2, who had not yet mastered the French language:

> *Just, they were always just racist like let's say I wouldn't be able to say some words in French, they'd just call me like "you don't know French stupid [n-word]. [N-word], it was like the [n-word] most of the time [...] They were like "you don't even know how to speak French properly, you don't know how to pronounce words properly", cause there's like grammar words...like*

those type of things. And they'd just call me [the n-word] whatever... like just racist, racist kids (Marcus).

Overall, the participants perceived regular schools as hostile spaces where they were forced to contend with various intersecting forms of bullying through race, gender, sexuality and language-based intimidation from their peers. These experiences appear to have had a direct impact on their motivation as their perceptions of the importance of school wavered, their grades were negatively affected and they engaged in skipping school. These effects will be further detailed in section 5.2.

5.1.2. Getting "Kicked Out": Opacity of the Placement Process

While the participants underscored the physically and emotionally unsafe behaviors from others they endured in regular schools, issues pertaining to their own behavior were a common dimension that got them placed in special school. However, they were generally unaware that they were being placed. In fact, the placement process was interpreted by the students as simply being "kicked out" of regular schools because of their behavior or because of their academic performance.

I just got a whole bunch of detentions, of suspensions and it was just not working well anyways, so yes, I just had to...well, they kicked me out! (Chris)

I got kicked out like a month ago [for] anger issues [...] I got kicked out because of my foul mouth (Elijah)

Most of [my friends and I] got kicked out, some of them was for their grades [...] they were just getting kicked out, for like getting in trouble, but not like seriousness. It was just like little things and then they just got expelled (Kevin)

In other words, students did not seem aware that they had undergone a placement process, they rather considered their presence in a special school as the result of culminating events or disciplinary measures involving their removal from the regular school environment. They were also unaware of the special education labels they had been institutionally assigned. When questioned about "special education" or "special needs", many participants (8) did not know what these terms meant. One of them speculated:

Special education? Like I don't know, special education. I don't really know, like extra help? Cuz that's not being like special, you just need extra help. There's nothing wrong with that.

You could call a kid that needs a tutor retarded then, it's like dumb. It's ignorant for people to say that. I never said that. A school's a school. So it's like, I think, it's like, whatever (Ryan).

Ryan's response shows the stigma that can be associated with a label or a placement in a special school. Students who had expressed that they had a better idea of what special needs/education meant, shared a similar viewpoint:

Tya: Do you consider yourself a special education student?

Duane: No, that makes it sound...Ummm no, but special education sounds like something that umm slower people like. I'm not sure, sounds like something like people that have trouble, real issues learning, go to, I'm not sure [...] But it depends on the person at the end of the day cause some people can be like, I don't know...

While Duane confirmed that he knew what special education meant, he appeared to have difficulty explaining it. However, he seemed to believe that it is a system reserved for students who have "real issues" which could be associated with severe intellectual disabilities. Other participants employed descriptors such as "slow", "dumb", "retarded", all terms they wanted to dissociate themselves from. Therefore, placement in "special schools" were not perceived as placements in "special education": *[special schools], they are not for dumb kids, it's just kids who need help* (Richard). In fact, for the sake of clarity, coherence, and confidentiality, the term "special school" is used throughout this dissertation, however, students employed various other terms that did not connote a "special" environment to refer to non-regular schools.

Marcus shared that he had been in a learning environment with students with "special needs" and he felt he didn't belong there:

I didn't like that school whatsoever. It's just weird. The kids there are retarded. Sorry...Cause I don't think, like they couldn't learn. Like. Just because I'm there with those kids, I couldn't learn. They don't want to learn. They're not there to learn. They're there to do something else. I don't know what they're doing in that class...Weird kids it's really for special ed, some kids when you see, like when you come to the school like some kids would be normal, and some kids would be like... eh this kid has a problem, you could see it [...] Ok, I don't really mean like retarded, I mean, it's not like, it doesn't like...they don't make smart decisions. Like they're not really smart in what they do, I think I should say. (Marcus).

In this excerpt, Marcus attempted to explain the difference between himself and students who would require special education. When Marcus apologized and backtracked on the use of the word “retarded” he seemed to realize the offensiveness that is charged in that term, but wished to convey the lack of *smartness* he observed, something that he did not associate to himself. He seemed to think that “special needs” entailed not being smart or something you could “see” such as a visible developmental disorder. His perceptions were shared by other participants:

> *Well here [special school]...I haven't met any kids with autism or any real disabilities really, so I don't think they do that here, but in my elementary school they would have a class for the kids with like severe autism and stuff like that, like they can't talk or anything like that* (Juliette).

When Evelyn was referred to a special school that specifically serves students with developmental disabilities including intellectual disorders, behavioral and emotional disturbances, autism spectrum disorders, down syndrome, anxiety and severe learning disabilities, she acknowledged that she struggled with anxiety, but she thought that a school like that was not the right choice for her:

> C*ause I'm like...I wouldn't fit in [there] because the needs of those kids are like different than mine...their special care needs, that's why the special care counsellors are working with them* (Evelyn).

When offered an institutional definition of special education upon request during the interview, Ryan and Duane pondered what this meant to them:

> *Well, I’m in [a special school] and I just, I need extra help, I need many different ways of teaching... but it’s nothing that I have to be ashamed of, I don’t feel like there’s anything wrong with being a special education student. It’s not like you’re in “special ed”* (Ryan).

> *Technically I guess I am [a special education student] but I don’t know, just because it sounds weird that it could be a different context. You know how like in normal schools they have like those special classes for uhh like the slower kids, that’s kinda how it sounds like, but like yeah it makes sense that this school, yeah I guess I’m a “specially educated” student I guess [...] It’s because I got placed here* (Duane).

In both cases, placements in special schools produced a special needs identity for the students that did not exist prior. While Ryan and Duane had the opportunity to reflect on this mechanism, the participants generally did not have an awareness that they had been through a special education

placement process. Many did not know what special education meant, when they did, they didn't self-identify as a student with special needs. Those who were officially assigned ministerial difficulty codes according to their student files (5 participants) were also unaware of these special needs designations.

Similarly, all participants were on record as having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), yet an overwhelming number of them either didn't know what it was, whether they had one, or they did not or could not remember contributing to it. When asked about their IEP they provided answers like: *"I don't really know what that is"* (Anthony; Raquelle), *or "What is that?"(*Kevin*), "I've never heard of the word IEP"* (Andy*), "I don't think I have one" (*Juliette*), "I don't remember it" (*Khamiah*), "I think I do, but I don't know it personally" (*Chris*).*

Richard, one of the few participants who was aware of his IEP to some extent shared:

> *Richard: I think [I have an IEP], I think if you go to [a special school] you already have done it*
>
> *Tya: Ok, do you remember seeing it? Do you remember contributing to it?*
>
> *Richard: You could contribute to it?*
>
> *Tya: Yes*
>
> *Richard: I don't even understand, like what do you mean contribute to it?*
>
> *Tya: So an IEP is an individual education plan, the way it's set up is that you're supposed to build a plan for your education with your parents and the school staff*
>
> *R: No, I've never even heard of that before*
>
> *T: Ok, so you've never touched your IEP? You can't tell me anything about it, you don't know what it looks like?*
>
> *R: No, is that odd?*

Likewise, Karyn does not appear to have been implicated in the process of creating her IEP to any larger extent than those who were unaware of their existence:

Karyn: I was just like what the fuck is this? I'm not like this, so I just handed [the IEP] to my mom, like "you deal with that"

Tya: Ok, so is it accurate to say that you weren't involved in the input that was in there?

Karyn: No, I wasn't, neither was my mom, they just made us sign it I think

The participants' responses indicated that they are not implicated in their IEPs in a meaningful way, and they don't have even a basic understanding of its purpose or how it could benefit them. What can be drawn from the student responses is that they were prevented from fully participating in their own special education placement process, namely through the inaccessibility of information both in terms of their official socioacademic profile and the support measures that may be available to them as "special education" students. Given the opacity that characterizes the institutional dimensions at play in the participants' special education placement process, the following section will provide a finer account of the students' experiences throughout the process.

5.2 Typology of Student Placements: Composite Characters

This section presents the typological analysis of the data, which constitutes the composite characters of the composite counter-story. It consists of four composite characters based on the experiences shared by the students regarding the special education placement process. These configurations can best be characterized as 1) *voluntary, 2) protected, 3) forced,* and *4) premature placements.* Thus, using empirical data, each composite character will be elaborated through the participants' specific experiences in regular schools, throughout the transition process, and in special schools. Finally, in coherence with the theoretical framework that prioritizes the student voices, a recapitulation of each placement process will be proposed based on the composite characters, accompanied by a vignette of a specific student's experience as an example of each. Interpretations of the data will be reserved for the following chapter.

5.2.1. Composite Character 1: Voluntarily Placed

The voluntary placement composite character concerns four participants (Ryan, Andy, Raquelle, Laura). As the name suggests, students in this configuration voluntarily enrolled themselves in special schools following challenging experiences in regular schools that they deemed unresolvable. In particular, students felt like they were being neglected academically and oversurveilled behaviorally. Ryan explained, when it came to academic support:

> *My math teacher didn't give a shit, like at all, at all, at all. I remember, he did not care if we failed or not...He'd like throw the paper in your face, he would like...First of all, sometimes he would leave class, he wouldn't be in class, he would like record himself, like um doing like the work and just explaining the work and that like bored the hell out of us, none of us would listen, he wouldn't even be in class! [...] He's a very like, one of those teachers who was just like: "If you fail, you fail kid, sorry, like I don't know what to tell you"* (Ryan).

Similarly, Raquelle underscored a teacher's unapproachable attitude when it came to her difficulties in math and how it affected her classroom behavior and self-esteem:

> *Honestly, I hated that school...I was still like bad at math and I got this really strict teacher and it was really hard for me to like cope in the class, so I just wouldn't talk or ask questions cause like if you asked a question that was, I would say like, "stupid" to her, she'd kind of scream at you and like make you feel...Like if I asked something, I'd kind of feel dumb for asking it cause it's like: "Oh, you should know that". You know what I mean? So, I wouldn't ask for help [...] I was just like I was fed up of it, cause I wasn't getting the help I needed* (Raquelle).

Raquelle's testimony regarding her reticence to asking for help is particularly relevant in interaction with her perception of how Black people may be judged as unintelligent:

> *Sometimes people think like Black people aren't smart and it's really, like why? You know? I know a lot of Black people that are really smart, so it's like why are you degrading Black people and putting Black people down? [...] Because it's just the fact that normally like in classes, you don't really see, like a Black person raise their hand and be like: "Oh, I know the answer". Or something like that, it's usually someone else that's not Black and I don't know, it just makes people feel some type of way, and especially like when you see outside and people around you put down Black people and other cultures and stuff like that, it's... I don't know, I feel like it impacts on people, not just Black people* (Raquelle).

As such, Raquelle seems to be suggesting that non-participation in classes may be perceived as a lack of intelligence, yet there may also be underlying factors that cause this to happen that have no relationship to intellectual capacity.

In terms of behavior, participants felt constantly under unjustified surveillance for menial issues such as being late or uniform violations:

> *You know when you're late, there's kids that are coming late more often like I was one of the kids that would come late a lot more often, but like, [the vice principal] was on my ass way more. Like there was kids who he would be like, "ok you have a [detention] after school", alright. Him, he would see me, like throughout the whole day he'd be like "don't forget huh, don't forget". He'd bother me, and bother me, it was like annoying me, so I was like I don't even wanna be here, let me just leave, he's just like bothersome, he just wouldn't leave me alone about it (Ryan).*

> *I didn't like [the regular school][...] and then they have uniform check, like if your skirt is like really short you have a detention and if you're not wearing the right uniform you have detention. It was unnecessary (Laura).*

Further, at the time of the data collection of this study, marijuana had been legalized for approximately a year in Canada. The medical, social, political and economic implications continue to be documented, as well as the benefits for certain segments of the population (Potter & Weinstock, 2019). When Andy discovered marijuana at his regular school and proceeded to experiment with it, he felt he became a target for the administration and teaching staff:

> *At first [the teachers] were good but then once I started smoking and once I been in trouble at school for smoking you can tell like they have a different perspective on you. Like I remember in like grade 7, grade 8, grade 9 like all the teachers loved me, it wasn't really anything bad but like once my friends started getting kicked out of the school, I guess they thought I was just like my friends. You can just tell like it's not the same type of feeling, like you know you kinda feel like unwelcomed because...like you have like a walking target on your forehead because like they're always gonna target you, they're always gonna be on your ass, like it's crazy* (Andy).

Andy believes that once he was assigned the label of "drug user" by personnel, there was no possibility of shedding this negative image. He was eventually labeled as a "drug dealer", an accusation he denies: *I was not selling no drugs. I was smoking weed and that was it* (Andy). Nevertheless, not only did Andy perceive himself as a target for oversurveillance but also as the target of "jokes" among teachers:

You know when someone says something but you can kind of hear like the truth come out in what they say. Like they would say a joke but I could hear the truth in the joke like they're trying to say something at the same time. I felt that with some of the teachers cause you can tell when they have staff meetings they definitely talk about us, or us smoking and like you can hear the jokes in the class and I'm like: Wow! They really do think we sell drugs in the school, like it's crazy! (Andy)

The various forms of perceived academic neglect, targeting, and the consequences that ensued, affected the participants' academic performance, motivation and self-esteem to varying degrees. In Raquelle's case, she was overcome with a sense of hopelessness and discouragement when faced with perceived indifference from her teachers:

In high school you have so much classes, so much homework to do and it was like me knowing that I wasn't getting the help that I wanted and needed, it was really hard for me, so I just like...I was always like oh, my god, like I'm going to fail, you know? Whatever, you know? I kind of had that attitude which was a bad attitude, and I'd get mad at myself because it was like I know that I can do it, but how am I supposed to do it if I don't get the help that I need, you know what I mean? (Raquelle).

For Ryan, his motivation, academic performance and generally, his educational trajectory seem to have been negatively affected from being regularly oversurveilled by an administrator:

Yeah, in sec 3 [grade 9] I just didn't care about school, I hated the school, I wanted to leave because of my [vice principal] he was really up my ass all the time, he was always bothering me about lates and stuff. I was late, but I mean like, it was like, he was just bothering me a lot, I didn't like it, and then it was like, I didn't care about math, I didn't care about anything, I was just chillin and stuff, I failed, and I had to go to WOTP [Work Oriented Training Path] [...] it did do a lot to my motivation, it just made me not want to come to school (Ryan).

Additionally, the sanctions associated to his "misbehaviors" evoked a sense of injustice, which tended to compound the behaviors that were already deemed problematic by the administration, which eventually led Ryan to feel indifferent:

I would skip my detention because I would feel like it's unfair, like sometimes I would come in like 2 minutes late and they would give me 30 minutes, I'd be like, "I'm not doing 30 minutes

> *for 2 minutes" like no, no and I would just leave and then I would have even more consequences. I'd like leave and then they'd be like: "oh yeah you have an hour tomorrow", and then I wouldn't do the hour and then they'd be like "you're suspended", I'd be like "ok".* (Ryan)

Andy explained that the unreasonable consequences to the behaviors that were perceived as problematic by personnel not only had a negative impact on his grades, but increased his reliance on marijuana:

> *My principal, he would threaten to...like it was very stupid, I don't know, like I was brought into his office and he would make me wait in his office for like 2 hours before he even spoke to me then he would speak to me saying like you know "do you think you could smoke at work, do you think you can do this, do that" and like I would always tell him no, but I felt like academically my marks were being affected because I was always taken out of class to be in the office, every single day or every second day I was in the office or I was getting my locker searched. I felt harassed, like it was crazy [...] Like they would search my locker, tell me to like empty my pockets, like I would come in from lunch time and like you'd just see the eye, like my principal just staring me in the eye to see if my eyes are red, like stuff like that [...] It made me not want to go to school. Like I remember there was a point in my life when I was just hanging out with my friends smoking and I never wanted to go to school because I felt like the second I walked in there I was gonna be a target, I hated school and like once I started being serious like I really did not care for my classes cause I knew I wasn't learning anything anyway being in the office, like I would sleep through classes I would just wait for school to end and then like I feel like instead of like making me turn away from weed it made me like want to go more towards it because I felt like smoking weed is not gonna give me problems but being in school will* (Andy).

Ultimately, the participants in this configuration became so fed up with the treatment they experienced in their regular schools that they took it upon themselves to improve their respective situations. Further, when Andy tried to change schools to better his situation, the administration created obstacles for him:

> *I told my principal one day, I'm like "I don't wanna be here anymore, I wanna go to [a different regular school]"and he told me he's gonna make sure I never ever change schools...He's like I'm gonna make sure you stay here until sec 5... And I told him like I was gonna try regardless, and I did try but they [two regular schools] said no* (Andy).

Andy also communicated that he was doing his best to cope during a time he felt he had nobody to rely on. At no point was he offered any form of intervention such as drug counselling regarding his marijuana use. Dealing with racism was an added burden to his already solitary struggles:

> *Most Black people that do experience racism in school, the way they cope with it is they try to like, you know, be the best person to show that you know, even though I'm Black, even though you're racist, I'm still gonna like thrive at my best. But I feel like me, I just like, you know, you can't really do much as a student, like you just kind of have to like live with it, because there isn't like no person that's really like, you know speaking for you* (Andy).

He was basically left to fend for himself. As a last resort, Andy decided to enroll himself in a special school:

> *I spoke with [administrators at a special school], they said that I had to get like a confirmation from your school that you can come. So I went to River Heights [regular school] and my principal was there but he didn't speak to me. I spoke to the guidance counsellor cause I heard it's the guidance counsellor that handles school switching or transferring and I basically told her like you know I don't want to stay here, I feel like I'm harassed by the principal. I'd rather go to [a special school], I know people get recommended to go [there] but I feel like it's gonna be best for me. And she said that "you don't have to leave but if you want to you can go" and like I told her I wanted to go, and like since then I've been going to [special school]* (Andy).

In other cases, regular schools used the threat of transferring students to special schools as a means of addressing perceived unacceptable behaviors:

> *They were like threatening us with it. Like "you're gonna go to [a special school]", like "we're going to kick you out if you don't focus on your work or if you fail again you're getting sent"[...]Like the school board, they send you there because you're doing bad things. That's what I thought it was* (Laura).

However, Laura decided that it would be to her advantage to choose a different school before she got "kicked out" for failing:

> *Me and friends, we all decided this [regular] school was really complicated. So we looked into [a special school]. Because, like we knew anyways, cause we were gonna fail. So you might as well change to another school before we have to repeat or they're going to change us* (Laura).

For these students who voluntarily transferred from regular schools, their transition process basically consisted of them contacting special schools directly and making one-on-one arrangements. This happened when they felt like they had no other choices. These decisions were made as a last resort to escape situations they perceived were impeding their success. To achieve this, they relied on recommendations from friends when choosing a special school. They did not mention the implication of any placement committee.

These students confirmed that once they transferred, they were able to find the academic support that had eluded them in regular schools in the form of individualized pedagogy, relevant feedback, positive reinforcement, and flexible expectations on the part of the personnel:

> *It was really like a stress relief between switching from [regular school] to [special school], cause it was like less stress...It's like you get the time that you need to finish your work and you get the help that you need like the one on one help, and they don't constantly give you homework like that, it's like if you don't finish this assignment in class, you take it home and finish it* (Raquelle).

> *If you really need their help they're like really like next to you, they're there. We're just getting teached the same here as [at regular school]. I still understand what they're teaching me but like I guess yeah, we are taught different, but we still get the same work though. Like they, still, when they teach us they're specific, they make sure that we're on top of it, like we know what they're talking about. At the other school, they'd just move on [...] [In the special school] they helped me like focus more on my work and... they'd tell me how I'm doing. Like every time if you did something good like you get an award or like a prize or something like that. So you'd get noticed for it around school* (Laura).

Similarly, caring and trusting relationships with the personnel emerged as an important aspect that transcended the boundaries of an institutional relationship, which student-participants cherished:

> *The teachers...I really really liked, [Leroy (a Black support worker)] was really nice. Like he talked to me, like he even made me cry because like, he was saying some things that I related to. Cause he saw that I was down, I wasn't happy, something happened and like, he talked to me about it. And like, he showed that he really really cares about his students [...] he's like REALLY good at math. He's like a math magician...I'm actually doing my work here* (Laura).

In Ryan's case, he considered his teachers more like family:

> *No, I love my teachers, they're not just teachers, they're family too, so it's ok, like, that's how I feel* (Ryan).

These types of support combined with being released from the pressure of performing academically with no support or being constantly targeted, not only appear to entail a sense of relief for the participants, but also a positive impact on their motivation and academic performance:

> *Me changing schools, it was a new atmosphere like, you know, I'm surrounded by new people. I don't see my principal and I don't see the teachers that like think I'm a drug dealer. So I felt like that motivates me to go to school more* (Andy)

> *I really liked it there and I had a good math teacher, and I started understanding math, and I was like wow! I could of understand this at [regular school] if I had this kind of help, and I looked at them and this is so simple, you know what I mean? And I was like oh, my god, like why couldn't I get this help before, you know? So, I was really happy that I changed schools* (Raquelle)

5.2.1.1. Recapitulation of the Voluntary Placement Process

Thus, the *Voluntary Placement Process* can be characterized by the participants' decisions to enroll in a special school by choice, as a last resort. Their experiences in regular schools entailed two main points of contention. On one hand, they recognized that they were having academic difficulties and could not access the help they needed to succeed, which according them, constituted academic neglect. On the other hand, students also experienced oversurveillance and harassment by staff members when it came to their behavior. This concerned daily expectations such as arriving to school on time, to extreme accusations of selling drugs. In both cases, they

Figure 1: Snapshot of Andy's Counter-Story

Andy is a 17-year old, grade 10 student, who enjoys fashion, basketball, history, and geography. His parents were born in Haiti, while he was born in the US. He moved with his family to Canada when he was seven years old. His parents opted to settle in Ottawa for his primary years so he could have access to English education in Quebec at a later date. His only memories of the catholic school he attended from K-6 were being one of the only Black people in the school, and a few visits to the principal's office for mischief. Andy attended a regular high school in Montreal between grades 7-10. His most memorable experiences consist of a series of negative occurrences including being the victim of racial targeting, oversurveillance, and microaggressions. Andy's decision to leave his regular high school caused him sadness since he would not graduate and go to prom with the peers he had known over his entire high school life. But he decided it was worth it to escape the consistent institutional scrutiny and harassment he was under. At the special school he enrolled in, he found a fresh start and a welcoming environment. However, he continued to struggle with math as he had over his entire educational trajectory, and did not feel like he would ever have the grades to get into college. He thus, resolved to pursue a trade.

became so overwhelmed and hopeless that they created and executed their own exit plan. The transfer to a special school generally occurred based on referrals from peers, by contacting the school administration directly, without the implication of a placement committee. Once the participants were enrolled in the special school of their choice, they expressed an appreciation for the academic support and family-like environment. Their motivation and academic performance improved, and they were relieved to escape the harassment or academic neglect they experienced in regular schools.

5.2.2 Composite Character 2: Protectively Placed

The second composite character *protectively placed,* concerns student referrals to special schools by personnel enacting "protective measures" as a response to students' social difficulties encountered in regular schools. The three students who underwent a protective placement (Juliette, Evelyne, Anthony), were facing various challenges related to their mental health such as anxiety and depression, as early as elementary school:

> *I remember in elementary school I would have to be taken out of class sometimes because I have anxiety...so when I was younger I used to have a habit of like biting my shirt a lot and stuff like that, so I had to be pulled out of class to take a walk [...] I know that it's an anxiety thing. Yes, I used to bite my lips a lot too, to the point where they got red* (Juliette).

Anthony recalled his state of depression starting in high school and the impact it had on his motivation. He explained that whenever he felt like he could overcome it, other obstacles would manifest and created a sort of never-ending cycle:

> *I was already not going to school because I was too depressed to get up from my bed, but when I felt motivated and I wanted to go, I couldn't go cause my [bus pass] was gone...I didn't have tickets on it and so, I couldn't go to school anyway, so then I had to go back home and I ask for money...there wasn't any money coming and nobody was like listening to me for my [bus pass], and so I had to redo grade 10* (Anthony)

In fact, it appears that the anxiety and depression the participants were dealing with were both a cause and effect of difficult relationships with peers, academic failure and lack of motivation. Evelyne described what it was like to deal with depression and anxiety in high school in terms of her interactions with peers and her academic performance:

High school I would say it was like a definitely a depressive state, like ...I was basically like on my own, caught still isolating myself, but then like I kind of started opening up like in sec 2 [grade 8] getting to know everybody, and when that started to happen it's kind of like somebody already had like read a book on me even though like I don't really know them, you know? So, like that all started and then that's when the drama starts, and then it's just like, with that I started focusing more on drama than I did on my work, and then like everything just went downhill from that...I was kind of tired of everything (Evelyn)

Since Evelyn explained that she liked to keep to herself, it was difficult for her to focus on her school work with the "drama" going on in her peer group, and her grades suffered. Being the only Black student in her class seems to have further compounded her difficulties:

I remember in [regular school] I was the only Black kid in my science class, cause there were not a lot of Black people there, so I always felt I needed to work twice as hard to prove that I'm smarter, you know just like everybody else in that class, cause I always felt that they identified me as straight, like dumb or just drop out of school early, you know? So, I pushed myself ten times harder to like just prove a point when I didn't have to (Evelyn).

Additionally, Evelyn recounted being bullied, as did the other participants in this configuration:

Some people would bully me because of the way I looked, because I had long hair and long eyelashes, and I was very quiet, so nobody knew if I was a girl or a boy (Anthony).

There was a situation with me and this guy, I'm not going to say much that happened, but he has a picture of me and he decided that it was ok to spread it around the school even though I didn't give him my consent, and then after that it just started this whole thing where everybody was just against me, calling me names like slut, whore and all that kind of thing, so then I don't know, it just got too out of control and I just wanted to leave, cause I didn't feel welcome anymore, everybody was turning against me (Juliette).

In Juliette's case, the sexual and gender-based bullying she endured seemed to deepen her depression and affect her grades. It was ultimately the defining reason for her transfer out of a regular school: *...and I was failing too, cause I was going through that crap [sexual harassment], so I was like, you know what? I don't want to be here anymore, I want to leave* (Juliette).

In terms of transitioning to special schools, while the participants in this configuration experienced academic difficulties much like the other participants of the study, a defining dimension for their transfers was the difficult social situation they were contending with. Therefore, even though they had a desire to change learning environments, it was the school personnel who initiated their placements in special schools, in contrast to their peers in the previous configuration (voluntary), who took it upon themselves:

> *I was struggling a lot especially in math, cause like I don't think the regular program was really for me, cause I struggled a lot, like I need extra help and I need to be away from kids [...] And then that's when the school suggested [a special school] instead...and I was like yes that would be better* (Juliette)

> *We were sitting in the office and they were saying that I'm a bright kid and that I can do a lot of work, it's just that I'm not putting the effort to hand in the homework, so they were sending me to [a special school] to help me out with that basically (Anthony)*

As such, according to the students, the transfers to special schools were presented as benevolent acts that would help with the social struggles that were affecting them academically:

> *My dance teacher actually went to [the guidance counselor] because I didn't talk to anybody, just her, and she knew that [the drama with peers] was really affecting me, so she went, she's the one that went to the guidance counsellor behind my back, which I got upset about, but then we all had like a meeting together and she was like showing me options and we were talking about like my grades and how it was better for me. At first like I didn't want to because I didn't want to leave, then after that it was like the end of the year and I didn't pass my math exam, so even though like if I wanted to stay I couldn't, so I had to come to [a special school], so I just chose [the one] closest to my house* (Evelyn)

Thus, the participants welcomed their placement in special schools. However in certain cases, the change in learning environment evoked feelings of anxiety:

> *I knew a few kids who went here, but that's because they got expelled for doing crazy stuff, so I always thought it was like ghetto people or like people who get high everyday, or like just kind of like bad kids who get expelled here come here, so I was like there's no way I'm going here cause I would not fit in here, so then I was also pretty scared and I was like oh my god!*

> *Like you know what if like somebody got locked up and then came here to finish here, like I don't feel comfortable with that, so like a million things were going in my head* (Evelyne)

Evelyn's initial perception of special schools illustrates the stigma associated with schools that are not considered "regular" or "normal". Overall, the participants were happy to discover that the special schools did not live up to their bad reputations. In special schools, Juliette found a place where she felt like she could be herself:

> *Well I feel like I can be myself more without being judged, that's for sure, like I mean as you can see we don't have to wear uniforms, like express my style, I can express who I am without being judged and all that stuff, so it makes me feel a lot better, like I feel comfortable coming here, I'm never nervous coming here, unless it's like for exams and stuff, but like you know I'm an easygoing person, I don't really get into much trouble* (Juliette).

Although some social problems such as bullying and "drama" did not follow the participants to special schools, the depression and anxiety they were dealing with persisted. Anthony described his first day in a special school:

> *First day I went to [a special school] I was hospitalized and I went to the psych ward for depression and anxiety and all these things, so yes, there's that, and then midway through...I had another problem and it was like my heart, my heart was like coming out of my chest, so I had like heart palpitation problems, so it was like hurting me every day and I couldn't breath and my heart was like getting out of my chest, like literally, and so I had to call an ambulance at the school and they took me [...] I had panic attacks here and there after that* (Anthony).

While Anthony felt like he was adequately supported due to more individualized attention and intimate environment:

> *[Special]schools are smaller [...*] *so the less the students, the more attention that each student gets, and so it helps you, they basically help you more and they're able to like sit down with you one- on- one whenever you need it and it's like easier for stuff like that to happen* [...] *Teachers can still see all the students and they're able to like talk with them, like sit down with them and help each and everyone of them and depending on what the student needs, so there's that, and smaller schools, it can help other people that don't like big crowds and stuff like that* (Anthony)

Evelyn felt like she could not rely on the school for support. Similar to her experience in a regular school, she felt like she was alone in terms of dealing with her anxiety. She provided an example of how the available resources did not necessarily meet her specific needs:

> *I try to talk to [a behavioral technician] about [my anxiety], but I feel like her type of help isn't like the type of help that I need, you know like talking to her, it's more like letting everything out, but then not getting any advice back on what to do [...] There should be resources kind of like fit for everybody because at the end of the day I went to [the principal] about it, he told me to talk to [the behavioral technician], but I feel like that wouldn't be enough you know? But like now there's also [someone] you can talk to, the drug counsellor, which I find is really weird cause I don't have a drug problem. There's like a lot of resources here, just I find like none of it is really fitting for me exactly [...] So, I kind of just try to deal with it on my own type of thing, and then there's also a point where I really wanted to change schools to see like if it would change, cause like I couldn't help like feeling like I'd pass out every time I come [to this special school] just because my heart is beating so fast. So, like I can't do it, I can't change schools cause it's too far in the year to go anywhere else, so I just kind of have to deal with it on my own* (Evelyne).

Therefore, while intimate and safe environments appear to be positive dimensions that can be found in special schools, they are not always effective in addressing special needs such as Evelyn's social anxiety. While she may have benefited from smaller student-teacher ratios, the special needs she seems to have been recommended to a special school for, remained unaddressed in that setting.

5.2.2.1. Recapitulation of the Protective Placement Process

The participants who experienced a *protective placement* tended to be dealing with issues relating to mental health. They relayed various experiences involving different forms of anxiety, depression, general difficult social relationships with peers in regular schools, and academic failure. As a result,

personnel made recommendations for special schools, under the guise of protecting students from social challenges encountered in regular school environments, while helping them get more specialized support. These recommendations were typically made by teachers and guidance counselors, and students were generally willing and relieved to try a new environment. In special schools, while the participants generalized their experience as positive due to the more intimate environments and individualized support, not all of them were able to gain access to the support they thought they deemed necessary, in terms of their specific needs.

Figure 2: Snapshot of Evelyne's Counter-Story

Evelyne is 18 years old, in her graduating year of high school. She and her father were born in Montreal, while her mother was born in Saint-Vincent. Evelyne describes herself as a quiet person who likes to keep to herself, and who enjoys dancing. She began her schooling in a predominantly Black neighborhood. She has fond memories of elementary school, namely due to the exposure to Black heritage and culture. In high school, although she was never diagnosed, she became certain that she suffered from an anxiety disorder. She had panic attacks in social situations, and dreaded working in groups. She was often involved in "drama", to the point where it affected her ability to concentrate, as well as her grades. One of her teachers took notice and proposed that she follow a modified academic program. Since Evelyn did not consider herself as having any disabilities, she refused this option and agreed to go to a special school instead. While Evelyne improved academically in her new environment, her issues with anxiety persisted. She reached out for help in her new school but felt that she was never able to obtain the kind of support she needed. She resolved to deal with it herself and used outlets she considered therapeutic such as music and dance as coping strategies.

5.2.3. Composite Character 3: Forcibly Placed

The third composite character which can be characterized by *forced placement* was the most common configuration of the typology, as it concerned nine participants out of 20: Duane, Kahmiah, Savannah, Chris, Richard, Kevin, Isaac, Amiyna, and Karyn. For these students, academic performances or behaviors that were deemed unacceptable by school personnel were simply not tolerated. Students were thus commanded to transfer to special schools without recourse.

Regular School

In this configuration, student experiences in regular schools were very similar to those in voluntary placement (5.2.1) in the sense that the participants tended to experience academic difficulties and/or lack of support from staff:

> *So, I was failing and then yes, all that year I just wasn't feeling like the best. I just failed, [it was the] first time I ever failed at anything, I didn't really like it, I was like I have to be here with these kids that I was making fun of last year, this isn't fun. And then I failed again* (Richard).

Some of the teachers were very like close-minded, so like they... Like I don't know, they don't help you as much, they're just like "figure it out on your own" like type of thing, just do it like, so I don't know. Teachers were like... Like they weren't really as sociable as they should be, cause you know teachers talk to the students and like get to know everyone or whatever, but like it wasn't like that (Karyn).

They also tended to perceive that they were being oversurveilled and unfairly targeted by school personnel:

We got picked on so much...Picked on by the same, same teachers, and it was the two vice-principals [...] Always, always, always, always. It was annoying, very annoying (Chris).

However, in addition to the distrust and strained relationships students developed with personnel, some distinguishing dimensions in the forced placement configuration were the exclusionary disciplinary measures the participants felt they were subjected to. To illustrate how these dynamics unfolded, they will be presented in cross-reference to how blackness interplayed throughout the student's pathways. For many of the participants having Black peers relieved the stress of dysfunctional educational ecologies. Isaac, a student who was among a few of the only Black students in a private Jewish elementary school, explained his first interactions when he found peers who looked like him in a public high school:

I don't really talk to that much people with the same skin as me, so I was like whatever, but [at my new regular school], I talk to them more like because they were in my class, I talk to both of them obviously, like all the races, but like it's different...it felt a little different…I can't put my finger on it but something about it made me more comfortable, I don't know why (Isaac).

However, when Black students formed social networks amongst themselves because they were feeling alienated, large groups of them appeared to be ill-received by school personnel, especially when it came to groups of boys:

I felt more like kind of like myself, like around [Black kids]. Like I can actually be myself around them. As opposed to yeah White people [...] there's a lot of Black kids in Twin Valley and I was mostly chillin with them, you know, because the White kids had their own group, they're doing their own thing and the Black kids, we were doing our own thing [...] most of [the Black kids] got kicked out, some of them was for their grades [...] I feel like it is because now

if you look at Twin Valley, they legit kicked out every Black kid. There's like, probably like three or four Black kids in Twin Valley now on the senior side that would be like kind of like in my grade. [...] Just yeah, just stupidness. Like I don't know, just stupid stupid things. They legit kicked out everyone that like has potential. Like I know a few of my friends, like they were making money from like, from like having like online stores, like from their Instagram and everything and they were just getting kicked out, for like getting in trouble, but not like seriousness. It was just like little things and then they just got expelled. But they legit kicked out everyone that had potential (Kevin).

For the participants, blackness played a role in the way they were perceived by personnel, which led to strained relationships between them, as well as punitive and exclusionary discipline that was often perceived as unreasonable or extreme. In fact, one of Kevin's friends from Twin Valley school who was expelled for poor grades, was part of this study. He shared a similar view, as he found the punishments he was administered unwarranted and unreasonable:

The principal at Twin Valley always used to get me in trouble, like I was always in his office [...] It was horrible with the teachers, horrible! For little things like uniform violations, or like... I don't know. Like just stupid stuff, and I just got a whole lot of detentions, of suspensions and it was just not working well anyways, so yes, I just had to... Well, they kicked me out and I was like: That's the end of my life. (Chris).

Karyn summed up how these types of discriminatory institutional practices unfold in a general way:

I think some people are a bit harder on Black students than other students cause like they like believe that like they're like gonna sling guns, or like drugs, or something or like gangbanging which is not 100% accurate, but a lot of people put that on Black students, but not only Black kids are doing all that bullshit, like everyone does it now, so yes, but I think that like if it would have come to like anything that has to do with like drugs or something, things like that, they would go to Black kids first or something, depending on like what school you go to, but like in Atwood Academy for sure, like they would literally search your whole locker if an Asian's phone goes missing, but if a Black kid's phone goes missing, no one really cares: "Oh, well you weren't supposed to bring your phone to school, oupsies"! But, yeah (Karyn)

The unjustified targeting enacted by non-Black school staff members perceived by the participants tended to create a sense of mistrust toward these people who were supposed to be responsible for their

well-being in school. In the face of various forms of bullying, discrimination, and exclusion, students did not feel like they could rely on school personnel to address these matters, either because they could not be trusted, they were unapproachable, or they exhibited discriminatory behaviors themselves. Students picked up on "vibes", which lead them to perceive personnel as insincere and disdainful:

> *I would recognize that [the teacher is] not showing me that type of vibe, like a quality type thing, he's just showing me some like: "Oh, you're not going to be nothing in life". So, why should I like [try]... And after [teachers] try to shoot like that little hint of like...how do I say it? Not happiness, but like "we're friends" or something, or they want to show me that quality now but then after you're just going to do the same thing over and over.* (Chris)

Participants also speculated on whether the personnel was racist:

> *They [Black students] aren't told: "You're Black, you are not allowed to go to this school", but at the same time I feel like because some of those students are Black... How do I word this? I feel like if some of them are Black, they're predisposed already to not want, either not wanting or not getting a good education, so if they're in school and something goes wrong and someone says something, the teachers [police you if you're Black]: "Oh, you're not going anywhere, you're not doing any of this, you're not doing any of that". I feel like that happens like a lot [...] I feel like some staff members might be, I don't want to say like racist, but they might have a little bit of racism in them.* (Richard).

Participants generally based their assessment of whether staff could be racist on the differential treatment they either experienced or witnessed as Black students compared to their white peers. They were aware that staff had professional obligations that would not allow them to explicitly say racist things in contrast to the explicit verbalizations from their peers. However they were also aware of the unspoken dimensions that are steeped in dysfunctional educational ecologies such as the disregard for their educational, social, and emotional well-being, passive attitudes toward intimidation, oversurveillance/targeting, and the excessive punitive discipline that do not seem to circulate in the same manner among white students. Richard also underscored how Black students could be "predisposed to not wanting or getting a good education" which does not happen in isolation from these said dimensions. In fact, they interact in the process of their removal from regular schools.

Transition to Special Schools

The transitions from regular schools in this configuration happened in the form of zero-tolerance practices such as cumulative suspensions and eventual expulsions. Students were suspended for reasons such as “talking back”, “giving attitude”, arriving late, or, paradoxically, not attending school, and skipping detentions.

> *I guess I was kind of giving [my teacher] attitude, I don’t know, I don’t remember, and then she’s like: “Ok, that’s it, I’m kicking you out”. And I was just like are you serious? For just saying something?* (Khamiah)

> *I got so much that I started not even going to my detentions, cause it was like so many of them, I was like oh, my god, I don’t want to go...Honestly, I don’t even remember what happened...I think they just permanently put me in the in-school suspension thing [...] and I was suspended during the exams, so it was like I was basically bound to fail* (Chris)

The timing of Chris' suspension is particularly noteworthy given that academic failure was a key reason cited for special school placement. Furthermore, participants described in-school suspensions as “holding cells” pending an expulsion that they appeared to be blindsided by:

> *[There’s] a room where you just like stay in there and you don’t go to lunch and you stay in there and they give you your work, like they send like a kid from the class that you have right now and they just send you the work and like you don’t get to like actually like get taught, like you just do the work and basically you stay there the whole day. So, it’s kind of a holding cell [...] I think when it got to the end of the year, I was just in there because like I’m just staying there for the rest of the year [before getting kicked-out]* (Chris)

> *I was actually in...it's where detentions take place and they put people that are bad or in school suspensions or something, I had to stay in there for two weeks doing nothing, nothing, just staying there two weeks because I had to know what school I was going to, they had to have a school board meeting [...] They brought me in a meeting and I went with my parents and then my favorite principal, which is yes, the only one I liked, she started crying, you know. What was I supposed to do? Sit there and pretended I wanted to cry? Like...I did feel sensitive, but yes, they just said that you know you're going to a new school... Like if this [special] school sees I changed, then they could send me back, but - no way Jose* (Savannah).

In Savannah's case, not only does the possible destabilizing impact of being forced to change schools seem to go unacknowledged, but the adult in charge of her care prioritized her own emotions by crying during the transfer meeting. Therefore, any possible feelings of guilt or shame for disappointing the one staff member that Savannah actually had a positive relationship with did not seem to matter to the administrator involved. Savannah's unease is illustrated through the confusion in her response on "how she's supposed to react" followed by a declaration that she would not consider returning to a regular school even if it was made possible.

Thus, the suspensions appeared to operate as a time bider during the transition process between regular and special schools, or in other words, an expulsion. The reasons for expulsions that were reported were: making threats, vandalism, skipping school, or anything following some form of behavioral contract that was breached through a three-strikes-you're-out system. For Duane, a Snapchat beef (a disagreement through a popular social media platform used by teens) over a girl between himself and an older male student in his school resulted in his expulsion, no questions asked:

> *Like they didn't ask me any questions or anything [...] They just told me I was suspended and I didn't go to school for the next 2 weeks, maybe 3 and yeah [...] I just stayed home... It was just like my dad was making me study and shit...Then after that I came to [a special school]... Like I didn't want to go to this school, I just wanted to go to a normal school but then I was like ok, like I knew I had no other like choice. There's nothing I could really say* (Duane).

Additionally, Duane learned that the police had been implicated:

> *I was shocked, that was like my first time getting arrested like I didn't even know what was happening. Like I was, I was, shocked, like really?! [...] I was just really confused* (Duane).

Duane explained that he had been arrested for making threats, but did not understand why, as he had responded back to threats made toward him, which, according to him, were omitted from the report given to the police. His expulsion was also a surprise, as was the case for most of the participants in this configuration.

Special Schools

Once placed in special schools, participants echoed the positive aspects discussed by those in the two previous configurations, such as the more calm and intimate environment, smaller class sizes, more academic support, and the opportunity to form more meaningful relationships with teachers.

It feels like a community, not like a school, and when you're eating breakfast in the morning [at school], it's like: Is this a school? (Savannah)

There's less kids, like it's easier for like the teachers to help you, and maybe easier for you to focus I guess [...] They help you, I guess yes, it's fair because I think they know that you're struggling, so they try to put their all to make sure you're doing better (Isaac)

Similarly, they expressed a decrease in stress, improved academic performance, and an increase in motivation, confidence, and self-esteem:

Once I got into [a special school]...my grades were going so high that I didn't even believe that I was actually capable of being this smart. Because everybody just put me down, you know, so I got into the [special school] they're telling me like, wow, what the fuck like, you're smart (Amiyna).

My life changed because I just got more like confidence in myself, I like actually was able to sit down, like it was way easier for me to learn about myself compared to being in like [regular school], and I feel like more comfortable with my surroundings and like myself, so [special school] kind of boosted up my self-esteem like a lot, because I got a lot of praise and a lot of love which I didn't get at [regular school] (Karyn).

However, what is distinguishable in this configuration is that for many of the participants, these positive aspects seemed to operate during a "honeymoon period" at the beginning of the integration segment in the new school. As time went on, the participants found that they were subjected to the same perceived unfair practices they endured in regular schools, such as academic neglect, being targeted, and differential treatment that tended to impact their motivation:

Students like might like act out differently if like they don't get enough help, they'll just be like I'm not going to go to school if I'm not going to get like that much help, or like there's always like trouble around, getting in trouble for stuff like I didn't do, you know? [...] I think like if a White person was to need extra help, like they get it more than like a Black student will get...well from what I see (Khamiah)

Khamiah clearly perceived differential treatment from personnel in terms of academic care. Amiyna made a similar observation when it came to the school dress code:

> *I walk down the hall with just a shirt like this much [pointing to below the belly button]. I'm the one getting in trouble. But when a white girl does it, which my white girlfriend did it on purpose for me to see [the teacher's] reaction...uhh, it's no issue, you know what I mean?...A white girl comes in a nipples, sheer, see-through, nipples...nothing. But when I come with a likkle ting like just me showing this [pointing to below the belly button], I'm suspended* (Amiyna).

Likewise, participants perceived that they were suspended for unfair reasons such as talking out of turn, horseplay, or not complying with orders they found absurd. In Richard's case, when a teacher "caught him" throwing snowballs he was administered a punishment he didn't think made any sense, which led to a suspension:

> *Tell me if that makes any sense ok? Obviously, I know throwing snowballs is bad but I'm a kid who throws snowballs, it's just fun throwing snowballs...So, my punishment was that I had to wash dishes. I don't wash my own dishes, so washing other people's was not something that I was trying to do at all, like not at all, and she was saying how, you know I should do something for the community, I was like "you know what? Fine". I washed the dishes one day, once, it was Friday after school [the French teacher], needed help, so I love [her], she's like my favorite teacher, so I helped her, and then the next day...we had a pizza lunch and it was a whole bunch of plates, and [the first teacher] was like: "Oh Richard, I'm going to have to ask you to wash the dishes". And then I was like, "no". So, she suspended me for a week because I didn't want to wash other children's dishes* (Richard).

While students responded positively to personnel that were supportive and caring, those that adopted cold, to-the-point attitudes, and rigid regimes seemed to activate power-struggles, aggravate students, and provoke the behavioral problems they were originally placed for. In Amiyna's case, an interaction with a behavioral technician led to her expulsion. She believed, and was deeply hurt, that this member of the personnel called her "a beggar". When she reported the incident to the administration and requested to have a meeting with her social worker present, it was declined and she was dismissed because the staff member denied the incident happened, suggesting that it was a misunderstanding. Feeling very emotional about the insult, and then by the way it was being handled, the situation escalated, which led to Amiyna losing her temper and subsequently being suspended. She recounted the meeting during which she was informed about her expulsions, to her surprise:

It hurts me that like I actually did the right thing for the first time and they expelled me like, I actually asked to have a meeting […] I'm talking about how my mom's sick...how I have to work so hard to give her money, so the roof can be on top of our head...Like I'm trying so hard not to cry but it's coming out. I'm trying to be strong and they're just like there staring at me... Like they're not feeling no pain because they don't know what I've been through to feel that pain, especially being 17 years old to feel that pain and a White man, come call me a beggar! I'm crying out to them and I'm like telling them my pain and [the principal] just looks at me, he's like "I appreciate it Amiyna, but you're not coming back to this school" [...] Yeah, they expelled me because I was on a contract and they gave me way too many chances, which clearly they didn't give me any chance at all. (Amiyna).

Consequently, Amiyna was expelled to another special school. It would thus appear that while special schools sometimes operated as positive alternatives to regular schools, they also sometimes replicated the harmful practices that played a role in special school placement. In sum, participants contended with antiblackness in its diverse forms (racial targeting, exclusion, bullying…), throughout their educational pathways. Two of the coping strategies they shared were "laying low" and seeking out Black personnel whenever possible.

Just basically like I'd just be like in class just quiet. I wouldn't bring the attention to me...like I would always sit in the back like with my friends...I'd stay to myself in the class (Kevin).

Yes, like me and Mr. Allen were pretty cool, like we're both Caribbean and stuff, so we kind of just like match, and some of them understand where you're coming from like compared to like white teachers, cause they can't really get it [...] so if I would have talked to people about my problems, I would've preferred to talk to like a Black teacher than a white one because it's just the vibes are different (Karyn)

Thus, keeping a low profile seems to have operated as a strategy in terms of being targeted. Similarly, while participants underscored the scarcity of Black personnel throughout their experiences, those who were lucky enough to encounter them seemed to benefit from their support in terms of their sense of alienation.

5.2.3.1 Recapitulation of the Forced Placement Process

Figure 3: Snapshot of Amiyna's Counter-Story

Amiyna is 17 years old in grade 11. She has an outgoing personality and enjoys doing hair and makeup. She is also passionate about her involvement in the community and has been working part-time and in the summers in a youth apprentice program. Amiyna was born in Ottawa and is from a large Muslim Somalian-Jamaican family that moved to Montreal before she was school aged. Although she had eligibility for English education, she began her schooling in the French sector. She recalled being one of the few Black students as a difficult situation and being bullied based on her blackness. Due to this school's actions in implicating social services in the family's life, Amiyna's parents chose to transfer her and her siblings to the English sector. In a school that was predominantly Black, Amiyna remained a victim of bullying based on cultural and religious differences, and appearances. She coped simply by keeping a low profile. In high school, things became "disastrous". In a regular school, she gained popularity and discovered drugs. She frequently skipped school and wasn't performing well academically. She had a boyfriend to whom she sent a nude photo of herself to, which he ended up distributing to the entire school. This incident ruptured relationships with her peers, and caused problems in her family. She continued to behave "badly", accumulated suspensions, and was eventually informed that she would be transferred to a special school. Outside of school, she was placed in a group home. While she struggled emotionally being away from her family, she maintained a good academic standing in the special school. Since this initial special school only offered a program up until grade 9, she transferred to another for grade 10. At this school, she encountered many difficulties in terms of her interpersonal relationships with the personnel, which eventually led to her expulsion. Though the principal suggested that she move on to adult ed to finish her graduating year, she ended up in another special school. This transfer worsened an existing state of depression she was coping with. Eventually she made friends and developed relationships of trust and respect with the staff at her new school. She particularly appreciated the diverse curriculum she was exposed to where she learned about her own culture and those around the world. She is very excited about finishing high school.

The *Forced Placement* was the most common configuration of the typology. Participants in this type of placement perceived themselves as forcefully removed from a regular school environment based on behaviors or academic performances that were deemed unacceptable or intolerable by personnel. These placements were also perceived as unjustified. In terms of their transition to special schools, participants were generally unaware of the process and received an unanticipated communication notifying them that they would not be readmitted to a regular school in the future. While these notifications went uncontested, the transitions were preceded by stress and fear due to the unknowns of the new environments they were obligated to integrate. Depending on the time of year, these transitions could last for many weeks. Once the integration occurred, participants were pleasantly surprised by the caring staff and welcoming or "laid-back" environment they encountered. However, this seemed to unfold as a honeymoon period as the punitive and exclusionary disciplinary measures that were applied in regular schools were replicated and often to a more intense degree, when it came to addressing behaviors. Finally, the participants kept a low profile and sought out Black personnel as strategies for the various tribulations they were facing.

5.2.4. Composite Character 4: Prematurely Placed

The final composite character can be characterized by *premature placement.* It concerns 4 students (Elijah, Jeremy, Marcus, Kendrick), among which 3 began their schooling n the French sector. Placement in special schools for these students occurred at the elementary level. As such, their time in regular schools was very brief, and their experiences were similar to those elaborated in the previous sections (being bullied, targeted, punitive discipline, lengthy suspensions, academic and socio-emotional neglect, demotivation, alienation, academic challenges...)

> *The teachers were like getting on my nerves, they're always watching you and like they're always thinking you're doing this [...] we're just chillin and after like we always get blamed for [things], like you know?* (Kendrick, FS[18]).

> *Math was a big struggle for me and I would sit there and cry and cry and the teacher would force me to do my work and like say "you have to do it" and I'd get like so mad I'd rip it up and then like if I crossed paths with another kid, I'd be like, "whatchu looking at" like, you know and like I'd get into an argument with the kid and like we'd go at it [...] and the teachers would never deal with no racism. They'd probably say it's not okay, but they wouldn't take it serious. Cause I'm like a little kid. Like what does a ten-year-old know about racism or what it is?* (Jeremy, FS).

When the participants were asked why they were transferred to special schools, they cited academic difficulties and, to a greater extent, behavioral problems:

> *Yeah, I failed uh, I forgot what grade actually but I failed a grade, yeah [...] Racist kids, I would just get into fights all the time [...] I'd get suspended and come back it would just be the worst [...] but like yeah those times I actually got sent, or they told my mom to send me to another school, that's when they were like "yeah he has behavioral problems"* (Marcus, FS).

Unlike the participants in the previous configurations, the prematurely placed students had only a vague memory of how their transfers to special schools occurred, as they were much younger when it happened. However, they did recall some of their first on-site experiences. The next section concerns

[18] FS=French Sector

the student experiences in special schools at the elementary level, which took place in both the French and English education sectors.

Special elementary schools (English and French sector)

The participants recalled the "scary" conditions they met concerning their placements in special elementary school. At the onset, simple things like getting to school became problematic. For Marcus, he was transported by school bus across the city for over an hour in both directions. Similarly, Elijah explained how he was obligated to travel across the city on public transportation by himself as a little boy: *I had to go far for [an elementary school]. Like I was 10 years old taking the metro from [one side of the city] to [another] by myself* (Elijah, ES[19]). The fact that Elijah highlighted this experience appears to indicate that retrospectively, he believes that his safety was compromised, as he was not yet mature enough to handle travel from across the city on his own. Further, Jeremy recounted the fear he felt during his first days in an English school:

> [*I was] nervous, I was scared to death because like the kids there were like...more big and bad and I was scared of like, doing the wrong thing and the kids beating me up. You know* (Jeremy, ES).

Likewise, Marcus described his first impression in a special school in the French sector:

> *Like, it felt bad, like when I first seen it, it looked like a prison to me, like what is this place? I'm not gonna lie, it was actually run like a prison. Like for kids, I found it was like extreme, like really extreme, like REALLY extreme, especially for kids [...] Special school was ten times worse than the first [regular] school I went to* (Marcus, FS)

Therefore, not only did the participants perceive themselves as exposed to extreme conditions as children, but their situations also worsened when they were placed in special schools. Academically, they perceived that their opportunities to learn were limited:

Academically, the only thing I really learned was French in that school...Everything else was like "uhh, draw a picture, read a book, talk about the book. Why'd you draw this picture?" (Elijah, ES).

Behaviorally, things also did not improve:

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[19] ES = English Sector

Cause like my attitude kinda changed, I kinda changed a bit cause, like umm that was like back then I was kinda rude to the teachers a bit. It's because...I was hanging with a more bad crowd, with the wrong crowd and the wrong group and like my persona kinda changed a bit (Kendrick, FS)

Like my attitude and stuff got way like worse from seeing the other kids do what they did. Like, everything was like, I wasn't as bad. Like yes, I'd throw chairs or I'd get mad easily but then like seeing the other kids like cuss and swear and this and that and, that made me just like fall into their pattern (Jeremy, ES)

Not only did the participants' acknowledge that their behavior worsened in a special environment, but more extreme disciplinary measures were recounted in contrast to the other configurations of the typology:

Like teachers in that school, they'll friggin restrain you. Like they'll take you, throw you on the floor and like hold you down until you're like calm [...] They tried that shit with me once [...] Kids would fight teachers. Like [teachers] try to restrain them and [kids would] fight back and they'll start a whole scene and there'd be like 3 teachers on one like an 8 year-old...like a 10 year-old, there'd be like 3 teachers on a 10 year old, trying to calm him down. Like [screaming] "don't touch me!!" "Ground his ass, throw him in the [room], lock the door!" (Elijah, ES)

That [physical abuse by staff] happened to me multiple times, like multiple times, like I got someone's knee on my head, the back of my head everything, it's bad, it was a bad school, I'm telling you [...] Honestly, I'm not gonna lie, I seen some of the kids that used to go to that school sometimes they like, they talk about it sometimes too like, like that school was like the worst school we ever went to in our lives. And now like, some of us like I see, like on a daily basis like we talk like "yo guys, like that school was so bad". I was thinking about it, like that school was actually bad. I remember my friend used to like get stopped like multiple times, sometimes the police would have to come and tranquilize, like tranquilize him like literally just make him fall asleep and bring him home and shit like that. But obviously, I'm sure he's not gonna get mad for no reason, there's a reason why he's getting mad (Marcus, FS).

Thus participants reported being physically assaulted or literally restrained by staff, as well as witnessing other students experiencing the same treatment on a regular basis. The last sentence of Marcus' testimony indicates that he cannot conceive any justification for a little boy to be tranquilized

by the police in a school, and raises the relevant question of what exactly was making children so mad? This does not seem to be addressed by the personnel, according to the participants. Additionally, Marcus drew a contrast between how Black and white students were treated when it came to behavioral incidents:

> *Let's just say a kid gets mad, if it's a white kid whatever uhh he'd probably like get followed, or whatever, get pushed up to the room, if it's a Black kid or whatever, he'd either get told to calm down, if he doesn't call down, he's gonna get restrained in the room or like restrained right there on the spot like everything...getting dragged out of there, like sometimes kids would get dragged out the class in the most disrespectful way ever. Got literally dragged off of their chair, like teachers would come and just pull them off their chair and just grab them, and like drag them through the room out the class [...] Yeah, definitely, that happened to me once or like twice and I got mad to the point where they called the police and then my mom had to come pick me up cuz like that makes no sense come on!* (Marcus, ES).

Therefore, according to the participants in this configuration, special elementary schools operated as sites of sanctioned violence toward children. The perceived differential treatment between Black and white children when it comes to such acts, also indicates that students additionally experienced anti-Black racial discrimination. Overall the consolidated effects of such practices materialized in the form of exacerbated behavioral "problems", as well as the criminalization of children, as police were often implicated, not to protect the children, but to protect the staff.

Special High School (French Sector)

In special high schools, the conditions for the students did not improve, most notably, in the French sector. Marcus highlighted a peculiarity of the population of his school in the French sector:

> *Like my [special] high school was FILLED with Black people. Like we were all Black. Like just Haitian people. I was probably like the only Jamaican kid in my high school. It was just mostly Haitians. Haitians and like, there was a little white section, but mostly Haitian people from the east [...] I don't think that's normal. That school was like, it was kind of weird to see so much Black kids in that school* (Marcus, FS).

The fact that Marcus had become accustomed to being one of the only Black students in the numerous schools he attended, seems to lead him to a critical reflection on why Black students are concentrated in special learning environments.

Further, he highlighted how his attendance was not taken seriously by personnel, which encouraged him to skip school:

> *Like sometimes the whole school would come to class and the teacher would see the whole class inside [in the morning], and then lunch hits, teacher comes back. There's like, after lunch, there's like 2 kids left in class. No one called their parents, the school didn't call the parents...So like I'd just go home [...] there was one year I failed...cause I did not go to school, like I just did not go to school, that year was just, just, that year was just crazy [...] it was literally like I went to adult ed or something* (Marcus, FS)

Marcus's reference to "adult ed" may indicate that he did not feel he benefited from the support and care typically accorded to children and adolescents, but was rather left to fend for himself, which ultimately affected his academic success. In the same manner, Kendrick seems to have been denied caring meaningful learning opportunities in a vocational program:

> *The work was elementary type but like on paper you were still in like sec 1 or 2 [...] I was assigned to do the [vocational] program, like I was assigned to do the workshop and cooking classes. That was it. No, like no math problems, nothing. Hmm mm yeah, just like basically putting away boxes, that kind of stuff [...] Basically we were kinda like slaves in that class...because we were forced to like clean up. I remember this one time we had swimming lessons and after that I didn't want to, like me and my friends didn't want to go to the pool because the pool wasn't clean, so we were like kinda forced to clean the whole gym, wash the benches, like clean the basement, like all those kind of stuff* (Kendrick. FS).

Kendrick's slavery analogy is accurate in this case, as he and his classmates felt they were basically providing unpaid labor through force. Additionally, this seemed to happen at the expense of the actual program he was enrolled in, which is supposed to be providing him with useful life skills. In terms of his learning, he went on to explain:

> *The only I thing I learned is that you gotta like get a weapon, cause it was like really dangerous like. Everyone was walking with a knife and guns at that place. So I kinda decided to get a knife*

> *to protect myself because like everyone there was... like at the beginning there was like a few people that got stabbed at that place, so it was like very brutal and my mom was like very scared because anyone could get killed at that school. And like the teachers like they wouldn't even care* (Kendrick, FS).

Not only were opportunities to learn inhibited through perceived forced labor, but also through dangerous environments, notably in which Kendrick felt unprotected from possible physical attacks from peers.

Special High School (English Sector)

Marcus and Kendrick were the only two students who had attended special high schools in the French sector[20]. Eventually they both obtained derogations to the English sector. Marcus drew a contrast between his experiences in French and English special schools:

> *Umm well there [special French school] it's not like, I don't think you've been in a school that I've been in. I don't think you understand. Here's like, this is calm, it's calm. Other schools I've been to, it's not calm like this. It's probably screaming, there's probably lockers banging, weird sounds coming out, like you would think you're in a zoo. Like it's not normal, that's what I'm saying* (Marcus)

Improved academic performance were also shared by the other participants in this configuration as well:

> *I thought about it and I'm like oh imma start doing my work. I start doing my work, start handing it in...I started getting like high ass marks, like 80s. 90s and 100s in history and in my other courses I was doing well [...] Like the work was hard. And I thought it would just get harder but literally it got easier. Maybe because I'm smart!* (Elijah)

While the participants benefited from an environment more conducive to learning and improved academic performance consequently, they were not able to escape exclusionary discipline, racism, and criminalization in special English high schools either. Participants in this configuration were suspended or expelled from special high schools for reasons such as skipping school, making threats

[20] Jeremy's experience in the French system occurred in elementary school only. Legally he was eligible for access to English education based on his mother's previous attendance in Quebec English schools; unlike Marcus and Kendrick who needed a derogation before enrolling in the English system

or challenging authority. In Marcus' case, the attendance contract he was on paradoxically resulted in his expulsion:

> *I was late sometimes and like the lates, like I said, it got stricter for me, so I couldn't be late a certain amount of times and I was late two more times and I got put on a contract and yeah. I remember like once, the contract was like I can't be late more than twice a week. If not, I'll get expelled and I was late for like, I was like maybe two seconds, two minutes after...That was my last chance, so I got expelled* (Marcus)

In fact, three of the four students in this configuration were expelled from at least one special school to the next. Further, Elijah recalled being consistently racially targeted for various events that were deemed as "offenses" in the school, including being suspected of having marijuana:

> *Like [the principal] was targeting me for most of the year [...] And her targets were the Black kids. Straight. It really was. Even Richard [a participant of this research]...he's not even one of the hood Black kids, and even he was getting targeted [...] Like if something happened she would automatically go to the Black kids [..] This is like the first time I got searched. The first time, I'm like ok, they're searching everybody...after I got searched, I walked into the computer room and I seen a couple of other students...They're like yeah, they're searching me blablabla. I'm like what the fuck? So now we're in the computer room they're like you can't go back to class, you can't go to the bathroom, you gotta come straight back, you can't linger in the hallways and do nothing. What the fuck!....So you guys are not searching everybody, cause everybody that got searched is in here and this is all the Black students, all the Black students [...] Then the second time I got searched and I see the same people in the room, so I'm like aww so now you're just fucking targeting us, but you know I don't smoke so why you gonna keep searching me. Like you're gonna just imagine seeing me with weed? Ok, so after that, [the principal] lost all my respect, even now I see her, I don't hail her up, I just look at her straight faced and walk away. She says hi to me, I'm not gonna say hi back* (Elijah).

As Elijah's experience unfolded, the gradual rupture in trust, security and sense of belonging became evident. When he got searched the first time, he interpreted the actions as a usual and reasonable occurrence, by which school personnel were simply carrying out their mandate of ensuring an orderly environment. Being subjected to these practices repeatedly, without justification, led him to believe that he was being intentionally targeted, that the actions were absurd, and that the authority figures were not worthy of his respect. Similarly, Jeremy expressed that being subjected to these types of

practices made him feel "*mad and disappointed, worthless, like I was never gonna graduate and just fail everything*" (Jeremy).

Finally, with a history of "behavioral problems" the participants were expecting to find resources in terms of dealing with them. However, those expectations appear to have remained unmet:

> *Tya: Before getting kicked out [of the first special school], what kind of help were you getting for your anger issues?*
>
> *Elijah: Hmmm, nothing to be honest, that I remember* (Elijah)
>
> *I was told...this [special] school is like basically, like they're there to help you regulate your behavior and everything, but I didn't find they did anything to help me regulate my behavior [...] What I mean by that is like you have regular classes, like you don't do nothing different from [regular school], like yes, it's different in the sense, but I mean like you would think [special schools] would help you with behavior. They have more support. They would have more people like psychologists and people to talk to, or like have like one period of the day to like sit there and relax. Have like an [anger management] class or something like that, but they don't, they don't do that. I mean, the only thing they'll do is if you get into an argument, they'll say it's you know, it's not right. "You have to work on your goals, you have to do this". But I mean, how is it helping me? It really doesn't like* (Jeremy).

Ultimately, the participants self-identified as having either behavioral problems or learning difficulties, yet did not believe they accessed any meaningful associated support measures in special schools.

5.2.4.1. Recapitulation of the Premature Placement Process

The *Premature Placement involved* students who were placed in special schools at the primary level due to "severe behavioral problems" or 'learning difficulties" as designated by regular school personnel. All students in this configuration changed schools multiple times throughout their trajectory. They tended to begin in the French sector and eventually receive a derogation to the English sector, if they didn't already have English education eligibility. They vaguely recall their experiences prior to special schools as well as the transitions. Their experiences in special schools were the most

Figure 4: Snapshot of Jeremy's Counter-Story

Jeremy is 14 years old in grade 8. His mom is white, born in Canada, and his father is from Jamaica. Jeremy was born in Montreal. Throughout his life he has resided with his mom and his grand-parents. Currently, he lives in a group home. He enjoys gymnastics, crocheting, knitting, and reading. He began his schooling in the French system and recalls being "good". He can't recall why he moved to the English system in grade 2, but he does remember "being a bad kid". He was also dealing with racism from peers and unresponsiveness from staff concerning these issues. In grade 3, he was transferred to a special school, which he believes worsened his behavior. He recalled the fear he had about first attending the school and resolved it was for good reason since the school felt like "a jail". Although most of the staff thought he was uncontrollable, he developed a strong relationship of trust with a Black teacher he described as his "guardian angel". He felt cared for and safe with her, she was the only one who was able to successfully intervene with him through words and nurturing instead of extreme measures, like physical restraints. In high school, Jeremy was admitted to a regular school but within only 3 months he was expelled. In mid-grade 7 he was also expelled from a special school. In his second special school he was focused on improving his behavior so he could return to a regular school. He was finding this difficult since he wasn't getting any meaningful support with his "behavioral issues" and questioned what the point of a special school may be. Despite a long record of turbulent behavior, Jeremy systematically performed well academically throughout his trajectory and hopes to graduate from high school and eventually become a social worker.

concerning, particularly at the elementary level. They described their learning opportunities as limited, their environments as racist, zoo/jail-like, and their behaviors as worsening over time. They recounted the harshest forms of discipline, such as being thrown to the ground, being physically restrained, being medically tranquilized, and having the police called to the schools to subdue them, with due emphasis on how young they were. At the high school level, punitive and exclusionary disciplinary measures and racial targeting continued to be a defining dimension of their experience. In the English sector, their academic performance improved at the high school level, but ultimately, they did not access the resources they needed in terms of their behavioral and academic success.

5.3 Synopsis

In the majority of cases, the participants' counter-stories reveal that the special education placement process was not something they were actually aware they were undergoing. They perceived themselves as getting kicked out of a regular school based on behavioral or academic difficulties. Many participants did not know what special education meant, when they did, they did not self-identify as a student with special needs. Similarly, they had little to no knowledge and understanding of their own IEPs. For those who were assigned difficulty codes, they were also unaware of these codes. Despite this unawareness, the typological analysis brought to light four composite characters based on the special education placement process experiences. This allowed for a richer description of the participants' placements, as well as a deeper understanding of the dynamics between their individual and consolidated experiences, and the institutional dimensions that demarcated them.

The first composite character underwent a *voluntary placement* that can be typified by the participants' experiences in regular schools that became so overwhelming, that they self-enrolled in special schools as a last resort, based on referrals from peers. In special schools, their sense of belonging and academic performance and self-esteem improved.

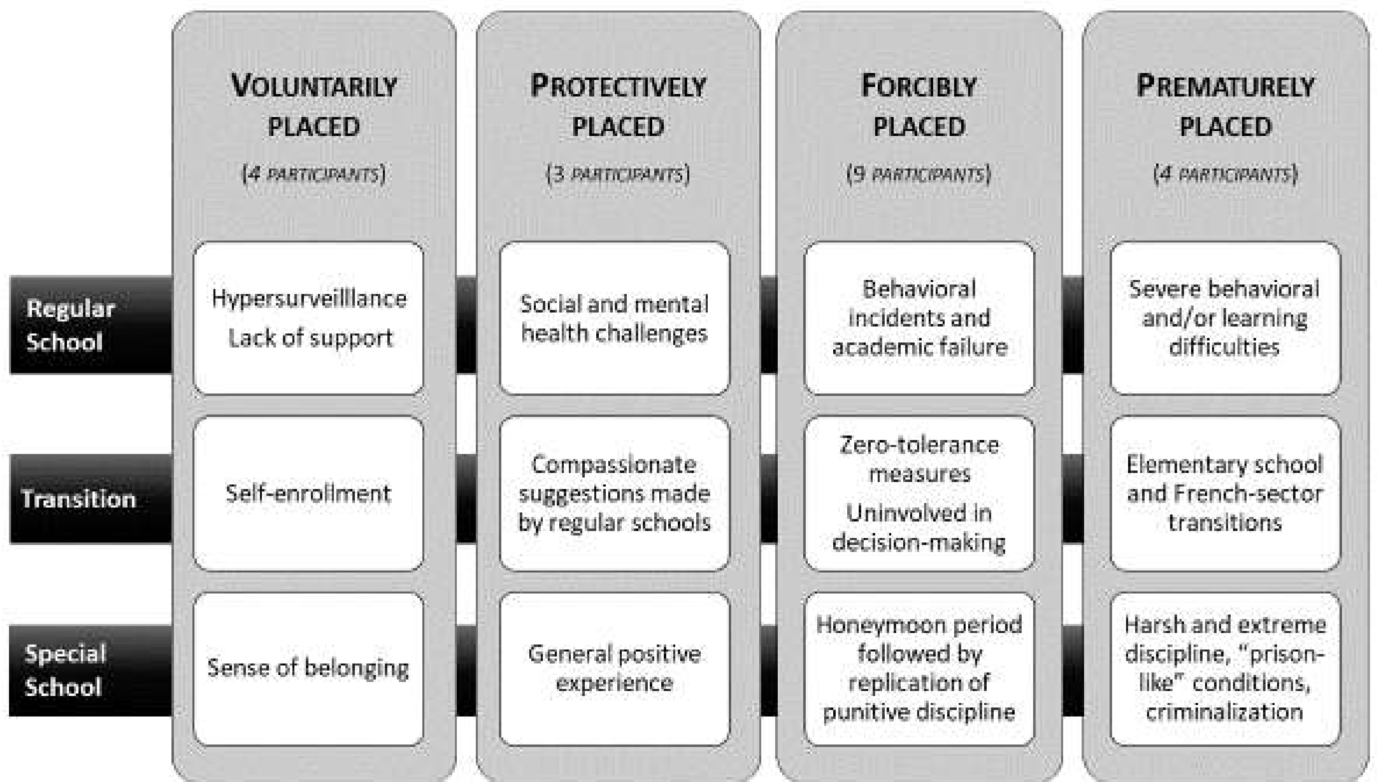
The second composite character underwent a *sheltered placement.* It can be characterized by the social and mental health challenges students faced in regular schools. Special schools were recommended by personnel as a protective measure. Personnel also facilitated transfers. In special schools, while participants perceived they weren't always able to access the support they needed, they generalized their experience as positive and supportive.

The third composite character was subjected to a *forced placement* wherein students were informed of their placements in special schools without any recourse. They perceived these placements as getting "kicked-out" of regular schools due to academic or behavioral difficulties, which were not justified. Participants experienced a positive integration process and interactions with personnel. However, when behavioral incidents occurred, the punitive and exclusionary disciplinary measures they experienced in regular school were replicated.

The final composite character underwent a *premature placement.* The defining features of this character involve transitions that cannot be recalled, placements in special elementary schools due to perceived severe behavioral problems, multiple school changes, and extreme disciplinary actions against the students. In special high schools, participants were denied meaningful learning opportunities, subjected to ableist and racist treatment and continuous displacement.

The typology of the composite characters is summarized in figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Summary of the Composite Characters' Special Education Placement Process



Chapter 6

Discussion of the Findings: A DisCrit Composite Counter-Story

In the preceding chapters, the special education placement process was described from the perspective of the school board personnel as well as from that of the students, based on their experiences. In this chapter, the first section will broach the convergences and divergences between the personnel and the students throughout the various phases of the placement process. The second section will present an interpretation of the student counter-stories, which involve how their experiences interact and overlap with the special education placement process in its entirety (regular and special schools), from a critical perspective, guided by the tenets of DisCrit. These will be broached through two overlapping themes: the denial of childhood innocence and the pseudo-medicalization of childhood behaviors.

6.1 The Special Education (Dis)Placement Process: Contrasting Student and Personnel Perspectives

As illustrated through the presentation of the results, the special education placement process can be summarized as a complex process that begins in regular schools and is triggered by students' behavioral and/or academic difficulties as perceived by the personnel. With some exceptions, (ex: students who enrolled in special schools voluntarily), referrals are made by regular school personnel, a placement committee is implicated to facilitate the transfer, whether the student has been formally evaluated or not, culminating to placement in special schools. While students and personnel seem to agree on the general reasons for special school placement, their perceptions of how the placement process unfolds diverge in many ways.

6.1.1. The Regular School Segment

Recalling academic "failure" as one of the key placement reasons, the analysis of the results revealed the tendency for the student-participants to have repeated a grade or to have experienced struggle with French, English, and especially with Math, beginning in elementary school. In regular schools, the personnel-participants communicated a concern for student well-being and self-esteem as they relate to academic success. They believed that responding to the students' academic needs was beyond their capacity, and thus more achievable in special schools. In contrast, while students acknowledged their own difficulties, they perceived that they were being disregarded in terms of academic support and that their well-being was not on the personnel's agenda. Most of the student-participants perceived

their difficulties as unaddressed for the entire regular school segment of their pathway, and worsening over time, especially when it came to math. This brings into question what kind of support measures were offered to students before referrals were made, how the difficulties were understood by school personnel, and how the personnel-student interactions impacted referral decisions. From the students' point of view, relationships with teachers were so cold and impersonal, to the point that students did not feel comfortable asking questions, out of fear of being humiliated in front of the whole class. This sense of unease coupled with a sense of incompetency, left students feeling hopeless and alienated, which impacted their motivation despite their strong desire to succeed, graduate, and find a sense of belonging to the larger school community.

Similar patterns exist in terms of student behavior. While the regular school personnel highlighted the benefits of special schools, the students reported the personnel using referrals to special schools as a threat, punishment, or a consequence to their "bad" behavior. In other words, the students reported being told that if their behavior didn't improve, they would be sent to a special school. Furthermore, while regular school personnel communicated referrals to special schools as necessary when the safety and security of the larger school community was deemed threatened, the student participants did not feel like they benefitted from this sense of protection as members of the student-body, as they endured various forms of intimidation from their peers. Bullying is a long-standing pervasive problem in schools, and its negative effects on educational, mental, and physical health and well-being have been well-documented (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Winton & Tuters, 2015; Wolke & Lereya, 2015). The student-participants of this study were forced to contend with various intersecting forms of bullying through race, gender, sexuality and language-based intimidation with minimal to no response from school personnel. While there have been numerous initiatives to address bullying in schools such as province-wide safe schools campaigns and legislative action against bullying and violence (MELS, 2009b; Projet de loi 56, 2012), the participants in this study reported having to fend for themselves, as early as grade 2, or a lack of confidence that their reports of being intimidated would be taken seriously.

Not only did the student counter-stories demonstrate that they were unprotected by official anti-bullying endeavors such as Bill 56 - *An Act to prevent and stop bullying and violence in schools* (2012), which focuses on making school actors more accountable when it comes to intimidation and violence prevention, but the predominant institutional intervention seemed to be simply removing students from the school where they were experiencing the bullying. For example, in schools where girls reported sexual harassment, it seemed difficult to manage these events in-house, resulting in transfers to special schools as a "protective" measure. Similarly, when boys encountered antiblack racial bullying, they

were met with indifference from personnel if they reported it, and decidedly, did not tend to report such incidents. However, when they acted in self-defense within their own means, they were reprimanded without any consideration for the events leading up to the behaviors deemed unacceptable and were also referred out. While the referrals concerning girls appear to be for more empathetic reasons, these transfers, in both circumstances, indicate that bullying is handled as an individual issue rather than systemic, very similar to how racism has been predominantly framed in schools and society to date.

6.1.2. The Transition Segment

The manner in which the students are transferred from regular schools to special schools also manifested differently according to the different actors that were consulted. Here, it is noteworthy to highlight, not only the divergences between the students and the staff, but also between the personnel who worked in regular schools and special school personnel, as well as the various groups of professionals (teachers, principals, guidance counselors, committee members). Generally, regular school personnel, especially teachers, perceive transfers to special schools as a benevolent and helpful practice that is beneficial to the students they believe are having “difficulties”. Once the transition is initiated, their involvement in the process ceases; at this juncture, the special education placement committee is perceived as taking over. However, the transition process for the students manifested as one of the most challenging and ambiguous phases of the process, especially for those who were forcefully, or prematurely placed.

For the students, the transition phase was disorienting and destabilizing, as they were blindsided by the news of placement, held in limbo for indefinite periods of time before the transfer occurred, and eventually forced into an unknown environment causing them insecurities and fears. Officially, there are laws and procedures that regulate special education placement. The Quebec Education Act (1988) and the Policy on Special Education (MELS, 1999) advance an individualized approach entailing mandatory evaluation of student needs prior to enacting any specialized interventions, including transfers to special schools. For the participants in this study, the guiding principles of this approach were not adhered to. Particularly, for those who were forcibly placed, the news of their transfer to a special school tended to be delivered as a surprise phone call or a letter insert with the report card at the end of the school year. For those that were placed for “behavioral issues”, their transfers occurred in the form of indefinite suspensions that, in some cases, lasted for months. Not only did the students report being taken by surprise when they finally received the notification that they were required to change schools, but their absence from any school (regular, or special) produced many negative

consequences in terms of their academic and social integration, thus compromising their well-being emotionally, socially and academically. This was mainly underscored by special school teachers who felt like they had to "perform magic" (Teacher 19, SS, p.109) in terms of helping the students integrate the special school environment and fostering socio-academic success.

The inconsistent and inconsiderate manner in which the student participants are transferred from one school system to the next would appear better framed as a *displacement* from regular schools through a process that does not fully respect their educational rights. While the regular school personnel purport an inability to meet the student's needs, these needs do not appear to be assessed, identified, or understood prior to the displacement, beyond the stipulation that they are too grave to be managed in a regular school. This converges with a report issued by the CDPDJ (2018) regarding the rights of students with special needs, that particularly highlighted "a marked increase in complaints involving places that were once considered highly conducive to [students with special needs'] educational integration, such as the English school boards" (p. 6). Similarly, while schools are legally required to organize interventions and adaptations before recommending any specialized services, such as special schools, there is little to no trace of such endeavors occurring, further supporting findings included in the CDPDJ (2018) report regarding poor identification and evaluation of student needs. This is also made evident through the students' and their parents' exclusion from meaningfully contributing to their own IEP and the placement decisions. Students and their parents appear to be unaware of the rights accorded to them, and thus are not positioned to contest any decisions, nor advocate for services they may be entitled to through the Education Act and the Special Education Policy. In sum, these displacements from regular schools are misaligned with educational policy as they manifest as school-centered rather than the student-centered principles that anchor provincial and local educational policies.

6.1.3. The Special School Segment

Special school staff demonstrated an awareness of the destabilizing displacement process the students endured, as well as a commitment to offsetting the associated negative effects by creating a warm welcoming process and environment for students. Both special school staff and students found tremendous value in a small school or low student-teacher ratio setting. The staff highlighted benefits such as intimate environments, easier applicability of differentiation, individualization, and other support practices, more effective communication and classroom management, as well as positive relationships with students. Student-participants echoed these sentiments emphasizing their appreciation for the flexible and relaxed environment, the access to academic support that eluded them

in regular schools, improved relationships with peers, an increased sense of belonging and community, and overall sense of relaxation where they could just be themselves. In particular, they were able to build relationships with teachers who they perceived as nice, caring, friendly and genuine. It is important for students to feel and know that care is bona fide and not just a mere formality, which was accomplished through simple gestures such as being listened to, being asked how they are doing, and being offered support and positive feedback on the part of school staff. Knowing that they could rely on the adults in their schools to support them socially and emotionally not only invoked a sense of trust, belonging, and security, but they declared that their motivation and their performance improved. Students reported experiencing academic success for the first time, positive impacts on their sense of self-esteem and self-worth that was "life-changing" (Karyn, p. 145), as well as improved behavior. These results converge with numerous studies that have demonstrated that nurturing student-teacher relationships correlate with social-emotional and academic success (Forman 2018; Noddings, 1992; Polite et al., 2009). In this light, while policy recommends integration in regular school settings, small schools have huge benefits that would not be accessible in regular schools.

However, the staff and student perceptions diverge when it comes to how behavior and discipline are handled. It is interesting to note that special school personnel tended to perceive regular schools as places where students are potential academic and behavioral hindrances to the functioning of regular schools due to associated negative impacts on school success rates. They also believe that students were transferred to special schools in haste, as a result of punitive discipline. In contrast, they believe that they practice non-punitive discipline, in coherence with an attachment-based approach. In fact, special school staff went to great lengths to reframe their disciplinary approach, employing alternate positive language such as "rights and responsibilities" in lieu of "code of conduct", or "reset" in lieu of "suspension". However, internal name-changing does not seem to lead the students to perceive the disciplinary measures as non-punitive. For the students, being removed from class, being suspended whether in or out of school, and being expelled remain punitive and exclusionary. Moreover, despite the institutional positive spin on discipline, criminalizing and correctional aspects lingered in the special school discourse. This illustrates the difficulty of mobilizing an ideological discourse to praxis or creating a change within a system that is inherently punitive, especially by just changing the name of things, without addressing the actual substance of the practice. Furthermore, punitive practices in special schools seemed harsher than in regular schools as students reported being denied access to food, being forced to do janitorial labor, being physically restrained, and having the policed called on them. These types of practices led to school alienation and exacerbated behavioral difficulties.

Thus, in special schools, even when students seem to be considered as valuable members of the community and human resources within the education ecology, and are able to form meaningful relationships with school personnel, the benefits of these relationships and interactions might be nullified through harmful disciplinary actions. If the students do not meet the school behavioral expectations, the welcoming climate reverts to one that is as hostile and unsafe as the regular schools, or even worse, especially for students in the premature configuration, or for those that were placed in French special schools. The students were penalized for the very labels they were institutionally assigned regarding behaviors deemed beyond their control, especially according to the medical model special education is founded on. Thus, the nurturing relationships and sense of belonging the students were happy to find and the associated benefits seemed to be disrupted and dissolved when issues of discipline were involved. In the following section, a discussion of how antiblackness and ableism further compound this situation is presented.

6.2 The Intersections of Childhood, Blackness, and Disability from a DisCrit Perspective

As discussed in chapter 2, DisCrit foregrounds the importance of acknowledging the dominance of master narratives and how minoritized perspectives tend to be undermined by them, as emphasized by the fourth tenet of the framework (Annamma et al., 2016). It encourages foregrounding the interpretations that minoritized people make of their own counter-stories rather than the researchers', and doing so without purporting to give them voice. As such, prior to presenting the DisCrit analysis of the results, it is relevant to acknowledge the associated reflections that were undertaken throughout this research process. Keeping the student-participants' voices foregrounded did, in fact, prove to be challenging, especially after establishing the master-narrative. At many points I felt that the student's voices were being drowned out. However, every effort was made to stay as close as I could to their stories. It is why I wrote out each student-participant's individual interview as a story, as a preliminary step in the analysis. I believe that the graduated approach to including my own interpretations (as illustrated in table 5, chapter 3) foregrounded the student-voices to the greatest extent possible, as it is simply not possible to entirely omit one's own interpretations as a researcher. The entire interpretation process was approached with care and caution, in the spirit of naming and acknowledging that which has been previously ignored, as a resistance to master-narratives. As the student interpretations, though foregrounded, are indeed intermeshed with my own, I find tremendous value in the resulting composite counter-story. I see its creation as a dynamic endeavor that was done for, by, and with my community and I am inspired to reflect continuously on how to foster and sustain connection and collectivity through research.

While the tenets of DisCrit which focus on the intersections of race and disability guided this analysis, the social identifier of childhood emerged as a significant dimension of the intersectional structure of power throughout the special education placement process. Thus, the following analysis will be broached through two major themes: the denial of childhood innocence and protections, and the pseudo-medicalization of childhood behaviors. In contrast to the previous section that was organized by special education pathway segment, the following sections concerns the placement process as a whole; elements that were common to both regular and special education sectors, unless otherwise stated.

6.2.1 Denial of Childhood and Adolescent Innocence and Protection

The composite analysis of the results of this study revealed that Black student experiences run counter-current to the guiding principles of special education that champion notions of equity, inclusion, and helping children succeed. The participant counter-stories indicate that student behaviors tend to be decontextualized from their developmental stages of childhood and adolescence, involving youthful innocence, identity formation, socio-emotional adjustments, and challenges. For Nelson (2016),

> childhood is not a universal category, not an automatic benefit of one's age, but rather it is the product of a discursive structure that both empowers and marginalizes on the basis of identity […] our current ideals about childhood were forged through the repeated alienation of subjects who were not white and upper class (p.73).

From an antiblackness lens, this "repeated alienation" is an extension of the legacy of slavery that once denied Black children human status in society and rather positioned them as merchandise or property. As property, racialized children in settler colonial societies did not benefit from the nurturing and protective behaviors typically accorded to white children. The remnants of this legacy can be connected to the ways Black children are adultified in modern-day schools (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021; Epstein et al., 2017) specifically through the cold and impersonal relationships that exist between them and school staff; the ways their behaviors are criminalized and punished; as well as the overall lack of protection that is afforded to them across various socio-educational circumstances.

6.2.1.1. Cold and Impersonal Interactions and Relationship

Positive teacher-student relationships and interactions are well documented as important factors that lead to student success (Demanet & Van Houtte 2012; Gentrup et al., 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1989).

While some student-participants cited positive relational aspects such as teachers who were "nice", "caring" and who offered them academic and emotional support, this did not emerge as a main theme in the analysis of the results, but rather, a perceived anomaly. On the contrary, student-participants described their relationships with teachers and other school staff as impersonal, cold, and sometimes intimidating and hostile. Interactions under these circumstances prevented them from fully participating in classroom activities, and seeking help when they were not grasping what was being covered in class, or discouraged them entirely from going to classes. As such, students chose either to activate a self-protection measure of "laying low" by not drawing attention to themselves, or to independently seek other means of success, by making themselves seen in an alternate environment. This was the case of the students who placed themselves voluntarily in special schools. The fact that students chose to self-displace from a mainstream environment to ensure their academic success speaks to the lack of care that these schools extend. It also illustrates one way Black students become outputs of a dysfunctional education ecology.

Moreover, impersonal and dismissive interactions, along with authoritarian and rigid regimes set the stage for power-struggles between students and staff. This is particularly relevant since one of the primary reasons students were displaced to special schools was "behavioral problems". Those student-participants who internalized this label, also acknowledged their need for support and their commitment to self-improvement and achieving their socio-academic goals. Too often, schools failed to provide meaningful or effective interventions. Instead, the very "behavioral problems" that landed students in special schools in the first place, were provoked and aggravated through interactions with staff, making them easy targets for punitive discipline.

6.2.1.2. Criminalization and Punishment of Child Behaviors

The structural denial of Black childhood innocence leaves Black children susceptible to many different forms of violence including those related to oversexualization, exploitation, emotional and physical abuse, and criminalization (Epstein et al., 2017). Criminalization inevitably implies an associated punishment for a crime. The student-participants' counter-stories illustrate how their behaviors are criminalized in schools to varying degrees and how this institutional construction leads to excessive and unforgiving disciplinary actions for reasons subjectively determined unreasonable, disrespectful, or dangerous by school staff. *Tenet 1* of DisCrit makes it possible to foreground the reciprocity between ableism and racism and how they are insidiously embedded in school policies and practices (Annamma et al., 2016). The analysis of the results reveals how typical childhood actions and behaviors such as play, competition, impulsivity, and defiance prompted various forms of

punishments, such as forced seclusion, denial of food, and forced physical and unpaid labor. It also revealed how the behaviors of the participants were criminalized, and how these processes interact to uphold antiblackness. In the next sections, these processes that in part constitute the adultification of Black children, will be further discussed via the various disciplinary measures applied in schools throughout the special education placement process.

Punishing Play

When Black children engage in playful interactions such as making jokes in class, throwing snowballs, or demonstrating elaborate athletic moves while playing basketball, both students and personnel reported that excessive punishments have been administered. As one of the most popular sports in the world, basketball is dominated by Black players locally and globally (James, 2011; Lapchick, & Zimmerman, 2020; Laver et al., 2020). A "slam dunk" or "dunking" is a more intricate point-scoring move that garners admiration and excitement from spectators and fans. One administrator-participant raised dunking as a reason Black students obtained disciplinary referrals. Instead of having their athletic prowess celebrated, students were disempowered, demotivated and punished. If dunking is not illegal in the official rules of the game, one might question why it is punishable in schools.

Howard (2014) brings to light the fact that "while [Black] children are quite aware of the inequitable and racist treatment they receive, their young minds often do not have a framework for naming and analyzing what is happening to them" (p. 504). It is through camouflaged, antiblack interactions such as this that students may develop this sense of awareness. While they are most often not faced with blatant and overt racist treatment from staff, as opposed to their peers calling them the n-word, for example, they acknowledged that such acts were carried out by school personnel in "a professional way". In this manner, discriminatory and policing acts such as these that target Black students, circulate as regular everyday practices, while students are left feeling unsettled, targeted and demoralized.

Forced Labor

The student-participants' counter-stories revealed that child behaviors such as horseplay, talking-back, and refusing to perform tasks, were deemed punishable through forced labor. In many cases, the personnel-participants presented these measures as "community service", which entailed a restorative justice connotation. However, I suggest that it is more in alignment with criminal justice. While, community service is generally performed benevolently, without compensation, for the betterment and benefit of the community in question, in the criminal justice system, it is rendered mandatory as an

alternative to other sanctions such as fines and imprisonment, and as a form of retribution (Harris & Lo, 2002). While community service may be effective in specific contexts, for Black students it was interpreted as a form of oppression. In no circumstances did the student-participants' report any positive or restorative outcomes related to this practice. In fact, they communicated a sense of injustice, drew analogies to slavery, and enacted resistance and refusal, which exacerbated their "behavioral problems" and contributed to a sense of alienation. Furthermore, the possible repercussions for students who tend to come from families who are overrepresented in the low-wage service sector that involves cleaning and labor, due to systemic and structural barriers, do not seem to be taken into account by school personnel. This disregard and lack of sensitivity could further trigger child behaviors of resistance that could be interpreted as problematic by authority figures in schools.

Physical Restraints

Physical restraints broadly refer to "the use of physical procedures by one or more individuals to limit freedom of movement, for example, holding an individual in an immobile position for a period of time" (CCBD, 2009a cited in Bartlett & Floyd Ellis, 2021, p. 32). While there is no national or provincial framework (in the case of Quebec) regarding their use in schools, local school boards and centers typically sanction these practices in special school settings when students are perceived as a threat to themselves or to others (Bernheim et al., 2019). While they are purported to be used as a last resort, these practices continue to be employed despite their negative psychological and physical effects on children (Bartlett & Floyd Ellis, 2021; Mohr et al., 2003; Montreuil et al., 2018). Additionally, these measures are disproportionately applied to students with disabilities and Black students (Katsiyannis et al., 2020).

DisCrit positions these practices as an effect of the racist and ableist settler colonial principles the national education system is founded on, which have propagated the inferiority of those configured as "other" and the necessity of managing and controlling them using force. They are also eerily reminiscent of the graphic, inhumane, and helpless position George Floyd was constrained in before his life was brutally ended by law-enforcement on May 25th, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In fact, fatalities have been documented as an adverse effect of physical restraints performed in schools (Nunno et al., 2006). While their occurrence is relatively low, the fact that they even exist are not only cause for great concern, but should constitute grounds for eliminating this practice. It is paradoxical that physical restraints are enacted as a safety measure, while putting the child who is being restrained in physical and psychological danger.

Suspensions and Expulsions

Both the medical and criminal justice systems enforce exclusionary measures on individuals that are deemed socially deviant, such as placements in psychiatric institutions or imprisonments (Becker, 1963; Ramey, 2018). These measures are mirrored in school systems through disciplinary actions such as suspensions and expulsions and student displacement to special schools, which disproportionately affect Black students across Canada, the U.S., and globally (Coles & Powell, 2020; James & Turner, 2017; Ramey, 2018). In conjunction with a growing body of research that underscores the negative effects of exclusionary discipline (Chu & Ready, 2018; Salole & Abdulle, 2015), the analysis of the data reveals little to no benefit of suspensions and expulsions for students. Not only were students denied access to learning opportunities, which caused and exacerbated learning difficulties, but they also felt a sense of alienation, insecurity, and injustice, as they were cast out of the school community, while reasons for their "bad" behavior, such as being bullied, remain unaddressed.

The fact that Black children are more likely to be seen as threats by school personnel based solely on the color of their skin (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Coles & Powell, 2020) illustrates the intersectional systemic consequences of disability and blackness. The results of this study concerning the multiple displacements of the student-participants from (special) schools converge with others across Canada that demonstrated "the evacuation of Black childhood from the construction innocence" (Maynard 2017, p. 210). For example, in Salole & Abdulle's (2015) qualitative study, young Canadian racialized adults reflected on the disciplinary action they were subjected to throughout school. As children they believed they were receiving appropriate consequences, but retrospectively they realized *"*that person [who administered a suspension for being sworn at] was an adult. I was just a kid, there's a lot of stuff going on with us. We don't think straight. Teachers got to know this…And I hate to say it, but I know it's because I'm Black. I get no second chances" (p. 152).

Indeed, there were no second chances for student-participants of this study like Duane. It is far from unusual for teen-aged boys to get into rifts overs girls. However, Duane was suspended, expelled, arrested by police, and criminally charged. With no direct contact with the family, no exit meeting, no questions-asked, the school in partnership with the police, positioned Duane, at best, as an unsuitable student in the school community, but more accurately, as a dangerous threat. This positioning made by the school personnel appears to have less to do with Duane's behaviors, and more to do with social values and norms in place that guide the disciplinary policies that are tainted by anti-Black racism and criminalize child behaviors.

Moreover, in alignment with the 5th tenet of DisCrit which highlights socio-judicial injustices towards individuals (Annamma et al., 2016), the agreeable rapport between two institutions that have historically denied Black citizens their rights was also brought to light in this study. The use of law enforcement by schools that specialize in behavioral problems illustrates how educational institutions can utilize special needs designations to further criminalize children under the guise of helping them. Schools across the country have been documented as spaces where Black students experience heightened surveillance and psychological violence (CDPDJ 2011; Codjoe, 2001; Howard, 2014; Salole & Abdulle, 2015). In special schools in Quebec, in both linguistic sectors, institutionally sanctioned physical violence can be added to the list. These violations that happened as early as grade 2 for students such as Marcus, Elijah, and Jeremy, further illustrate how ableism and racism operate in tandem as students are punished and criminalized for their special needs and as their childhood innocence is nullified in connection to their blackness. For these student-participants and others such as Duane, their first contact with police happened in schools. As such, special schools were solidified as dysfunctional education ecologies that apply tactics that instill fear, angst, insecurity and panic in children. The resulting trauma undergone by the student-participants was never addressed. One might ask what kind of crime did these children commit to deserve to be treated like criminals during their formative years, and what impact might that have on their future?

Antiblack Gendered Discipline

Some researchers have brought to light the missing voices of Black girls in antiblackness analyses (Crenshaw et al., 2015; George, 2020). In conjunction with DisCrit tenet 2 with foregrounds intersectionality (Annamma et al., 2016), I draw on the work of feminists of color (Crenshaw et al., 2015; George, 2020; Wun, 2018), in order to grasp the intersectional operation of adultifying practices that exclude Black children, with a specific focus on gender. Racialized girls are disciplined for reasons distinct from their male peers; they tend to be disciplined for being disruptive, defiant, disrespectful, or fighting (Wun, 2018). All of these scenarios were documented through the counter-stories of those participants who self-identified as female.

In Amiyna's case, her counter-story reveals some of her family's financial difficulties, including not having access to food, being intimidated because of her religion (Islam), dealing with social services and being placed in a group-home, being slut-shamed at her school, and dealing with depression, and racism. She had a tendency of enacting anger, when confronted with difficult situations, which eventually led to her expulsion from both regular and special schools. These dynamics illustrate the

institutional disregard for her circumstances, its narrow focus on enforcing social control through punishment and a complete dissociation of her behaviors from her experiences with structural violence.

Feminists of color have done extensive work that allows for the disruption of the dominant narrative from disciplinary policies that claim to address, prevent, or control interpersonal violence, to one that brings to light its structural causes, specifically among girls. They have demonstrated how racialized girls from low socioeconomic backgrounds are systematically confronted with various forms of interpersonal violence such as sexism and poverty in and outside of school, and how they enact anger as a strategy for navigating them (Crenshaw, 1997; Jones, 2010; Wun, 2018). In other words, structural violence generates interpersonal violence, a notion that often goes unacknowledged by school personnel. Wun (2018) concludes that:

> "Instead of recognizing and subsequently addressing the causes of students' anger, which could often be traced to the different forms of violence that they experienced outside of school and inside of school, school officials and authorities were more inclined to exclude and punish the girls. In this sense, while the girls were being disciplined and punished for their behaviors, the violence that may have propelled the girls to act out in school remained" (p. 431).

The result of the study are in alignment with such findings in the U.S. where Black girls face harsh and punitive responses to conflict, exclusionary consequences related to behavioral incidents, the burden of family obligations which affect them academically, high incidents of interpersonal violence, and a disregard on the part of school personnel for various forms of trauma they may be dealing (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Wun, 2018). The results also support the notion that schools can be sites of violence for Black girls, as well as the prioritization of punishment over protection. As Crenshaw and colleagues have stated, in "environments in which discipline is emphasized over counseling, girls who struggle with trauma and other unmet needs may come to the attention of school personnel only when their behavior leads to punishable offenses" (Crenshaw et al., 2015, p.11).

6.2.1.3. Socioemotional Neglect and Underprotection

The final constituent of the denial of Black childhood and adolescent innocence and protection that will be discussed in this section is the care and protection typically afforded to minors, that does not seem to be accorded to Black children in schools, according to the data of this study. This lack, is in part an effect of disciplinary measures that criminalize and displace children. When Black students are treated as "offenders", the principles of child protection are nullified and replaced with attitudes and

practices that mirror those enacted in the criminal justice system. On site, this manifested through forced unpaid labor, unsupervised isolation, physical restraints, and engagement with officers of the law, as detailed above. The participants who were subjected to these practices experienced fear, anger, and distress that was never considered or addressed. Off-site, when especially younger students in elementary schools were suspended, or in other words, revoked the privileges of being a part of a larger community, a complete disregard for their physical and mental safety was exhibited, as they travelled alone on public transportation, parents were not made aware of their suspensions, and they arrived home to an unsupervised environment.

Moreover, Black feminist researchers have brought to light how the adultification of Black girls causes them to experience negative stereotypes, difficult access to empathy and care, and harsher and inappropriate treatment from school personnel (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Maynard, 2017; Wun 2018). Recalling the case of Savannah's expulsion meeting, an administrator that she had a positive relationship with, announced her transfer to another school, and began crying about the situation. The first tenet of Discrit (Annamma et al., 2016) allows for this hidden form of underprotection to be exposed. As a high school student, Savannah did not require adult supervision as she was asked to leave school. However, her emotional needs were completely disregarded at the expense of the administrator's. Rather than preparing, accompanying, and supporting Savannah through the rupture of the relationships she already established, and the abrupt transfer to a completely unknown environment, the administrator prioritized her own emotions. Morris (2016) underscores how adultification biases have "stripped Black girls of their childhood freedoms [and] renders Black girlhood interchangeable with Black womanhood" (p.34). In Savannah's case, the adult-child roles were reversed. While the administrator was crying, Savannah was left feeling bewildered and insecure, reflecting on how to console her, while possible feelings of shame or guilt for disappointing an adult she admired did not seem to matter. Thus, the value of the fourth tenet of DisCrit which amplifies marginalized voices (Annamma et al., 2016) is made evident here, as Savannah's voice was muffled and muted by the administrator's tears.

In sum, the negation of Black childhood in schools was revealed as a significant component of the special education placement process, which manifested through cold and impersonal relationships, the institutional criminalization of behaviors, and a disregard for the physical and emotional safety of Black students. These processes created a sense of academic insecurity and personal mistrust toward non-Black personnel, based on the student-participant accounts. In compound, when faced with various forms of bullying, discrimination, and exclusion, student-participants sometimes enacted anger

as one strategy to navigate these obstacles. While the circumstances that led to this state were rarely taken into account, the criminalizing disciplinary actions that ensued were reinforced by medicalizing practices that transformed these typical childhood behaviors into disabilities and vice versa. These intersectional practices that allowed for the displacement of Black students will be discussed in the following sections.

6.2.2. Pseudo-Medicalization of Childhood Behaviors

Special education is bolstered by a medical framework that positions disabilities as intrinsic to individuals, which require adaptations and remedies to "help" students achieve predetermined standards of normalcy. As discussed above, the policies that undergird this structure allow for displacement practices based on processes of adultification bolstered by antiblackness to pass as normal everyday practice carried out by well-intended practitioners. This is illustrated through the pseudo-medicalization of child behaviors that prevailed throughout the participants' placement processes. The prefix *pseudo* is employed here to indicate even though the existing legal framework requires medical validation for a placement to be carried out, both the student and staff participants indicated that the process unfolds otherwise. Unlike studies conducted in the French sector of Quebec that have documented phases in the placement process such as referrals, the implication of specialists and medical professionals, the confirmation or refutation of a prognosis, and a formal decision-making phase (Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021), for the participants of this study, a simple referral was grounds for displacement to a special school. As such, unsurprising child and youth behaviors such as challenging adults, horseplay, fighting, or experimenting with marijuana were simultaneously pseudo-medicalized as "behavioral problems" and criminalized, and thus, managed by schools through zero-tolerance policies.

Across North America, zero-tolerance policies without reasonable recourse to less permanent, restitutive, or meaningful alternatives are documented to be disproportionately applied to Black students in schools (Anaim, 2018; CDPDJ, 2011; James & Taylor, 2017; Maynard 2017). They take the form of practices that render them displaced from their educational community such as removals from class, in-school and off-site suspensions, and expulsions. The link between increased criminalization (Adams & Erevelles, 2016), and engagement with the justice system (Meiners, 2010) has also been established. However, while intricate inquiries are mandated by law prior to enforcing these types of measures in the U.S. (albeit with notable application challenges) (Anaim, 2018), no such protective measures exist for students in Quebec. This is particularly concerning given the over-

policing and racial profiling of Black students that occurs in Quebec schools (CDPDJ, 2011; Maynard, 2017).

As such, zero tolerance policies operate both as a management system for pseudo-medicalized and criminalized child behaviors, and as the mechanism for removing Black students from school communities. In the previous section (6.1), the flaws of this mechanism were discussed, notably as they relate to the time they require students to be absent from school and thus causing them to be denied opportunities to learn in the regular schools, arrive to special schools with lag, and experience integrations challenges. While some personnel-participants from special schools criticized their regular school counterparts for being intolerant, these mechanisms were fully operational in special schools. Therefore, while both regular and special schools frame their service offers as a means of helping students achieve their maximum potential, the student-counter-stories suggest that they may rather be a sanitation process tainted by antiblackness.

Moreover, while the analysis of the results aligns with a larger body of international research that has investigated how flawed assessment practices and racial bias may lead to *misdiagnoses* among Black students (Bell, 2015; Borri-Anadon, 2016; Harry & Klinger, 2014), it also suggests a trend of *missed diagnoses* based on pseudo-medicalization, criminalization, and socio-academic neglect. In this light, not only are Black students being displaced to special schools for questionable reasons, in the event that they do require additional supports and services that are afforded to students designated with special needs by law, they are not gaining access to them, as they are not fully informed and implicated in their own placement processes.

As the student-participants of this study found themselves at the intersections of disability designation and racialization, traces of the collective historical trauma of being positioned as intellectually inferior and dangerous on a global scale were detected in the students' counter-stories as they dissociated themselves from special needs labels and affirmed their blackness as resistance strategies. This situation has specific implications for Black communities contending with the ongoing legacy of colonialism and the after-life of slavery. One of the main colonial tools that was utilized to establish and secure global European dominion and justify the human trafficking of Africans was the conception of fictitious racial identities, which allowed colonizers to superiorize themselves as white, and degrade Black people to the bottom of an imagined racial hierarchy (Quijano, 2000). This notion was legitimized through pervasive racist and ableist claims that Black people were inherently simple-minded, impulsive and threatening. In this manner, while student-participants recognized the benefits of smaller class-sizes, differentiated pedagogy, and adaptations, an ableist view of disabilities was

internalized. This perspective, in combination with the fact that they tend to be displaced to special schools without proper assessment or diagnosis, and uninformed about their own placement process and the labels they are attributed, suggest that it is very unlikely for these students to access specialized services and support measures that could potentially contribute positively to their socioacademic success. This finding speaks to studies that have demonstrated that interventions leading to positive outcomes for students with special needs tend to be reserved for white students (Banks, 2017; Fierros & Conroy, 2002; Gillborn et al., 2016).

Therefore, the pseudo-medicalization of childhood behaviors, not only operate as a tool of school sanitation through unregulated zero-tolerance practices, but also has a smokescreen to students and their families about the special education placement process, and a barrier to specialized support measures. These issues transcend race and disability and protrude into integration, inclusion and diversity policies and ideologies. There is an evident necessity of framing them as children's rights issues, as the rights to education and equality prescribed by the Quebec and Canadian charters of human rights and freedoms, as well as the Education Act are clearly not being upheld throughout the special education placement process.

6.3 Synopsis

Both the contrasted and composite analyses outlined in this chapter have identified a number of dimensions in the special education placement process that run countercurrent to the principles of inclusion, equity, and social justice. While many members of the school personnel perceive themselves as carrying-out altruistic practices that benefit students, some also critiqued these practices as serving the needs of the institutions, and identified antiblackness among them. While students and staff agree on the general reasons placement in special schools occur, there are numerous differences in perceptions in how the process unfold. The greatest divergence between student and personnel perceptions is situated in how discipline is handled. While a variety of approaches to discipline exist in schools, even the ones framed as non-punitive and restorative manifest as harmful to Black students. Discipline however it is framed, takes precedence over the social, mental, physical and academic well-being of Black children.

Further, the denial of Black childhood and adolescent innocence, and the pseudo-medicalization of Black childhood and adolescent behaviors plague the special education placement process. Behaviours such as playing, engaging in verbal disputes, and challenging authority were assigned criminal undertones requiring harsh forms of punishment and retribution, which took the form of forced labour,

physical restraints, and removal and exclusion from the larger school community. The manner in which these practices were applied illustrate the interdependence between anti-Black racism and ableism, as well as their insidious nature, that mainly operated through penal disciplinary measures and discourses of ensuring the safety and well-being of the student body. Similarly, while zero-tolerance policies facilitated student removals, behaviours were pseudo-medicalized to justify displacements, while support measures and specialized services where not made available.

Finally, despite being pushed out of the regular education sector and continuing to experience adultifying and displacing practices in the special education sector, participants expressed an appreciation for the intimate environments and access to more individualized support in special schools, as well as a strong desire to graduate from high school as they progressed through their pathways. This source of motivation became a missed opportunity for school personnel to support Black student success, further discounting access to nurturing, and bolstering feelings of being unprepared, lost and insecure about their academic capabilities, potential, and opportunities. Ultimately, special schools could be beneficial to students based on the student accounts, but they often fail to prioritize nurturing relationships and environments over punitive, violent and criminalizing discipline. This along with other practices tainted by antiblackness and ableism render Black students in special schools even more vulnerable to school disengagement, and compromise their social, emotional and academic well-being. Safety and caring, shouldn't be available only when students are behaving according to the desires and expectations of the personnel. Children deserve to know that they are safe and worthy in all circumstances.

Conclusion

This dissertation was inspired by my time working as an educator with students who never quite seemed to meet the standardized norms in schools. It was in this context that my critical reflections intensified regarding the general procedures and policies in special education; my own professional practices; and the well-being of youth, especially Black youth, who seemed to be having a different experience from their non-Black peers. This dissertation has contributed to a deep and intricate understanding of the students I have connected with, and the systems and structures we all navigate in the education ecology.

To contextualize the research problem, a general portrait of the diverse Black communities of Quebec was situated socio-historically, demographically, and educationally, to provide a wider perspective of the contemporary and ongoing adverse experiences of Black students. The review of the literature revealed an overall concerning socio-educational portrait in terms of their performance, well-being, access to opportunities, and their disproportionate representation in special education. It also revealed important research gaps pertaining to the English education sector, the practices and policies involved in the special education placement process, the documentation of student experiences, the reasons for their overrepresentation in special education, as well as the overall dominance of a culturalist approach to educational research across the province. For these reasons, the following research question guided the study: *What are the experiences of Black students who have undergone placement in special education in English schools*?

This inquiry was anchored in a critical sociological perspective, with disability critical race studies (DisCrit) (Annamma et al., 2016) at its core. According to this framework, institutional processes such as special education placement must be apprehended as components of oppressive social power systems. Particular analytical focus must be placed on the contextual dimensions of the dualities between ability and disability; Whiteness and non-Whiteness; and normalcy and abnormalcy, on how they are embedded into institutional practices and policy, and on how students are affected in their everyday lives (Annamma et al., 2016). An (anti)blackness lens was also employed to ascertain its specificity within the broader dynamics of racialization and disablement, and to account for how Black students resist multiple social oppressions within the specific postracial context of Quebec. All the key concepts emanating from this approach, namely, special education, placement process and the conceptualization of Black students and their experiences, were defined and informed by this consolidated perspective. These theoretical foundations allowed for the consideration of how Black

students' behaviors come to be constructed as natural deviance and criminality through structures that maintain oppression.

Given the sensitive nature of this research, the methodology chapter detailed the choices that were made to bring to fruition the empirical endeavors, while ensuring the well-being of all the participants. This involved situating the research in a critical-emancipatory paradigm, carefully considering my own positionality, and choosing methods and adopting strategies that ensured the student perspectives remain foregrounded and operate as contributions to theory. Therefore, a counter-story method (Solòrzano & Yosso, 2002) was employed to center the student-participants' views; to question dominant assumptions that uphold and legitimize racist and ableist ideologies of normalcy; to highlight the agency exercised by the student-participants; and to counteract dominant discourse that has historically invalidated their experiences. These considerations allowed for a composite quadripartite approach involving: 1) a thematic analysis of the personnel and student-participant narratives to identify common themes which highlighted their respective collective representations of the special education placement process; 2) a typological analysis of the variability within the placement processes based on student-experiences; 3) a contrasted analysis, which allowed for the student experiences to be cross-referenced with institutional dimensions; and 4) a DisCrit analysis, which consolidated the previous layers on analysis, established links between micro (everyday experiences) and macro (dominant ideologies) realities, and gave way to the researcher's positionality through a deconstruction/reconstruction of the data from an DisCrit/(anti)blackness perspective.

The first chapter detailing the analysis of the results established a master-narrative by introducing an institutional perspective of how the special education placement process unfolds according to the personnel-participants. A qualitative methodology guided the deductive thematic analysis of four individual interviews and six focus groups with a total of 21 school personnel members from seven regular and special schools, from various professional groups (8 administrators, 8 teachers, 3 guidance counselors, 1 behavioral technician, 1 consultant). The results of the thematic analysis allowed for the first research objective *to describe special education placement processes according to institutional actors* to be achieved. The consolidation of the personnel-participants' representations of the special education placement process revealed its sequential unfolding. It begins with a referral from regular school personnel, generally based on perceived student academic and behavioral difficulties, followed by the implication of a placement committee, which arranges for the students' transfer to a special school and culminates to student placement in special schools. On one hand, regular school personnel tend to perceive this process as a benevolent last-resort, which prioritizes student well-being. On the

other hand, special school personnel tend to question whether the needs of the regular schools are prioritized over those of the students. Both groups perceived professional barriers in terms of meeting the standards of ministerial exams and the lack of (access to) formal assessments. Special school participants reported other barriers such as unreasonable delays and inaccessible and/or incomplete student files during transitions, difficult team dynamics and challenges managing behavioral incidents. However they also perceived special schools as having a better understanding of student needs. In particular, they highlighted perceived successful practices such as fostering nurturing environments and administering non-punitive discipline.

The following chapter detailing the analysis of the results was based on the inductive thematic and typological analyses of student-participant counter-stories provided by 20 youth who self-identified as Black, and who were placed in a special school. These analyses addressed the second research objective *to document Black student experiences of the special education placement process* They revealed that students were generally not aware that they were, in fact, undergoing a special education placement process. They perceived their presence in special schools as the results of their academic or behavioral challenges. Further, through the typological analysis it was possible to create four composite characters to illustrate the distinct student special education placement experiences: 1) the voluntarily placd (self-enrollment in a special school), 2) protectively placed ("protective" measure enacted by schools), 3) forcibly placed (punitive/exclusionary measure enacted by schools), and 4) prematurely placemed (elementary school placement involving relatively extreme disciplinary actions against students). While the participants highlighted some positive aspects of special schools such as safe, intimate, and family-like environments, as well as individualized and differentiated pedagogy, additional systemic and structural barriers were revealed including perceived anti-Black racism; gender, race and language-based intimidation from their peers; as well as unresponsiveness, neglect, antagonism, oversurveillance, racial-profiling, and intolerance from staff. Thus, the third research objective *to analyze Black student experiences in interaction with institutional, systemic, and structural barriers throughout the special education placement process* was partially addressed.

The final chapter loops the third objective with the help of the contrasted and DisCrit analyses of the data that were employed. The contrasted analysis indicated that the student and staff perceptions converge when it comes to the general reasons for special education placements (academic and/or behavioral reasons), but significantly diverge concerning discipline. While personnel perceive their approach as non-punitive, students report them as unfair and racist practices that break trust and exacerbate behavioral "difficulties". The DisCrit analysis provided preponderant space to my

interpretations as a researcher to answer the research question. This analysis, guided by the theoretical framework, allowed for the conclusion that Black students at the intersection of disability designation experience a systemic negation of their childhood innocence and a pseudo-medicalization of their behaviors, which facilitates their *dis*placement from both regular and special school. These structural dimensions are grounded in racist and ableist ideologies that compromise their social, physical, emotional, and academic well-being, as well as their rights to education and equality prescribed by the Quebec and Canadian charters of human rights and freedoms, and the Education Act.

In sum, the purpose of this dissertation was to capture the educational experiences of English-speaking Black students who underwent placement in a special education program in interaction with the systemic and structural barriers that manifested throughout this process. I believe the results of the composite data analysis approach entail a number of empirical, theoretical, methodological and practical contributions.

Empirically, the thesis simultaneously contributes to the field of special education as well as to a rapidly growing body of international DisCrit research. It provides empirical evidence on how the special education placement process unfolds in a unique Canadian context, while establishing grounds to question the medical model it is anchored in, as it relates to the principles of equity and inclusion. Notably, it allows for the understanding of how categories such as *learning difficulties* and *behavioral problems* that are conceived to generate support for students, yet lead to exclusionary and unjust outcomes.

Further, the thesis also contributes to another growing research field: Black Canadian Studies. Black scholars across Canada have been contending with American hegemony when it comes to the study of blackness, largely due to the nation-wide preponderant postracial ideology. The critical analysis of the student experiences broadens works in the educational domain concerning the adverse experiences of Black youth in schools (Codjoe, 2001, Dei et al., 1997; Howard, 2014; James, 2012; Salole & Abdulle, 2015; Sibblis, 2014; Zaami, 2015). It provides empirical evidence of how concepts such as adultification and criminalization operate in a Quebecois educational context and how they are insidiously facilitated through the special education process. It also establishes an unprecedented contextual illustration of the intersectionality of childhood, race, disability, gender, language, and social class.

Within the specific context of Quebec, the thesis contributes to the advancement of knowledge in several ways. Quebec's position as a demographic majority at a provincial level, yet a linguistic

minority on a national level has shaped the evolution of its regional educational research. One dimension that has remained underexplored is the general situation in the English education sector (Howard, 2014; Mc Andrew et al., 2015). Thus, this thesis enhances the existing body of knowledge in that regard by providing meso-level insight concerning practices, procedures, and policies in the English-language domain. Along the same lines, while there is a large body of research that has documented the perspectives of various educators across Quebec (ex: Collins & Borri-Anadon, 2021; Diédhiou, 2018; Larochelle-Audet, 2019), those that directly take into account the perspectives of the students are relatively scarce. Further, the thesis provides an unprecedented contrast between the perceptions of the personnel and the students, and an intersectional portrait of students in special education.

Moreover, in other parts of Canada, most notably Ontario, research concerning Black people tends to be conducted based on their self-identification (Burke et al., 2021; Dei & James, 1998; James & Turner, 2017). In Quebec, the notion of racial self-identification constitutes a research gap, which has been reduced by this thesis. Rather than assigning or inferring blackness through country of origin, ethnicity, or language, participants were selected based on self-identity. The intersectional portrait of Black students designated with special needs is an additional empirical contribution as social identifiers tend to be treated as fixed, singular, additive, comparative, or hierarchicable variables (ex: Caldas et al., 2009; Mc Andrew et al., 2008).

Theoretically, in response to challenges and inequalities that have persisted for centuries for minoritized students, this research offers an alternative to the language, culture and integration-focused approaches that have dominated Quebecois educational research to date (ex: Gagné et Chamberland, 1999; Kanouté et al., 2016; Labelle et al., 2007; Mc Andrew et al., 2015; Rousseau, 2021). Among both quantitative and qualitative studies, the trend has been to situate minoritized groups in a mega category of “immigrants” or “ethno-cultural minorities”. The critical race-based analysis mobilized in the thesis provides a more intricate understanding of these very diverse groups and how they are affected by racism, as well as other structural barriers. Furthermore, the antiblackness lens employed in the research added even greater specificity, illustrating how Black students experience both disability and race in very distinct ways, while making it possible to reveal how the remnants of anti-Black settler colonial constructs remain foundational in the education system. Thus, the intersectional dimensions discussed above are as much a theoretical contribution as empirical.

Further, critical perspectives are by and large under mobilized in Quebecois educational research. While the DisCrit-based framework made it possible to shift the focus from acculturation, bringing

more focus to obfuscated systemic and structural barriers, the thesis also illustrates how the tenets of the theoretical framework were operationalized. This was demonstrated through the exposure of camouflaged ableism and racism that bolster ideologies of normalcy, and are embedded in everyday practices and policies; the exposure of the interdependence between these structures and how they are framed as beneficial to students; the disrupting of singular notions of identity and western norms; the foregrounding of Black student voices through counter-stories; and the analysis of how their rights are compromised through the special education process (Annamma et al., 2016). I suggest that these are decolonizing alternatives, in response to hegemonic western epistemologies and ontologies that have historically conceptualized the stories and experiences of minoritized people as folklore and/or unscientific (Dei, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

From a methodological standpoint, the thesis demonstrates how a critical-qualitative composite approach was conceived and operationalized. While it was presented here in a neat package in chapter 3, I encountered many challenges putting certain DisCrit tenets in operation, most notably the foregrounding of the participant voices, without purporting to give them voice (Annamma et al., 2016). Since the theoretical framework does not necessarily address how to operationalize the tenets, a methodological bricolage (Borri-Anadon, 2016) was necessary to establish space for both the participant and researcher perspectives.

Firstly, since I sensed that the institutional data was smothering the student-narratives, a deductive approach to the analysis mitigated this, allowing me to mobilize the institutional data as a contextualization of the master-narrative, rather than a detailed account of the personnel's experiences. Conjunctively, a counter-story method, proved to be a viable option in terms of foregrounding the student voices. Both biographical and composite counter-stories were mobilized, which facilitated a chromatic analysis that presented my own perspective and that of the participants at different intensities at various stages of the analysis, as illustrated in table 5 (p. 85). The quadripartite analysis (thematic, typological, contrasted, DisCrit), bore fruit to a single composite counter-story of the special education placement process, which to my knowledge, has not been carried-out as such elsewhere.

The implications of this study seem relevant to all stakeholders involved in youth education and beyond. In sum, the quadripartite analysis allowed for a better understanding of Black student experiences in regular schools and special schools, in both linguistic sectors, and indirectly, the reality of multiple practitioners in such settings. Examining these dimensions through the specific context of the special education placement process brought to light several points of tension. These dimensions

constitute elements that promote a greater understanding of the special education system, which has been relatively underexplored to date.

More specifically, the analysis of the special education placement process from both student and institutional vantage points made it possible to identify multiple issues concerning student needs and the interventions that are mobilized in practice. The data shows that the intimate environments, low teacher-student ratios, individualized support, and differentiated pedagogy facilitate a sense of belonging and self-efficacy among students in English special schools, suggesting that value of small schools within a system. Conversely, within the larger scope of the placement process, several professional acts such as the practical application of Ministry mandated policies concerning special needs evaluation and collective IEP participation emerged as challenges, similar to those documented in the French sector (Beaupré et al., 2003). This not only manifested as one of many components of the special education placement process that the student-participants were excluded from, but it entails important implications given the documented benefits of student IEP participation (Beaupré et al., 2003; Souchon, 2008), in conjunction with the strong desire to succeed revealed in the student-participant counter-stories. Due to their intimate environments, special schools are in a strategic position to ensure not only surface student participation in their IEPs, but a detailed understanding of the purpose of the document, of their socioacademic portrait and the associated implication, including the specific support measures that are available to them by law. This is an opportunity to establish relationships of trust, and to deconstruct ableist views of differences by facilitating a clear understanding, and non-deficit view of disability.

Moreover, the analysis suggests that the transition component of the placement process is highly unregulated, whether it's from a regular school to a special school, or from one special school to another. These are highly vulnerable moments for students that must be handled with great care and precision. As yet another component of the placement process that students are excluded from, they increase anxiety and insecurity. In light of the benefits of special schools discussed above, these transitions should not arrive as a surprise to students, nor should they be utilized as a punishment, or a time-biding strategy. They are an opportunity to review, with the students, their global profile, their strengths and areas of improvements, and resources that are available to them, thus, keeping them involved in all phases of the process and ensuring that their rights to services are being met.

In addition to IEPs and transitions, the analysis reveals that a third component of the placement process where student involvement should increase, is discipline. While personnel-participants perceive the disciplinary measures employed in schools as non-punitive, the student-participants communicated an

opposite experience. To address this convergence, student-driven approaches to discipline should be considered. Such approaches involve shared power between students and educators in terms of school rules and consequences, thus bringing "the students' voices into the decision-making process of school and [encouraging] them to promote the changes they want by assuming responsibility for their ideas" (Jean-Pierre & Parris, 2018, p.422). Moreover, the personnel's understanding of alternative disciplinary models such as a restorative approach, appear to be limited to adding a positive connotation to existing punitive measures. Given the prevalence and persistence of punitive discipline, long-term training involving the deconstruction of what discipline means and how it can align with an attachment-based approach should be prioritized.

Furthermore, the analysis of the results suggests that the provincial policy on educational success would benefit from taking trauma into account in its "consideration [of] every step in the education process, from early childhood to adulthood, and every aspect of the learning environment for children and students of all ages" (MEES, 2017, p.9). The critical analysis of the results reveals that trauma exists at historical, interpersonal, and systemic levels for students. Before even addressing literacy and numeracy development, digital competencies, and "adapting to diversity" to meet educational goals, side-stepping the reality of the traumatic stress experienced by students can no longer be afforded. The most recent research on trauma-informed policies and practices demonstrates that they promote safety, positive relationships, a greater understanding of "behavioral problems" and adverse experiences, as well as alternatives to punitive discipline (Daniel & Jean-Pierre, 2020; Howard, 2019).

In fact, the analysis also suggests that antiblackness circulates in schools as an aspect of trauma. Elsewhere, scholars such as Frantz Fanon (1961, 2007) brought to light how anti-Black racism contributes to perpetuating and exacerbating anxiety and suffering among its victims. His seminal analysis of the effects of colonial psychic violence on the psyche of the colonized points to the importance of considering student mental health and well-being in schools. The thesis also aligns with research in Canada and the U.S. that challenges notions of educational success and perseverance that inadequately address racial stereotypes, biases, and assaults, and their impacts on the mental health and academic well-being of racialized groups (McGee & Stovall, 2015; Smith & Lalonde, 2003). Therefore, the thesis joins other works that indicate that it is time for Quebec to move beyond a posture of "welcoming and celebrating diversity" in light of individual differences, to one that explicitly addresses systemic ableism, racism and the specificity of blackness, as a more comprehensive means of fostering "inclusion", safety, and social justice in schools. While I suggest specific institutional actions for Black students such as promoting and valuing their history, explicitly teaching with

compassion about their rights, opportunities, structural inequalities, and how to resist them, these actions uphold socio-educational justice and benefit all students, as well as the larger educational community.

Despite these contributions, this research entails some methodological and epistemological limitations, which should be highlighted. In terms of the methodology, I only had the opportunity to interview one placement committee in one school board. Therefore, the transition component of the process may be more characteristic of a particular school board culture than the placement process at large. Similarly, the difficult access to the student files I encountered produced an incomplete institutional portrait of the student-participants. While using multiple data sources is coherent with the counter-story method (Solòrzano & Yosso, 2002), this was only possible for 10 of the 20 participants. As such, the student files operated more as a complimentary data source for the concerned cases rather than a general institutional dimension. Nevertheless, the inaccessibility of the files is also a research result, given that they were not available, not because I wasn't given access to them, but because they could not be located by the personnel in charge.

Moreover, I believe the most significant limitation of the study is the fact that it was originally conceived and designed from an unconscious westernized lens. At the time I began this study, my understanding of how colonialism has dictated practically every aspect of life and its consequences for anyone at the intersections of anything other than white, male, and European origin was in the infancy stages. As such, I engaged in critical reflexivity with a certain naiveté that undoubtedly affected the choices I made, as I followed the protocol of a fundamental colonial institution that I was eager to be a part of.

In the same vein, the analysis has led me to recommend a trauma-informed approach to educational policy and practice. Retrospectively, I believe this approach could have benefited the research design. While I went to great lengths to ensure the safety and protection of the participants, I am left with a malaise knowing about their adverse experiences but not knowing if they are ok. Did Amiyna and Elijah make it to graduation? Did Karyn and Anthony receive the support they needed for their anxiety and depression? Did Jeremy manage to prove that he can be successful in a regular school? How is Duane coping with the trauma of his first encounter with the police as a child? I believe this is a limitation because documenting experiences and structural barriers simply seems insufficient. At this stage, the transformative aspect of the critical paradigm does not feel achieved. I attempted to address this limitation by contacting the participants for a follow up meetings subsequent to the analysis. However, with the contact information that was available and the advent of COVID-19, I was only

able to reach two of the 20 students. While, I believe that significant leeway has been made within the parameters of a doctoral project, I am left with the question of “so now what?”, which brings me to my recommendations for future research.

Regarding the students, their counter-stories suggest the possibility of concerning outcomes once they leave the youth/special education sector. In order to promote equity, social justice, and well-being, it is necessary not only to understand the future educational orientations, experiences, and outcomes of Black youth (designated) with disabilities, but more precisely, from a strength-based perspective, how they persevere despite the structural and systemic obstacles that materialize throughout their pathways. It is important to accord as much attention to the dimensions that foster educational success and well-being, as those that impede it.

Secondly, another research avenue concerns the analysis of the standards for normalcy based on settler colonial norms that anchor special education constructs and conceptions of disability, as well as the identification, categorization, and “normalization” of students deemed deviant from them. How do they obstruct social justice, and what alternatives can be created? Similarly, what are the long-term effects of some questionable practices and policies emanating from these norms such as zero tolerance measures, punitive discipline, and especially the pseudo-medicalization of childhood behaviors and physical restraints? How would a trauma-informed approach mitigate the effects of these existing policies and practices?

In the specific context of Quebec it appears important to continue undertaking educational research from a critical perspective in order to better understand complex issues involving social power relations that may not be ascertainable through post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms. In the same vein, despite the denial of systemic racism by the provincial government (Godin, 2020), the results of this research indicate that, similar to language and ethnicity, race requires theoretical and empirical study through its acknowledgment as a valid social category and status, to bring to light the insidious and intersectional circulation of racism and advance social justice. There appears to be relatively limited critical research apparatuses in French-speaking domains and quite complex to import English concepts. Simply translating the title and abstract of this dissertation was a challenge. Researchers may consider establishing compatible French-language frameworks for conducting critical intersectional analyses.

Finally, given the broader context of the study, it appears necessary to investigate resistance strategies to not only systemic, but also, epistemological racism in research involving Black youth. The

predominance of Eurocentric research paradigms constitutes an obstruction to their recognition, well-being, and educational rights. It also entails obstacles to critical researchers who must deconstruct epistemology, ontology, axiology, and methodology, that contribute to producing, reproducing and maintaining inequalities. Inspired by Indigenous research perspectives, future research may explore an Afro-emancipatory approach to conducting research with Black communities to ensure that the "so now what?" question posed above does not have to be asked. How would a comprehensive framework specific to situational and experiential Black life bolster individual and collective healing, transformation, emancipation, creativity, and love? How would it contribute to the struggle against antiblackness and benefit all of humanity? While these concluding questions and research suggestions may present as pamphleteer, I argue that too, may be the result of a Eurocentric paradigm that has domineered knowledge and thought for far too long.

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Annex 1

Interview Guide - Students

Themes guiding the interview:

1. Home and family experiences
2. Elementary school experiences
3. High school experiences
4. Special school experiences
5. Future aspirations

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1. Home and Family Experiences

Self

- Age, grade, cultural background…
- Activities and interests
- Friends
- Community involvement (groups, teams, after-school programs, weekends…)
- Significant mentors
- Earliest memory as a child (What? Where? Age? Who was involved? Feelings?)

Family

- Parents (background, employment, education)
- Other family members (parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles…)
- Home life (typical day, weekends, after school, vacations…)

2. Elementary School Experiences

- Attitude toward school
  - Was it a good school?
  - Why did you go there (parents, neighborhood, reputation…)?
  - What did you like/dislike (favorite class, subject, teacher…)?
- Student profile (successes, awards, difficulties, services etc.)
  - What kind of student were you? (academic performance, grades, behavior…)
  - Were you ever in a special class?
  - Did you ever receive special services (resource teacher, child care worker…)?
  - Were you ever in trouble? Reasons? Consequences? (detentions, suspensions, expulsions, parental reactions…)
- Support from parents/family/community (homework, supervision, moral, etc.)
- Relationships with school staff (teachers, principals, etc.)
  - Did you like your teachers, did they like you? Why?
  - Is there anyone you remember who really helped you?
  - Have you ever had a Black teacher, principal, etc.?
- Relationships peers (interactions, intergroup categorizations, experiences of discrimination, etc.)
- Teachers' and school personnel attitude toward diversity

3. High School Experiences

- Attitude toward school
  - Was it a good school
  - Why did you go there (parents, neighborhood, reputation…)
  - What did you like/dislike (favorite class, subject, teacher…)
- Student profile (successes, awards, difficulties, etc.)

- What kind of student were you? (academic performance, grades, behavior…)
    - Were you ever in a special class?
    - Did you ever receive special services (resource teacher, child care worker…)
    - Were you ever in trouble? Reasons? Consequences? (detentions, suspensions, expulsions, parental reactions…)
- Support from parents/family/community (homework, supervision, moral, etc.)
- Relationships with school staff (teachers, principals, etc.)
    - Did you like your teachers, did they like you? Why?
    - Is there anyone you remember who really helped you?
    - Have you ever had a Black teacher, principal, etc.?
- Relationships peers (interactions, intergroup categorizations, experiences of discrimination, etc.)
- Outside responsibilities (work, siblings…)
- Teachers' and school personnel attitude toward diversity

4. Special School Experiences

- Transition from regular school to specia school (reasons, incidents, process, meetings, letters, parents…)
- Perceptions and attitudes toward school.
    - What is an alternative school? (differences between regular school and alternative schools, teachers, books, workload, environment…)
    - Typical period/day/week?
    - What types of students go to your school/are in your class?
    - How do you feel about being transferred to an alternative school?
- Student profile (successes, awards, difficulties, etc.)
    - What kind of student are you? (academic performance, grades, behavior…)
    - Do you ever in trouble? Reasons? Consequences? (detentions, suspensions, expulsions, parental reactions…)
- Support from parents/family/community (homework, supervision, moral, etc.)
- Relationships with school staff (teachers, principals, etc.)
    - Do you like your teachers, do they like you? Why?
- Relationships peers (interactions, intergroup categorizations, experiences of discrimination, etc.)
- Outside responsibilities (work, siblings…)
- Teachers' and school personnel attitude toward diversity

Special Education

- What is special education?
    - How does it differ from "regular" education
- Are you a special education student? Why? How?
    - If yes, how do you feel about that?
    - If no, who do you think gets placed in special education? Why?

5. Future Aspirations

- What are your goals?
- Do you see yourself graduating from your school?
- What do you plan to do (trade, cegep, work, adult education…)
- What do you want to be when you grow up?

Annex 2

Interview Guide – School Board Personnel

Themes guiding the interview:

1. Sociodemographic and professional data
2. Special education, placement processes, and alternative schools
3. Relationships with students and families
4. Race and special education overrepresentation

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1. Sociodemographic data

Personal

- Age, civil status, children, place of birth, racial identity/cultural background

Professional

- Current position at school board (no. of years of experience)
- Education (level)
- Previous positions held
- Experience in the profession, school board, schools, alternative schools, special education
- Experiences with racially/culturally diverse students

2. Special Education, Placement Processes, and Special Schools

- What is special education? (objectives)
- How does it differ from regular education?
- Please explain the process from beginning to end (referrals, assessments, identification, placement, service delivery).
- How do students receive special needs designations?
- How do students designated with special needs end up in regular classes, vs. special classes, vs. alternative schools?
- How and why does the transition from a regular school to an alternative school occur?
- Once a student is placed, what happens? How often do students return to the regular system?
- What is your role throughout the process? Do you have an influence on final decisions?
- What factors impact special education placement?
- Are you familiar with your school, school board, and ministerial policies on special education? What are they?
- How do they influence your practice?
- Do students placed in special education generally receive the services they need to succeed?
- Does placement in special education result in beneficial outcomes for students? Please explain.

3. Perceptions of and Relationships with Students and Families in the Special Education Placement Process

- How do students and their parents respond to special education processes?
- Are students aware of the special education labels they are attributed? How do they feel about them?
- Are there types of special education students that are easier to deal with than others?
- Do you notice any types of students that are placed in special education more than others?

- What is the role of the parents in the special education process? Are they involved? In what capacity?
- Do you believe that parents are adequately consulted prior to placement decisions? Do they have an influence on decisions?

4. Race and Special Education Overrepresentation

- Can you describe the sociodemographic groups (race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status…) that are most represented in special education?
- Are you familiar with your school, school board, and ministerial policies on diversity? What are they? How do they influence your practice?
- Do you believe that Black students are at a disadvantage in the education system?
- How might the special education placement process differ for Black students, if it does?
- Studies conducted in the United States suggest that students of colour are overrepresented in special education. How can this be explained?
- Do you believe a similar phenomenon could occur or is occurring in Montreal, Quebec?

Annex 3

Parent information and consent form

Dear Parent or Guardian:

My name is Tya Collins. As a Black PhD student in the Department of Administration and Foundations at the University of Montreal, I am conducting a study on the experiences of Black students in English alternative schools. This research is co-supervised by Professor Marie-Odile Magnan at the University of Montreal and Professor Corina Borri-Anadon at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. I am sending this information and consent form to explain why I would like for your child to participate in my project.

1. Research Goals

The purpose of this study is to try to better understand the experiences of Black students in alternative schools (how they got there, why they were transferred, whether they are getting the services they need…) and to share their stories and perspectives anonymously. By understanding the special education placement processes, I hope to raise awareness about the different kinds of thoughts and perceptions Black youth may have when it comes to their educational experiences. Such information may be helpful for educating people such as helping professionals, teachers, researchers and other families.

2. Research Participation

If you and your child agree, your child will be asked to participate in two interviews (one individually and one in a group) that will take approximately one hour, at a date, time and location that is convenient. The interview will include questions about their experiences and perceptions of the schools they've attended. The interviews will also be recorded and transcribed. The information your child provides me with will be combined with information from other students and educators in the form of a research thesis.

3. Confidentiality

At no time will identifying information about your child or your family be used in any report and any subsequent presentations, conferences, journal articles, and/or books. All information collected from this study will be stored in a secure location. The results from this study may be published in print and electronically. I am taking the following steps to address concerns about your privacy and to protect your anonymity:

- All the names of people and places that may identify your child, yourself, or your family will be replaced with pseudonyms.
- Only I will have access to the interview data (recordings and transcripts).
- I will keep the data safe in a password-protected area of restricted-access computers and locked filing cabinets. Demographic information will be collected and stored separately.
- Any information that will personally identify your child will only be used to organize the research data. This information will not be used in any public presentation or written report.

4. Advantages and Disadvantages

In volunteering to be a part of this study, your child will make an important contribution to a growing body of research in special education in the English education sector of Quebec. Potential benefits of participation in this study include a chance for your child to openly share his or her thoughts and feelings about their school experiences. This may have a liberating and empowering effect. Conversely, sharing his or her past, present, and personal experiences may also bring up complex emotions that may be difficult to manage. To assist with any unpleasant feelings, I will have a list of

free services and referrals to appropriate professionals. Your child has the right to refrain from answering certain questions, to stop the interview at any time, and to delete confidential details from the interview transcript.

5. Right to withdraw

Most importantly, participation in this research project is voluntary, and your child will have the right to withdraw from this study at any time. To withdraw from the study, he or she can simply contact me by email or by phone. Any information that would have been shared with me will be destroyed. There will be no negative consequences attached to either declining to participate or withdrawing from participation in the study.

6. Appreciation of your child's participation

Your collaboration is precious in order to carry out this study and I am very grateful for your participation and support. I encourage you and your child to ask any questions at any time about this study, as your concerns are important to me.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address or phone number in the B) consent section below. If you give permission for your child to participate, I will personally meet with him or her to make sure they thoroughly understand what is involved.

B) CONSENT

Parent

I assert that I have read all the information in this consent form, that I have obtained all the answers to my questions pertaining to the research participation of my child and that I understand the goal, content, advantages, risks and disadvantages of this research.

After reflection and a reasonable delay, I freely give my consent for my child to participate in this research. My child will sign a separate consent form, confirming his or participation. I am aware that my child can withdraw at any moment without prejudice, by simple verbal notice and without having to justify their decision.

Signature: ____

Parent's name, printed: ____

Student's name, printed: ____

Date: ____________________________

Interviewer

I assert that I have explained the goal, content, advantages, risks and disadvantages of this research and that I have answered questions to the best of my knowledge. I also agree to respect the confidentiality of the participant and the conditions stipulated in this form.

Researcher's signature: ____

Researcher's name, printed: ____

Date: ____________________________

If you have any question pertaining to this research, or to withdraw your child from this project, please communicate with Tya Collins, PhD candidate, at the following number: 514-343-6111 ext. 29670 or at this email address: tya.collins@umontreal.ca

Any complaint concerning your child's participation in this research can be directed, in strict confidence, to the Université de Montréal's Ombudsman at the following number (514) 343-2100 or at this email address: ombudsman@umontreal.ca **(the Ombudsman accepts collect calls).** This study has been approved by the Université de Montréal and is not being conducted through any particular school board.

A copy of this signed information and consent form has been handed to me.

Annex 4

Student information and consent form

Your parents have allowed me to talk to you about a project that I am working on. The project is on Black students in alternative schools. I am going to explain the project, and then I am going to ask you if you are interested in participating in it.

Who am I?

My name is Tya Collins. I used to be the Head Teacher at Focus High School. Now, I am a student at the University of Montreal.

Why am I meeting with you?

As a PhD student, I am doing a research project about students like yourself and I would like to know if you are interested in being a part of it.

Why am I doing this study?

I want to find out about you and your school experiences.

What happens if you agree to participate in the study?

We will have two meetings. The first one will be just you and me. I will ask you questions about your school experiences in elementary school, in high school, how you ended up in an alternative school, and how it's going so far. I am interested in knowing how you feel. It will take about an hour, and your answers will be audio recorded. You can try your best to answer all the questions but you don't have to answer any that you don't want to. We can have this meeting at your school, at my university, or somewhere else where you feel comfortable.

The second meeting will be a group meeting with other students. I will present the results of the study and I will ask you if you agree or disagree with them, and if you think I forgot anything. We can have this meeting at your school, or at my university, depending on where everyone feels comfortable.

What's the point of the study?

Your point of view may help teachers and principals understand what's good and what could be improved in school life for students like yourself. As far as I know, being in this study will not hurt you, will not get you in trouble, and it will not make you feel bad. In the event that you feel uncomfortable or upset, we can stop the interview and discuss your feelings. If I cannot help you, I have a list professionals in your area that may be able to help you and discuss what you are feeling.

Will you have to answer all questions and do everything you are asked to do?

If I ask you questions that you do not want to answer, you just have to tell me, and I will move on to the next question, or stop the interview.

Who will know that you are in the study?

Your parents and people at your school may know that you are in the study but the things you say and any information I write about you will not have your name with it. I will not let anyone see your answers or any information about you. Your teachers, principal, and parents will never see the answers you give or the information I write about you.

Do you have to be in the study?

You do not have to be in the study. No one will get angry or upset with you if you don't want to participate. Also, if you do agree, but you change your mind later, that's ok too!

Do you have any questions?

You can ask questions at any time. You can ask now or you can ask later. You can talk to me or you can talk to someone else at any time during the study. Here are the telephone number and email address to reach me:

Tya Collins
514-343-6111 ext 29670 tya.collins@umontreal.ca

If you want to be in the study, please sign and print your name below.

Student's signature: ____

Student's name, printed: ____

Date: ___________________________

Annex 5

School board personnel information and consent form

Dear Educator:

My name is Tya Collins. As a PhD student in the Department of Administration and Foundations at the University of Montreal, I am conducting a study on the experiences of Black students in English alternative schools. This research is co-supervised by Professor Marie-Odile Magnan at the University of Montreal and Professor Corina Borri-Anadon at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. This letter outlines the objectives of my study and how you will be involved should you agree to participate.

1. Research Goals
The purpose of this study is to try to better understand the experiences of Black students in special education and to understand the role that educators play in the placement process and their observations anonymously. I am interested in examining your perceptions as an educator on the placement processes involved in special education. By understanding these processes, I hope to raise awareness about the different kinds of experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of Black students who are placed into special education. Such information may be helpful for educating people such as helping professionals, teachers, researchers and other families.

2. Research Participation
If you agree to participate, an interview will take approximately 60 minutes, at a date, time and location that is convenient for you. The interview will include questions about your experiences and observations on the placement processes and your role in them. The interview will also be recorded and transcribed. The information you provide me with will be combined with information from other educators and students in the form of a research thesis.

3. Confidentiality
At no time will identifying information about you be used in any report nor any subsequent presentations, conferences, journal articles, and/or books. All information collected from this study will be stored in a secure location. The results from this study may be published in print and electronically. I am taking the following steps to address concerns about your privacy and to protect your anonymity:

- All the names of people and places that may identify you or your family will be replaced with pseudonyms (you may have access to the interview transcripts and may modify these pseudonyms until you are satisfied about the degree of you your anonymity).
- Only I will have access to the interview data (recordings and transcripts).
- I will keep the data safe in a password-protected area of restricted-access computers and locked filing cabinets. Demographic information will be collected and stored separately.
- Any information that will personally identify you will only be used to organize the research data or to contact you. This information will not be used in any public presentation or written report.

4. Advantages and Disadvantages
In volunteering to be a part of the study, you will be making an important contribution to a growing body of research in special education in the English education sector of Quebec. Potential benefits of participation in this study include the benefit of voicing feelings and thoughts that you may not have the opportunity to in your work environment. This may have a liberating and empowering effect. Conversely, sharing past, present, and personal experiences may also bring up complex emotions that may be difficult to manage. You have the right to refrain from answering certain questions, to stop the

interview at any time, and to delete confidential details from the interview transcript.

5. Right to withdraw
There is minimal risk associated with participation in this research. If, however, you should find any portion of your participation in this study upsetting, you may end participation (at any time, for any reason), without question or negative consequence. Any information that would have been shared with me will be destroyed.

6. Appreciation of your participation
Your collaboration is precious in order to carry out this study and I am very grateful for your participation and support. I encourage you to ask any questions at any time about this study, as your concerns are important to me.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at the email address or phone number in the B) consent section below.

B) CONSENT

Participant (School board personnel)
I assert that I have read all the information in this consent form, that I have obtained all the answers to my questions pertaining to my research participation and that I understand the goal, content, advantages, risks and disadvantages of this research.

After reflection and a reasonable delay, I freely give my consent to participate in this research. I am aware that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice, by simple verbal notice and without having to justify my decision.

Signature: ____

Name, printed: ____

Date: ___________________________

Interviewer
I assert that I have explained the goal, content, advantages, risks and disadvantages of this research and that I have answered questions to the best of my knowledge. I also agree to respect the confidentiality of the participant and the conditions stipulated in this form.

Researcher's signature: ____

Researcher's name, printed: ____

Date: ___________________________

If you have any question pertaining to this research, or to withdraw from this project, please communicate with Tya Collins, PhD candidate, at the following number: 514-343-6111 ext. 29670 or at this email address: tya.collins@umontreal.ca

Any complaint concerning your participation in this research can be directed, in strict confidence, to the Université de Montréal's Ombudsman at the following number (514) 343-2100 or at this email address: ombudsman@umontreal.ca **(the Ombudsman accepts collect calls).** This study has been approved by the Université de Montréal and is not being conducted through any particular school board.

A copy of this signed information and consent form has been handed to me.

Annex 6

Socio-Demographic Information – Students

Please note: Although all participating students will be asked to complete this survey, these details will be aggregated into a composite profile, thereby avoiding the identification of specific participants. No participant will be identified in any presentation or publication.

Name: ________________________________

Neighborhood where you live in Montreal: ___________________________________

Telephone number: ___________________ Email address: _______________________

Birthday: _____________ Gender: male ☐ female ☐

City and country where you were born: _____________________________________

Your first language spoken at home: _______________________________________

I live with: ____

What schools did you go?

Elementary school(s)	
High school(s)	
Alternative school(s)	

How do you define your:

ethnicity	
nationality	
religious background	
racial background	

Are there any other characteristics/identifiers that you identify with (i.e. sexual orientation, class, socioeconomic background?)

____

Information on your parents:

	Place of Birth	Education (high school, cegep, university…)	Work
Mother			
Father			

Annex 7

Socio-Demographic Information – School Board Personnel

Please note: Although all participating educators/school administrators will be asked to complete this survey, the details in this survey will be aggregated into a composite profile, thereby avoiding the identification of specific participants. No participant will be identified in any presentation or publication.

Name: ________________________________

Neighborhood where you live in Montreal: ___________________________________

Telephone number: ___________________ Email address: _______________________

Gender: male ☐ female ☐

Age range: 18-25 ☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐ 55+☐

Highest level of education: _____________________________

Position in the EMSB: __________________________ since: _____________________

How do you define your:

ethnicity	
nationality	
religious background	
racial background	

Are there any other characteristics/identifiers that you identify with (i.e. sexual orientation, class, socioeconomic background?)

____

Annex 8

First Contact Email – Principal

Research on the Special Education Placement Processes of Black Students in English Montreal Schools

Dear Principal,

As previously discussed during our phone conversation, it is an honor to be invited to your school to conduct a study on the special education placement processes of Black students in English Montreal schools. As a reminder, here are the activities that are intended to be carried out:

1) interviews with students
2) interviews with school board personnel
3) consultation of student-participant confidential files
4) Educational Placement Committee observations (2x/month)

Prior to formally recruiting participants for the study, it is ideal that I may have the opportunity to get to know the students that I may later interview. For this reason, I would like to be present at least once or twice a week in a few schools that we may mutually select together. During my time in these schools, in addition to observing the everyday happenings of school life, I could also facilitate student activities, and be available to offer assistance in whatever capacity is deemed helpful.

Thank-you again for agreeing to make the alternative school network available for this study. Looking forward to meeting soon in order to finalized the details.

Tya

Tya Collins
PhD candidate in Educational Foundations
Département d'administration et fondements de l'éducation
Faculté des sciences de l'éducation
Université de Montréal
Pavillon Marie-Victorin C-506
Phone: 514-343-6111 ext 29670 Email: tya.collins@umontreal.qc.ca

Annex 9

Ethics Approval Certificate

Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherche

N° de certificat
CPER-18-084-P

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE

Le Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherche (CPER), selon les procédures en vigueur, en vertu des documents qui lui ont été fournis, a examiné le projet de recherche suivant et conclu qu'il respecte les règles d'éthique énoncées dans la Politique sur la recherche avec des êtres humains *de l'Université de Montréal.*

Projet	
Titre du projet	**Les processus de classement en adaptation scolaire : l'expérience scolaire des élèves Noirs dans le secteur anglophone au Québec**
Requérante	**Tya Collins** ( ), candidate au doctorat, FSE - Département d'administration et fondements de l'éducation
Sous la direction de	Marie-Odile Magnan, professeure agrégée, FSE - Département d'administration et fondements de l'éducation, Université de Montréal
Financement	
Organisme	Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH)
Programme	Bourse doctorale
Titre de l'octroi si différent	--
Numéro d'octroi	
Chercheur principal	--
No de compte	--

MODALITÉS D'APPLICATION

Tout changement anticipé au protocole de recherche doit être communiqué au CPER qui en évaluera l'impact au chapitre de l'éthique.

Toute interruption prématurée du projet ou tout incident grave doit être immédiatement signalé au CPER.

Selon les règles universitaires en vigueur, un suivi annuel est minimalement exigé pour maintenir la validité de la présente approbation éthique, et ce, jusqu'à la fin du projet. Le questionnaire de suivi est disponible sur la page web du CPER.

Anne-Marie Émond, présidente par intérim
Comité plurifacultaire d'éthique de la recherche
Université de Montréal

31 octobre 2018
Date de délivrance

1er novembre 2023
Date de fin de validité

1er novembre 2019
Date de suivi

Annex 10

Student Matrix Example

Pseudonym: Laura / Age: 17 / Grade: 11 / Self –identification: Black / Gender: F / Parental country of origin: Guyana (M), St-Vincent (F)/ Generation: 2G / Disability Designation : NA
Interview code: SI-002

Oversurveilled and Underserved

« They're always on me. It feels like that. And it's not even a good always on me, it's like bad »

Synopsis - Description of pathway and special education placement process:
- Laura began her academic journey in a French immersion program in an affluent neighborhood school (K-1) and was transferred to a "lower income" school for grades (3-6). While she liked the school overall, she recalls some harsh disciplinary measures namely teachers yelling and being grumpy. In high school she found the staff to be comparatively more reasonable. During grade 8 her sister passed away and she spent most of the year dealing silently with this loss. It affected her academic performance and motivation and she ended up repeating grade 8. The following year, since no academic improvements were made and she was on the verge of failing again, she began exploring other options for schooling. Her friends told her about alternative schools and she self-enrolled in one based on their recommendations. In the junior school she attended, she found a really caring staff and much support. However, she felt that her trust was violated when a staff member made the decision to contact social services following a personal situation she shared. This call resulted in her placement in a group home and many family problems for years to come. During her stay at the group home she switched to another alternative school for grades 10 and 11. Overall she describes this school as unorganized and unfair. She recalls incidents that she interprets as racist and the feeling of being targeted and over-policed. As a grade 11 student, Laura communicates that she does not have the confidence to apply to cegep and intends to pursue a trade. In the end, she did not end up graduating from high school.

Facilitating factors:
- Caring teachers, academic support, positive reinforcement

Constraining factors:
- Loud, grumpy, yelling, mean teachers, rigid rules, long distances between home and school, differential treatment, overpoliced

What led up to/reasons for the placement:
- Failing grade 8

Defining moments/events/experiences during the placement:
-Being reported to social services

What happened after the placement:
-Placement in group home, academic struggles

Blackness at the intersection of the placement process:
-Feels targeted, treated differentially, overpoliced

Disability at the intersection of the placement process:
-A diagnosis seems possible but Laura is seemingly unaware
-Not aware of any special services

Comments: Laura's file indicates psychiatric or psychological evals, she disclosed meeting with a psychologist but seemed unaware of any evaluations, diagnosis, or interventions.

Educational Pathway Reconstruction (Descriptive Analysis)				
General Self-Description	**Elementary School**	**Secondary School**	**Special School**	**Future Plans**
Living situation: Living with mom, previously in group home Family situation: 7 siblings Neighborhood: Interests: Drawing, singing Employment: None	Name of school 1: Perception of school +: - Perception of school -: - Academic Profile: -Recommended to another school: *I guess I wasn't doing the work properly* Social Profile: - Behavioral profile: Disciplinary measures: - Disability and/or Special education designation: Intervention measures: - Relationships with peers: - Had many friends Relationships with personnel: - Placement process: - Blackness: - --	Name of school 1: (grade 7-8, repeated grade 8) Perception of school +: - Perception of school -: -Very strict especially with punctuality and uniforms: *I didn't like it. Well, that's because of me I didn't like it because they were kind of really strict and they give detentions because they give like two minutes to get your class and they have like three floors. So if you're late, it's like your fault. But yeah, and then they have uniform check, like if your skirt is like really short you have detention and if you're not wearing the right uniform you have detention. It was just a really strict school.* Academic Profile: -Considers herself a good student: *I made sure I was in class. I always had my notes and i'd ask teachers like if I'd miss something or i made sure...the only bad thing about in the schools was that I was unorganized and the teachers saw that. Like they noticed I was unorganized* -sister passing ways affected academics and motivation : *I remember, I wasn't really focusing on school that year. I guess I just didn't care…* You know, it affected my mood, so I wasn't working in school anymore. I'd go home and I'd just sleep, I wouldn't do my work? Yeah. -Spent most of the year dealing with the loss and found it difficult to catch up later: *Then it was too late for me to actually step up so that I feel like I began to like continue my work but it too late, like already the end of the year…* I was disappointed Social Profile: - Behavioral profile: -Being late	Name of school: Transition: HOW: Knew she was failing so took it upon herself to seek out another school: *Because me and friends we all decided this school was really complicated. So we looked into an alternative school. Because, like we knew anyways, cause we were gonna fail. So you might as well change to another school before we have to repeat or they're going to change us, I don't know. And so, I remember, I had to choose another school and like I it was kind of late in the year. And I called to go to another school. So like, I was about to go to James Lyng, but then that one, I think got full. So I had to go to instead, and then I decided to change schools.* -Friends suggested WHY: Failing grade 8 : *Like they'd tell us, like if we didn't do our work, they'd tell us like how big of a deal it is to not do it. Sometimes the teacher will yell at us, there's a one teacher that would be yell at us if we didn't do our work. So she'd try to scare us into doing the work. Well, I guess sometimes it was different with me because she actually liked me. So she'd just all me and be like you better do your work, like you need to.* Perception of school +: -Discovering the benefits of the school: *I thought it was full of like bad people like, not like bad bad, but like people who are doing bad things. I don't know like if you do something bad, not like at a normal school. Like the school board they send you there because you're doing bad things. That's what I thought it was. Then I learned that it's like for, it's a small a place where you, with small students like a small group of students that help the teachers help them focus more, instead of a whole building full of kids like, i don't know it's different from that. Now I realize it.* -Positive reinforcement: *They helped me like focus more on my work and they told me, they'd tell how I'm doing. Like every time if you did something good like you get an award or like a prize or something like that. So you'd get noticed for it around school* Perception of school -:	Hairdressing Vocational Does not feel capable of going to cegep based on marks. Did not apply, feels scared to apply **Actual Outcome (2019-2020)** Did not graduate

	<u>Name of school 2:</u> ████ (grade 2-6) <u>Perception of school +:</u> - <u>Perception of school -:</u> - <u>Academic Profile:</u> -Doing well in all subjects except for math: *Yeah, except for math. I wasn't doing good in that but English I was doing really good in English. Like back then I was, yeah I was having really big trouble in like math. But everything else I was good in it.* <u>Social Profile:</u> - <u>Behavioral profile:</u> -Stole things: *Cause I had nothing… I knew it wasn't ok* <u>Disciplinary measures:</u> -Observed a peer having his mouth washed out with soap -Excessive punishments: *I was a kid, umm I was a kid too, but I think I was a little bit older than that kid and like we were playing, my friends were playing there and then something happened when told us to leave and I was like, I'm not leaving cuz this is my spot. I think I pushed the kid and he hit his head and started bleeding. Like it was like some sticks there and he hit his head and I got in trouble for that. The teacher would be yelling at me during the detention. Like I deserved that, you know… I felt really bad* -Detentions <u>Disability and/or Special education designation:</u> <u>Intervention measures:</u> - <u>Relationships with peers</u>: - <u>Relationships with personnel</u>: -Teachers were mean, grumpy, loud, yelling	<u>Disciplinary measures:</u> -Detentions -Threats of school transfers for not doing work: *No they were like threatening us with it. Like you're gonna go to ████. Like we're going to kick you out if you don't focus on your work or if you fail again you're getting sent.* -Alternative school : *Cause the schools threaten that for us. Like they say if you fail, you're going to that school, they make it sound like bad* <u>Disability and/or Special education designation:</u> <u>Intervention measures:</u> -Academic aids (CCWs): *But they'd normally help me, like (inaudible [00:14:48]) like those helpers, they'd help me… they come to help students that need help in the class and you sit there, they'd assist you* -Supportive teachers: *Like they'd tell us, like if we didn't do our work, they'd tell us like how big of a deal it is to not do it. Sometimes the teacher will yell at us, there's a one teacher that would be yell at us if we didn't do our work. So she'd try to scare us into doing the work. Well, I guess sometimes it was different with me because she actually liked me. So she'd just all me and be like you better do your work, like you need to.* <u>Relationships with peers</u>: - Good relationships with peers <u>Relationships with personnel</u>: - <u>Placement process:</u> - <u>Blackness:</u> -	-Distance from home would cause lates: *I'd always be late, because it was real far from my house* -Implication of SW on the part of the school : *I didn't want them to take me, like the social worker because I just wanted to have contacted with my dad. So I asked for help from the teachers. Cause I thought they all knew. but then when she called the social worker before I even asked, she didn't even ask me if she could ask the social worker or call the social worker. She just called.* The result is that she's scarred to talk about things for that very reason, she wants to protect her family Lates (having to miss an entire class for showing up late): *And I don't like this one, like if you're late like over ten minutes, like 12 minutes. You have to wait 30 minutes after school. If you're like 12 minutes because usually it's the time that, it used to be the time that you're late is how much you're paying after school. It's 30 minutes if you're over ten over ten minutes late.* <u>Academic Profile:</u> -doing well academically <u>Social Profile:</u> - <u>Behavioral profile:</u> <u>Disciplinary measures:</u> -Detentions for being late <u>Disability and/or Special education designation:</u> -Unaware of what special education is <u>Intervention measures:</u> -Implication of GC: *I was having trouble, like because before that they were all like, like a guidance counsellor, they brought a guidance counsellor in so I could to talk to him, I could talk to him, so they knew that I had "problems" like a little bit of problems, but they didn't know about that, what was happening at home* -Implication of social services: *until one day, I like something happened and home, I went and told them because something happened to me like, and they were asking me why I was late and I why like looked like that. So then yeah, I told them, I wasn't expecting them to call those services, I asked them to call my dad, or contact me. But she said she couldn't contact him finally. So*	

	-Caring teachers: *She (grade 3 teacher) was nice, ummm she care about me, how I was doing. She helped me a lot. She made sure I stayed out of trouble, that's what I liked about…: She paid more attention to me or at least tried to. I guess that's all. Like she really paid more attention to me than any other teacher did.* <u>Placement process:</u> - <u>Blackness:</u> -Never had any black teachers		*So I haven't had a social worker for years until then and then she called a new one. So she came to get me after school. I told them, like on the way out like you're not gonna, like nothing's gonna happen to my mom. She said no. I believed her and she went to go pick up my little sister from her school. Then we got brought us to the police station. They're asking some questions, and then there they tell us that they're taking us, my sister to a foster home and they're taking me to a group home* (ended up staying there for a year and a half). *I didn't know at that time that that was gonna happen. And then my mom, the police went to my mom's house. So, they, she basically lied, the social worker* *I guess she, she felt bad so she had to call but at the same time, like she should've asked me.* -Laura does not feel comfortable disclosing the details leading up to this event other than the following : *like she was the only one there in the office because I don't know where the other teachers were. One of the teachers, like the head teachers at that school. She was off because she had like cancer or something and so it was just like those type of teachers and she was the only one in the office and I needed something to cover like, what I had, so she asked what happened and like I told her. But that wasn't the reason why I was late. I just asked for something to cover and for food because I left my house like right after it happened* -Does not feel that the staff member's intervention was appropriate : *Because after that, a lot of stuff happened to my mom, for like so long. Like I get it, they should care but at the same time, I don't know…*I *would ask the student, to make sure, like do you want me to call social services instead of calling, like have my consent? You know* -Implication of psychiatrist : *as I was like talking to a guidance counselor, she would like bring me. The guidance counselor set me up a psychol...a psychiatrist at like a hospital somewhere. So I'd go there during school like a little bit and [00:42:14 inaudible] the person that told.* <u>Relationships with peers</u>: - <u>Relationships with personnel</u>: -Teachers are generally caring: *it was a good school. At first, I didn't like it when then started liking the teachers, cause, they show that they really care about students. But then like, they said that if you don't care, if you don't care about this school, we don't care, you guys have to leave like the same time. But*	

			I realized that it's our fault like if we're not coming to school and to learn, why are we there, but at the same time, I don't know. *And they cared, they really did care about me too. They really made sure like I was socialized, cause was when I first got there I didn't socialize with anyone. Then they made sure, they'd even try talking to me themselves. They made sure I had fun* -Detecting teachers that are "fake": I know when a teacher doesn't care when they just look at you and they say *Hi, and then they just walk off. Look, I know when a teacher does care when they, they say Hi, how are you? And they ask you, they see you and they ask you what's wrong really? OR like how was your weekend? And they have a full conversation with you, that's how I know that they care. Unlike these other teachers who just say hi, good morning then walk off.* -Supportive staff : *If you really need their help they're like really like next to, like if you really need the help, they're there* -Encadrement: *Umm not taught different because we're just getting teached the same here as there. I still understand what they're teaching me but like I guess yeah, we're taught different but we still get the same worked though. Like they, still, when they teach us they're specific, they make sure that we're on top of it, like being like, like we know what they're talking about. At the other school, they'd just move on with what they're talking about. They make sure we're on track* Placement process: - to next alternative school: *like I told you at that school they really cared about me because I was having problems at home. And so what happened was they had to call the social worker and social worker brought me, took me from that school and brought me to the police station to talk about it then a lot of things happened. I was in a group home for like a year. After that, like I was already gone from Vezina, so that incident, after that and then uhh, they knew I having trouble being sent to another school because I was already done with that school and the group home didn't really know that. So it was hard to find a new school so I suggested JL after that and apparently something, I don't know what happened* Blackness: - -- Name of school 2: ██████ Perception of school +:	

			-flexible rules and calm environment: *I'm actually doing my work here, because we actually, I you didn't finish your work, they still give you a chance to hand it. At the other school they didn't. If you didn't do your work, it's a zero. It's quieter, it's a little bit quieter than other schools, here. The teachers tend to socialize with the students here.* Perception of school -: -It's unorganized: *so when it comes to like school trips, they tell us to come at this time. We get there, we wait a whole hour for some else to come or they don't know what's going on. They don't don't even know what's going on. Or like, they get us unorganized too. They give us so much work to do in one week, especially in English, so much work. Sometimes the teachers don't even know, like you call them [00:50:40 inaudible] like I'm here and it's like they don't even know where I am. Like I call, I yell it and their still not moving from their desk. Or I'll have my hand up and they're still with another person. I don't know, it wasn't like that at the other schoo* -Feeling unheard : *We said that to them too, they don't care. We told them it makes no sense, we were like, how does that make sense though? Like still, like they're not listening to us when were telling them it doesn't make sense. So, I guess we have to do the detention. There was times to during the year that they didn't do detentions cause they didn't feel like it. Like if you were late, there was no attention. I actually liked that. I'm not complaining but still you shouldn't have detention on days you choose to have detention.* Academic Profile: -Struggling in math and sciences, failing classes, also English -Does not feel like she's in danger of not graduating based on teacher feedback: *Well, if she's not telling me anything now, I guess not because like I'm still trying to do my work* Social Profile: - Behavioral profile: -Skipping school, unmotivated, not getting caught (parents unaware): *I was like, not really because I didn't get caught so I didn't really, so I was like, okay, I'm gonna continue doing this since I'm not getting caught… I was missing school like Thursdays I'd come. I remember, I came back and then one person*	

			in the class. The person was new, they're like are you new, I was like no I came here last year? I was like wow, I haven't been to school that much. Disciplinary measures: -Suspensions for up to a week: *I can't come back to school unless my mom comes. Which it was hard because my mom works during the day…*yeah, and then they allowed me to come back because they realized that my mom was working -*because It didn't help me at all, like nothing happened. The solution she we thought of it didn't happened. Like nothing different happens afterwards. Except I started coming to school, because my mom found out. So, I came to school but nothing really happened. but nothing really helped, so then that's when they sent me to the hub* -View on suspnsions: *you shouldn't send them home. Make them think about what they did. Cause clearly they don't know. They're not thinking about the probably at the time. And you're just making it worse by sending them home.* -Collective consequences and making food unavailable: *Okay, here's one that I really got mad at because I like my food. Okay, so they locked...down there, there's like a cafeteria and they lock their food in the fridge. So they have a lock on the fridge . They have a lock on the cabinets with the plates and juice and stuff. So clearly someone came one day and they messed everything up, like threw food all over the place. And yes, that was the white boys in the school, they threw everything. And we all got punished for it, and they know exactly who did it, but they still punished everyone for it. I was trying to say like that's not reasonable. Me and my friend were trying to say that like why, this makes no sense, like why are we getting punished for what they did? An like for a whole week we no food. And they know I don't have lunch still* *Jail : they locked everything, locked the fridge.* Disability and/or Special education designation: -Does not consider herself in special education : *Once my sister actually did say that, she was like you go to a special school and, she said that like she means my alternative. But at the same time I don't think of it like that, I really don't okay. I don't see it that way.* -Possible undiagnosed depression : *I guess was sad; I was just tool like tired. I was tired of school. And then people were annoying to be honest. I had like, I didn't care for the teachers.* Intervention measures:	

			-Behavioral techs (CCWs): *So I'd usually talk to her when I wasn't feeling good at the group home, I'd talk to her and tell her things about what's happening with my mom and stuff. So I felt more comfortable working out of here, but I'd still do my work. I tried to.* -Other support staff: *Yeah, like this girl comes in every Wednesday. Yeah. She's another one. She, I don't know what she is, she's like, I don't know what she is, she's like a worker 2 I guess… But she she talks to everyone in the school. I'm not sure about everyone, but she talks to me and she asked me how I'm doing in the school, if I'm doing a good and if I need help. Because if I told her I'm not doing well in that class, she'll go off and tell the teacher, ask her to for any suggestions and stuff. She asks for me. She said she already wrote feedback on the chromebook but I didn't see it, I guess I have to check that* Relationships with peers: - Had friends Relationships with personnel: -Staff was welcoming -Staff all up in your business: *I mean the teachers care, but sometimes they cared so much, like not in a good way. Like they don't know how to mind their own business, that's it. Cause sometimes you want your privacy and they don't like that. These kids need their privacy, they get bothered by that and other students. So I like the teachers, like some of them sometimes. There's like no one here that I'm close to me except for the math teacher, because he knew about the group home already and he knew me from before. I know his sister* -Inattentive staff: *I know, because my French teacher, like I'm calling him, I don't know if he's half of deaf. Like I'm calling him, he's right there. I'm like, sir, sir. He's still like looking at his computer typing away. And like my English teacher, she's rarely in our class, cause she's the head teacher. I don't blame her I guess but she's the teacher and she's barely in our class for English, which is an important subject and she's giving loads of work every week. She rarely even helps us. She just sits in the classroom on her computer. That's that's pretty much it.* *Well teach us, like actually teach us something, show us what to do instead of telling us what to do. She's like it's on the chromebook. You have an article to read, it's on the chromebook. Okay, are you're gonna teach us or are you gonna tell us? Guide us through it.* -Lack of support : *Like they complain about us not doing the work but they don't help us TO do the work. Like I told my mom about it. I like another mom when I was at the Parent-Teacher interview this year, like another mom was like asking me, my son's saying that the teachers are really in the class, is that true? I was like, yes, it's true*	

			-Caring teachers : *Depends on the school and teachers in it, I think because I was in this school and they sent me to another alternative school for like a week or two and one of the teachers there I really really liked, he was really nice. Like he talked to me, like he even made me cry because like, he was saying some things that I related to. Cause he saw that I was down, I wasn't happy, something happened and like, he talked to me about it. And like, he showed that he really really cares about his students, because like he's a math teacher there, and like here, I was not understanding my math because even though I like my math teacher he still doesn't teach us properly. He moves quickly so, and this teacher like, he realized that my teacher was not teaching us properly...cause he, he's like REALLY good at math. He's like a math magician… he's really, really nice. He cares a lot. If I could just go to that school just for him or if he can come here, that would be really great, because he's really good. Like I passed with a 91 when I came back.* -Also those that are unhelpful : *Well. I wasn't feeling good. So they sent me to them, for like a whole week. Without really my permission or my mom's permission. At the same time, it was still good. I didn't really like one of the teachers there because he was kind of off. He was kind of touchy. Like I don't even know, because one of them was touching, the other one did not help me at all. He just looked at the French helper there, Rob, Rob. He would just like say hi you doing good? Okay, and then just walk up the room. It was only* [redacted] *who helped me alot.* -Feeling oversurveilled: *they're always on me. It feels like that. And it's not even a good always on me, it's like bad* *Yeah, and like in the morning. Why are you late ? Like honestly, in my head it's none of your business, at the same time, I understand what you're asking me, but you're waiting at the door for me every morning. It's always going to be the same answer, like I don't know. Like I'm late because I woke up late working. The bus is late. It's always going to be the same thing, and they're always waiting for me at the door.* Rude teachers : *There's one time too, I was so mad at this, because I found this really, rude. Okay. So I came in late for my math teacher's class. And then umm I asked her when she came out of the class, what did I miss, like what is the work. She's like you should have been in class for that. You came late so I don't know what to tell you. I'm like, well. She came you could tell me what we did in class, that's what you could tell me I don't know why you're being so stubborn, and she just walked away. My friend saw that, my friend from here, she was like why is she being like that Yeah, sometimes teachers can be really rude*...And this why I don't want to go to her class. But yeah, I'm always late for her class to be honest. Like with her class is always in the morning.	

			Placement process: - Blackness: -Feeling targeted: *I guess at this school because there's a lot of students that do things. At the same time, they blame me for stuff, but I know for a fact I didn't do, and I told them I didn't do that, like okay but I guess it's cause I did like one thing in the past, they choose to blame me.* -differential treatment: *I don't know if I should say white people. there's some white kids that are here who are causing trouble and clearly you can see it. Then they come tell the whole school, they tell us specifically, they're not telling them that they're wrong. They're punishing everyone is the school, not punishing one person. Like everyone's complaining too. Like stole. We have no choice, you have to follow the school rules, it's a new rule you have to go by it... Like you can't use the bathroom because students keep like smoking Jewels or something in there*?... and they don't suspend them or expel them and like a lot of kids. *There was a lot of kids in the school at the beginning of the year and they're all gone* (who were mostly balck). *I don't know, cause at times it could be really unfair, like consequences, because there's still people going around the school doing things that should be suspended for* *Yeah, I don't what it is. i was saying that there's still people in this school that do bad things but I still see them like, I don't know. There's this one other student. I don't know him like that, but like my friend knew him like that but he still goes here. I think he's here today. I don't know what happened, I think he was sharpening a pencil, the teacher told him to stop me and he still sharpened, like he was still sharpening his pencil, and I think they sent him home for that, and he got sent home for that. That's what my friend said, and he really did get sent home because he like left that day. Yeah, so that treatment. She does say their racist, but she also calls them stupid. Their consequences are dumb.* -Exaggerated consequences : *Well another thing happened to me, when I was umm, this was this year. I got suspended because I didn't want to go to class even though the teacher of that class was not here that day, and so the childcare worker came, thee one that come here? I'm sitting there like where the couch is doing my work. I'm doing my work. She comes to me, she's like you have to go to class. I'm like, I don't want to go to class, I'm here doing my work. I don't feel like going to class because the teacher's not here, anyways, why do I have to go there? She's like, you still have to be in class or you're gonna get a zero.I was like, okay. Yeah. Look, I really don't like, I'm doing my work because I showed her I'm doing my work, but no. She said if you don't go to class, I'm going to send you home and you're gonna suspended. And I was*	

			like, okay. And she actually suspend me and sent me home. And it was her who sent me home, not even the teacher who was substituting for the teacher. *I don't like that class. Like really don't, it was even an important class to be honest like [01:13:11 inaudible] so I didn't feel like going to that class. But I was still doing my work on the computer, but I don't know I didn't want to go and I just didn't feel like it. The teacher wasn't there. It was just kids in the class, it was really loud so I just didn't want to be in there. So she suspended me for that. It wasn't even the teacher that suspended me, it was her. And she wasn't even in the meeting when I came back.* *: I don't know, send them out the class and ask them a third or second time. At least send them out the class, don't send them home because you risk messing up their education. They probably have classes that they need the day.* *or like if white people white kids do something, we're all punished for that. Cause if it was a black person, that one person is getting punished for it.* Defines racism: *umm being treated differently than another race, not being liked because of her your skin colour. Yeah, being treated differently*.	

Annex 10: Thematic Contrast of Master-narratives and Counter-Stories

	Master-narratives	Counter-stories
Regular School	No common themes	
	Ensuring safety for the school community	First encounters with dangerous circumstances and environments (violence, drugs, intimidation)
	Expulsions happen when other students' safety is compromised	Racial intimidation reports ignored by staff Expulsions for "stupid" menial things
	Placement as a benevolent practice	"Getting kicked out"
	Academically unsuccessful, struggling students	Not getting the academic support necessary to succeed
	All measures exhausted before placement	Special schools used as threat if behavior doesn't improve Surprise expulsions, no opportunity for recourse
Transitions	Reasons for transfer = behavioral or academic challenges Lengthy transition process/long periods out of school	
	In-school suspensions as a beneficial, non-punitive measure	Being kept in a "holding cell"
Special Schools	Benefits of low student-teacher ratio, caring and attentive staff, welcoming environment, improvements in academic performance	
	Non-punitive discipline, restorative justice Community service as an alternative to punitive discipline	Unfair, punitive, extreme discipline Encounters with the police