

“You Live What you Learn”: Identity and Practice among Visible Minority School  
Administrators

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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University of Victoria

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

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## **Abstract**

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Principals and vice-principals occupy a vital role in our public schools. They hold politically and organizationally powerful positions to influence change and support educational reform. Riehl (2000) points out that one's practice of leadership is influenced by one's identity, thus knowing who administrators are is significant. Although understanding who our formal administrators are is still an emerging area of scholarly inquiry, most of the educational literature focuses on administrators from the mainstream, dominant culture. Little attention has been given to who our visible minority principals and vice-principals are, especially within in a Canadian and British Columbia context. This study explores how the life histories and life experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals of BC who are immigrants and children of immigrants have created their identities. In particular, how have their experiences as "other" influenced their praxis as formal school leaders? Using a life history methodological approach, data were gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Six themes and three sub-themes emerged from the interviews that highlight participant life experiences, meaning and learning about their identity and praxis as leaders. Participants linked their present

views, beliefs, and approaches to leadership with events and personal experiences from their past. Participants' enactment of school leadership was informed by their experiences trying to fit in with mainstream culture; identity issues and cultural identity development; connecting with minority students and families; needing to promote diversity; being mentored and now being mentors; and influencing change. Therefore, a connection was made by the research participants between who they are as leaders and how their experiences have influenced them.

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Completing a dissertation while working and with a growing family can be a challenging venture; fortunately my path was made easier thanks to the unfailing love and cheerful encouragement of my husband, James, my daughter, Anjuli and my son, Elliot. I express my deepest gratitude to my parents, Gurdip and Madan. I am but a reflection of their generosity and unconditional love.

Finally, I am profoundly indebted to my participants who gave so generously to this study. Their keen interest in sharing their life-histories has added a much needed voice to identify who are our visible minority leaders and how they lead in our school communities.

## **Dedication**

To Gian Singh Bedi (1912 to 1999)

My beloved Pita Ji (Grandfather)

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Open almost any academic education journal and you will inevitably find articles which pertain to diverse student populations and how formal school leaders must address issues of diversity. Over the past several decades there have been many concerns raised about diverse student populations and how school leadership is addressing the prevalent issues. These include attempts to close the graduation and achievement gaps between minority and mainstream learners. Nevertheless, schools continue to reproduce societal inequities and operate on normative standards that represent dominant, privileged cultures, usually defined as white middle-class cultures, and as a result still struggle to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Blackmore, 2006; Davidson, 2009; Coleman, 2012; Edwards, 2006; Egbo, 2008; Kumashiro, 2000). This pattern occurs in spite of the numerous attempts by governments to implement school reform initiatives. In British Columbia (BC), we have recently seen the implementation of the new BC Education Plan (2012) which replaced the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (2010) initiative, another attempt to “fix” educational issues. Although school reforms dominate the educational landscape, these plans are driven by desires to increase student academic achievement on standardized tests and the belief that if the achievement gap between ethnically diverse students and their Caucasian peers could be lessened then somehow issues of diversity would dissipate. But approaching issues of diversity from an academic achievement lens alone does not entirely address complexities faced by diverse student populations through our current educational structures.

Is this really a surprise? Western education systems reflect social ideologies, in particular liberalism, conservatism, socialism, and nationalism. They were established to impart the prevailing values and beliefs of dominant societal ideologies. Gutek (2001) explains,

...ideology acts as a determinant of the kinds of values that are to be cultivated by the school. While a liberal might stress individual competition, a socialist would emphasize cooperative activities...Whereas conservatives see the school as an agency of cultural transmission and preservation... ( p. 195).

Therefore each of these ideologies cast a specific and different role for public education. But the overarching theme that connects all the ideologies is nationalism as a perpetual educational goal (p. 207). Axelrod (1997) further builds on the role of public schooling as a tool for building nationalism and democracy. The undercurrent to nationalism and democracy was the need to create civil and political order to ensure economic progress (p. 25). Thus from the very beginnings of public education systems, we can see a professed need for standardization and conformity for all students. Therefore education is not a neutral activity (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Not surprisingly then, the dominant approach to diversity in schools has been directed to achieving equality through homogenization (Battiste, 1998).

During the infancy of Canadian education systems, school authorities could pay little attention to diversity since few learners, from either the dominant, mainstream culture or minority cultures, persisted beyond the most elementary levels. Most learners exited the system after elementary school to join the labour force primarily in low-skill or

resource-based jobs that have traditionally fueled Canada's economy. Two social movements led to changes in this trajectory. First, the rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s propelled Western societies and their schools to elevate the needs of individual learners through child-centered pedagogical approaches and the implementation of differentiated curricula (Neumann, 2003). With the development of globalization in recent decades, no nation in Western contemporary society "...can afford poor schools or high dropout rates among its young people unless it wishes to jeopardize its economic future" (Raptis & Fleming, 2003, p.1). Therefore the strategies for addressing student diversity have come in three main forms: pedagogy and school level policies and practices. Although the pedagogical terrain pertaining to diversity has been well explored, how school leaders such as principals and vice-principals deal with diversity in particular has just become a focus of scholarly inquiry in the last two decades. However, the discussion of principal and vice-principal leadership approaches examined in the academic literature focuses predominantly on the experiences of mainstream, white males with little attention given to visible minority formal school leaders and their experiences.

### **Purpose of the Study**

According to Riehl (2000), "if practice is connected to identity then it matters who administrators are" (p.70). I was really struck by this quote and I think this could not be more critical in our current environment of education where school populations are more heterogeneous than ever, drawing on a much more pluralistic population. In spite of heterogeneous school populations, Canadian schools continue to replicate the beliefs and values of the dominant, mainstream society mostly from the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant perspective (Goddard & Hart, 2007; Walker & Quong, 1998). This approach

continues regardless of projections by Statistics Canada suggesting that by 2031, 35% of adolescence 15 years and under will belong to a visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2013)

Despite robust scholarly research which discusses educational leadership – including principals’ and vice-principals’ leadership styles and their approaches to managing diversity through various approaches like social justice, inclusion, and transformative leadership – the majority of research represents the perspectives of the majority culture, white males (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007; Klenke, 1996; McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). As Gooden (2002) also pointed out “...traditional leadership methods have been founded on research that excluded people of color and women” (p.23). Thus in the existing body of research peripheral attention is given to the voice and identities of diverse school leaders; those school leaders who themselves are from marginalized, non-dominant backgrounds. Hoyt and Blascovich (2007) argued that limited studies on ethnically diverse school leaders reflect who is conducting the research. They claimed that white mainstream researchers dominate in the field of research on educational leadership and therefore have little interest in the topic of visible minority leaders (2007). So the research interests of the researcher have also impacted our knowledge and understanding of the experiences of diverse leaders. Therefore studying minority educational leaders is of value given the structures of inequality within the academic educational literature and within our school systems that provide covert and overt institutionalized advantages to dominant white mainstream society (Tatum, 1997).

Fitzgerald (2010) cautioned against the superficial inclusion of visible minorities’ voices and experiences in research as “...this would simply reproduce the dominant

privilege and misplace authentic voices...” (p. 23). Hesford (1999) echoed the same concern explaining that “... the academy has been slow to recognize the reality of relational positioning and therefore the contradictions inherent in trying to represent ‘the lived experiences’ of ‘others’ as too often attempts are reduced to acts of tokenism” (p. 15). Both Hesford and Fitzgerald argued for more thoughtful research involving diverse leaders that expresses a more authentic voice and is respectful of diverse experiences to counter the hegemony that exists in the current research literature. Fitzgerald also added that “...in the educational leadership literature, there is little or no attention paid to *who* leaders might be and, in particular, their own professional biographies” (p. 97). I would also add that little is known about leaders’ personal biographies thus creating disconnect between leaders’ personal identities and their professional work.

Wilkinson (2008) had also been critical of the lack of diverse voices in the educational leadership discourse. She stated, “One of the potential dangers of emerging research for diversity and educational leadership is a slippage into an apolitical and instrumental focus upon diversity as a form of management containment of individuals” (p.102). Furthermore, Wilkinson adds, without a more inclusive discourse in educational research, issues of diversity and multiculturalism will continue to be presented at the margins of discussion, with focus on white male experiences as a central point of reference thus alienating minority communities from leadership discussions.

Blackmore (2006a) also extended this discussion on the limitations of the current education literature regarding diverse leadership experiences. Blackmore added that women and visible minority leaders view existing representations of leadership, both visual and textual, as homogenized, monocultural, and mostly from a masculine

perspective. Thus according to Blackmore if the white male experience continues to serve as a focal point for leadership discussions with few attempts to shift the paradigm to be inclusive of experiences from visible minorities, women, and Indigenous peoples, then administrators who represent these marginalized communities will continue to feel discouraged and disenfranchised, in spite of gaining entry into leadership positions. Finally Blackmore (2006b) argued that the educational literature can no longer ignore the life experiences of minority leaders and how those life experiences impact their identities as leaders.

In addition, many scholars believe that leadership is socially constructed and influenced in its development and enactment through context, values and personal experiences (Astin & Leland, 1991; Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Klenke, 1996). Since leadership is socially constructed, then our understanding of who our leaders are takes on greater significance and leadership is then influenced by ethnicity, race and culture and, thus, is not neutral in this context (Astin & Leland, 1991; Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Klenke, 1996). This leadership construct suggests that the context in which the principals and vice-principals were brought up, their backgrounds and experiences, undoubtedly impact their views on their leadership roles and how they practice their leadership.

### **Research Purpose and Questions**

Given the situation discussed above and using Riehl's comment about leadership practice and its connection with identity (p. 70), then I am deeply curious to know who are visible minority school leaders that occupy formal positions of leadership (principals, vice-principals) in public schools? I am especially interested in those who are foreign

born and immigrated to Canada or are children of immigrants, thus the first and second generation visible minorities. I am curious about this group, as I wonder about the life histories of visible minority principals and vice-principals and how their life histories and experiences have created their identity. Ultimately, how does their understanding of social justice, inclusion and diversity intersect with their personal journey? And through their experiences and life histories are they more likely to be inclusive, socially just, or equitable? If so, how do these values show up in their work? What is their enactment and praxis of inclusion, social justice, equity and being change agents? Does their identity as members of minority cultures inform their leadership practice? Through all this mulling and questioning, I have formed two main research questions:

**What are the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians?**

**Do visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians feel that their life histories and experiences have influenced their leadership praxis, philosophy, and identity as leaders? If so, how?**

**Overview of Research Process.** To explore these research questions, I recruited British Columbia principals and vice-principals who are visible minorities and immigrants or children of immigrants. With the generous assistance of the British Columbia Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA), a short recruitment announcement was published in the association e-newsletter. I was contacted by seven participants who fit the participant criteria and I conducted in-depth interviews with all seven participants as well as second interviews with five of the seven participants. The rich life experiences of the participants led to meaningful data. My main findings, which are discussed in greater detail in chapter five, indicate a connection between the life experiences of the research

participants and how they now choose to lead. Participants discussed the pressures to fit in as visible minorities into the dominant culture and how that pressure has led to identity issues especially cultural identity issues and sense of belonging. Given their experiences and struggles with trying to fit in with a culture that is different from their heritage, participants now feel they can deeply relate to the struggles of their visible minority students and families resulting in a deep connection and understanding to their shared experiences and a need to promote diversity within their schools. Also part of their experiences have led participants to see themselves as role models for their communities and much of the desire to be role models came about from the mentoring they received in their formative years. In addition, participants described feeling like change agents in their leadership roles and that enacting positive social change was how they strived to be seen as leaders. Finally, participants consistently expressed that who they are today was influenced by what they experienced during their formative years. For example, Aarti said “My experiences have shaped me; you learn what you live” (Second interview, line 57). She also added “I just know what I lived and that has influenced who I am today” (Second interview, line 115). Sanjay also mentioned “I go back and look at my own experiences and those have helped shape who I am, also as a leader... You know there are positive and negative factors that have influenced us, you want to make sure that you address them in who you are and the way you behave now...” (First interview, line 96-97).

### **Significance of the Study**

In this dissertation I explore how the life histories and life experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals of BC who are immigrants and children of

immigrants have created their identities and influences to their praxis as formal school leaders. Thus at the forefront of this research is an attempt to understand the experiences and leadership of a marginalized group of principals and vice-principals with the hope to add to and extend the current paradigm in the educational leadership literature. By situating the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are immigrants or children of immigrants into the discussion, the findings from this study have the potential to shift the paradigm in the educational leadership literature by being inclusive of the voices and experiences of formal school leaders who are not from the dominant, mainstream culture. Without their voices and experiences an understanding of our educational systems and the leadership within is incomplete, as pointed out by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) who stated that “the voice of people of colour is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p.58). Thus without including their experiences, the field of education is missing a valuable perspective and including their perspectives and experiences has the potential to inform the field of education leadership, especially the leadership literature related to diversity. In addition, this study has the potential to lend insights into the recruitment, retention, development and mentoring of visible minority principals and vice-principals to promote the placement of visible minorities into formal positions of leadership in the BC school system. Furthermore, they can help to challenge negative stereotypes and misconceptions that may be held about visible minorities in school communities. Thus visible minority principals and vice-principals serve as role models to visible minority students and teachers who seldom see minorities in positions of power and authority in their lives. Also this study adds to the literature that explores the identities of principals and vice-

principals which is still an emerging field of study and is not as robust as our understandings of teacher identity.

The focus is also on principals and vice-principals, the formalized roles of leadership in our public school systems. This group is specified in this study because principals are considered a guide for social morals and the influence they have as leaders is significant within a school context (Sergiovanni, 1995, 2006; Theoharis, 2007, 2008, & 2009). Although there are many notions of leadership that are much broader and include teachers as leaders or even simply recognize leadership “wherever it occurs” (Hunt & Dodge, 2000), I have focused on leadership in a school setting with the more formalized and positional role of leaders thus principals and vice-principals. Although there are distinctions between the principal and vice-principal roles especially in terms of the division of administrative functions, I am not concerned about such role variations. In addition, at the start of this research study, I was concerned that I might not find an adequate number of participants that fit my criteria at the principal level, thus decided to include vice-principals as they are also seen as holding a formalized leadership role within schools. Wilkinson (2008) pointed out,

A quick glance across current journals, books and studies in educational administration reveals a developing concern around issues of diversity and educational leadership...Despite this flourishing inquiry; however, there remains a relative dearth of empirical studies in the area of diversity and educational leadership, especially in regard to formal educational leaders such as principals/head teachers. (pp. 105-106)

Also, according to Blackmore (2006a),

The research on visible minorities leading in education is slim. The voices of administrators of colour are silenced in educational leadership history and theory. It is in this silence that that our research and the narratives of the participants are situated. Emerging literature on leaders of colour teaches us that their ways of leading may be as diverse as their gendered and cultural heritages but all rise from their own complex social and cultural histories. There is no right way to do administration; hence we must be sceptical of formulaic models of leadership and research that reifies them. (p. 106)

To further Blackmore's idea, I would add that the data from this study, in the form of the stories and participant profiles, which essentially outline the experiences of visible minorities, helps to add knowledge and extend our understanding on who visible minority principals and vice-principals are and this information may move, empower or inspire diverse leaders in education to pursue positions of leadership within education.

**BC School Demographic Context.** Current statistics that are recorded for public and independent schools in BC only publishes the following information regarding students attending school between kindergarten and grade 12: gender, age, aboriginal, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities, including a breakdown on type of disability (Ministry of Education, 2014/15). It is difficult to determine if student race, ethnicity and cultural background information is recorded and just not reported or simply not recorded as part of student demographic statistics. But some information on the demographic information for visible minorities can be gleaned from the Canada Census

records. According to the data collected from the 2011 census, the total number of visible minorities in BC was listed as 1,180, 870 compared to 3,065,525 non-visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2011). Also Statistics Canada indicates that from visible minority statistics, children under 15 years of age comprise 23.5% of the BC population which is greater than the national average of 19.4% (Statistics Canada, 2011c). Most recently from the Ministry of Education statistics covered in the Summary of Key Information for BC schools, students whose primary language spoken at home which is not English was 23.8% for the 2011/12 recording cycle (Ministry of Education, 2012) BC Teacher and administrator data that included a breakdown of demographic information such as visible minority was also difficult to find. The most recent information was from the Statistics Canada 2006 reports that of the 34,373 BC teachers at public schools 5,085 are visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2006). No doubt this number has changed between 2006 and the time data was collected for this study in 2014. The number of administrators for BC public schools including principals and vice-principals were reported at 2706 in 2006 and 2617 for 2011/12. But from this number, I was not able to determine the visible minority composition.

Also statistics offered by the Canadian Census from 2006 helps to provide additional context to the demographics that are relevant to this study. The Canadian Census indicates a high population of visible minorities within the regional area covered by this study at 31.4% compared to the provincial numbers at 24.8% (Canadian Census, 2006). In addition, the number of new immigrants who are visible minorities to the area is 75.5% (Canadian Census, 2006). Again although these data are out of date, they do

help to contextualize the region in which this study took place as having a high visible minority population.

**Situating myself within the research.** Issues of exclusion, inclusion, and diversity are important to me given my experiences and life history. I immigrated to Canada in the early 1970s. Although I was young at the time, I recall vividly my struggles in school, especially to learn a new language, which has a continuous impact on my life today. I remember the embarrassment and insecurity with reading and writing in English and receiving remedial support for language arts in the hallway (my school did not have a special education resource room) with a special education assistant who was a mother of one of the boys in class. I can easily recall the shame that one of my classmate's parents knew how terrible my English skills were. But what plagued me were thoughts of the mother sharing this knowledge about me with her son. Was I being judged beyond my ability to read and write English at the required age level? This thought was present in my mind. I can hardly forget the time when my grade 3 class had to read into a tape recording device, in a small group of 6 and then listen to the recording. I would not identify my reading on the recording as I could tell how poorly I was reading. Even when a classmate identified my recording, I blatantly lied saying it wasn't me. As a result of my struggles, my family started to speak to me only in English and I no longer spoke in Punjabi. I have lost most of my language ability in my mother tongue, especially in writing and reading the language. I can speak the language, enough to get by, but I am painfully aware of my thick Canadian accent which accompanies it.

In addition, I can clearly identify key experiences in my life history during my formative times in my development as a leader in a post-secondary environment. I found

myself deeply relating the experiences shared by many of the research participants especially issues related to wanting to fit-in with the dominant culture, identity issues as a result of growing up in a dominant culture different from my heritage as well as a strong connection to issues of diversity to foster inclusion. At times I listened to the research participants and felt as though I had met long lost friends; finally connecting with those who shared such a similar background and questions of identity as I do. I never realized until then that there are people out there just like me. When my participants described the shame and regret they feel for having lost their mother tongue or not being able to cook traditional foods and being ridiculed and embarrassed by relatives for either being “too Canadian” or not “ethnic enough.” It may sound oddly grandiose, but I felt less alone in this world. One participant mentioned being publicly shamed by a relative for not “...even being able to make chai” and making her feel “...not up to snuff” (Aarti\*, first interview, line 237. All names are pseudonyms). I swear I had a very similar exchange with a relative in my youth. Being in this place of not being Canadian enough because I was not white and not being ethnic enough because I had abandoned my traditional language and customs also placed me in the space of not knowing where I belonged.

As a senior leader in an academic library, I have been formally recognized, both locally and nationally, for my work with respect to promoting inclusion and diversity. I wondered what compelled me to do this work and I wondered how other leaders with a similar background to mine might also chose to lead. This line of thinking also led me to my study. But I decided not to situate this study in the academic library context; sadly there is no ethnic diversity among the most senior leaders across Canada. The public

school system in BC became the focus of this study because of the diversity that exists and because of the compelling issues surrounding diversity and inclusion and leadership.

Life histories of visible minority principals and vice- principals offer counter-narratives to the master narratives in the educational leadership literature and add another dimension to the discourse. It is my hope that my research findings and analysis shows the importance of life histories to knowledge production and to alternate interpretations of educational leadership and to understand enactments of leadership by diverse leaders.

### **Definition of Terms**

There are several key terms that I have defined for this study to ensure consistency in approach and to clarify my meaning. Some terms are straightforward but some choices I have made about the words I have used are not perfect and many are challenging. Below I try to explain the terms I have used and explain some of the difficulties with terminology in this study.

Since my research participant group was limited to visible minorities, it was important that I clearly define what I mean by minority and visible minorities. According to the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2010) defining a term like minority can be difficult in order to distinguish it from the concept and the varying situational contexts that minorities may live within. In addition, the United Nations Minority Declaration indicates that "... there is no internationally agreed upon definition as to which groups constitute minorities" (p.2). The reason given for this lack of an agreed upon definition is that "...any definition must include both objective factors (such as the existence of a shared ethnicity, language or religion) and subjective factors

(including that individuals must identify themselves as members of a minority)” (p. 2).

Sometimes a definition of minority is applied on a numerical basis meaning being less in numbers, but in other situations a minority defined group could be a majority in terms of numbers yet still be a minority group in that the group is in a non-dominant position (p.3). In the case of this research, I have adopted the definition of minority to encompass both numerically fewer individuals in a group that are not of the dominant, majority population and hold less power than the dominant group. Also from a Canadian context, I have further defined minority in terms of visible difference from the majority population of Canada using the Statistics Canada definition for visible minority meaning:

- members of visible minorities are persons, other than Aboriginal persons, who are non-Caucasian in race or nonwhite in colour’. The ten groups include Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Japanese and Korean. (*Statistics Canada – Census of Canada and the Employment Equity Act of Canada, 2011*)

In addition, I used terms like “ethnic,” “person/people of colour,” “ethnically diverse,” “ethnic minority,” and “racial minority” interchangeably with visible minority as all such terms can be found in the education scholarly literature. Although there are subtle differences between all terms, I am treating them as being interchangeable.

Certainly there are known concerns with all forms of defining groups that can and do imply discrimination. For example the United Nations’ committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in March 2007, declared Canada’s use of the term “visible minority” to be discriminatory and that Canada’s use of the term may contravene an international treaty aimed at combating racism (CBC News, 2007). Yet terms like

“people of colour” are also challenging because it implies differences based on skin colour only and that white is not considered a colour but rather what is the norm. In addition, “people of colour” are only of colour when compared to the dominant white culture’s lack of colour. This term can also imply that “people of colour” are then deficient for not being white. Race or racial minority is also challenging because the term race tends to be applied to the black-white binary in the literature (Phinney, 1996). Thus I use ethnic minority and visible minority interchangeably to include race.

In addition to the debate in the literature around terms regarding race, visible minority, ethnicity can also imply several meanings. For the purpose of this study, the term ethnicity will be used to refer to identification with a larger society whose members have common origin and heritage and share segments of a common culture (Phinney, 1993). I use the terms culture and culture of origin to mean the norms, practices, values and beliefs that are shared and learned among an ethnic group (Phinney, 1991, 1993, & 1996). These shared customs, values and beliefs create a sense of cultural identification and belonging.

Race generally refers to one’s genetic make-up and biological properties whereas ethnicity refers more to one’s behaviour in relation to a larger group of which the individual claims to belong. Chow (2002) explains that the terms “race” and “ethnicity” are often conflated and this conflation is overly critiqued by scholars. Thus it is challenging to insist on an absolute distinction between the terms at all times, and given that dynamic they are mutually implicated.

All such terms like visible minority, people of colour, racial minority, and ethnic minority are ways to describe those who are culturally, ethnically, and racially

marginalized within a larger society. Marginalized is a term used by some scholars to define anyone who is devalued as a person based on a difference in ability, social standing, culture, ethnicity and race (Kools, Chimwaza, & Macha, 2015). Often those who are marginalized are seen to be different from a mainstream group that has been normalized as a dominant group in society. To describe the white normalized culture in Canadian society, who represents the Anglo-Saxon foundational culture of the country, I have used terms such as dominant, mainstream and majority interchangeably.

Also given that my research is focused on immigrants and children of immigrants, I have included the following definitions for first generation and second generation:

- First generation: immigrants in Canada who are foreign born. (*Statistics Canada, Census of Canada*).
- Second generation: children of 2 parents who are foreign born. (*Statistics Canada, Census of Canada*)

The term 1.5 generation also appears in the literature (Rahim, 2014). This term is used to describe immigrants who arrived in their host countries at a very young age. The generally accepted age range often used for generation 1.5 is between 1 and 15 years. I have, however, decided not to use the 1.5 generation to describe some of my participants because I find the age range to be arbitrary and lacking a strong basis in empirical research to clearly distinguish the second generation from the 1.5 generation.

Below are additional relevant terms and concepts used in this study:

*Equity:* In equity, there is an understanding that not everyone is the same or can achieve the same outcomes. Thus equity considers that fairness looks different

depending on the unique needs of an individual or group. Therefore equity is a human right imperative for all people to have a reasonable opportunity to develop their capacities and to participate fully in society. (United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, 2009)

*Inclusion:* In education the term inclusion is heavily connected to mainstreaming or integrating students with disabilities or “special needs” into mainstream classes. For my study, I chose to use the generic definition of inclusion to mean the action of including; the fact or condition of being included regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, gender, ability, socio-economic status and sexual orientation. (Ryan, 2012)

*Praxis:* In this context I have adopted Freire’s definition that praxis is “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (2000, p. 33). Thus the emphasis is on the action and practice over theory.

## **Overview of the Chapters**

Chapter one has outlined the purpose and background to this study. In chapter two, I provide an overview of the relevant literature to this study including a review of historical and contemporary roles for principals, diversity and formal school leadership, and existing literature that offer discussions on the leadership experiences of ethnically diverse formal school leaders. Chapter three discusses the rationale for using a qualitative approach to research for my study and outlines in detail the life history methodology. In addition, I discuss the method for data collection and analysis as well as examine the theoretical frames including social constructivism, interpretivism, and subjectivism.

Although I did not start with Critical Race Theory, Identity Development Theory and Assimilation Theory as theoretical frames, I include them in chapter three as they came through as vital theoretical perspectives in my analysis and understanding of the data. Chapter four offers participant profiles of all seven participants as a way to highlight the experiences of each participant and to honour their voices and experiences. In chapter five, the 6 themes and 3 sub-themes arising from the data are presented supported by quotations from the research participants. In chapter six, I provide an analysis of each of the themes and sub-themes and connect the research from this study to the existing literature to either support or refute any claims and conclusions made. In chapter seven, the final chapter, I consider implications of this research and potential future research that can be undertaken as a result of further questions that arose from this study.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This literature review examines the historical and contemporary role of the principal. It highlights the traditional functions of the role and how it has evolved. In addition, this literature review reveals that there is a gap in the academic literature regarding the leadership identity of principals, especially principals who are not from the mainstream culture.

The role of the principal is a vital one in our public schools. The challenges placed on formal school leaders require individuals with strong multi-faceted professional competencies and personal qualities to provide leadership in complex and demanding environments. Principals and vice-principals hold politically and organizationally powerful positions to influence change and support educational reform. Research shows that principals have a direct impact on creating a school's culture, whether positive or negative (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002; Peterson & Deal, 1999; Riehl, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2001). Thus the actions of the principal have a trickle-down effect on a school community (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, 2000; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2002). Therefore they are a critical group, worthy of focus on discussions regarding leadership identity, roles and leadership praxis.

Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to add to the discussion of who constitutes school leaders, and to examine the life histories of visible minority principals and vice-principals in British Columbia, especially those who are immigrants or children of immigrants. I explore their life histories and experiences and how these have created

their identities as leaders. Ultimately, the purpose is to address the main research questions of this study, which are:

**What are the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians?**

**Do visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians feel that their life histories and experiences have influenced their leadership praxis, philosophy, and identity as leaders? If so, how?**

Thus, at the forefront of this research is an attempt to understand the experience and the leadership praxis of being a visible minority principal or vice-principal in BC.

In order to examine the main questions specific to this research and to frame this research within a larger research context, this chapter provides an examination of the related literature. This literature review shows that the representation of voices of visible minorities in formal educational leadership roles is scant and an area that demands further exploration. Generally what is highlighted in both historical and contemporary literature is from the perspective of leaders from the dominant, mainstream culture. One notable exception is research focused on the experience of Black principals in the United States of America (USA). This research is often offered through the lens of critical race theory (see also chapter three) which posits that a counter-narrative representing the voices of leaders of colour can help to shift the dominant paradigm in the existing academic literature on principals (Brown, 2005; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Gooden, 2005; Haar

& Robicheau, 2009; Lomotey, 1989,1993; Mack, 2010; McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007; Montevirgen, 2011; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012; Tillman, 2004; Vinzant, 2009).

In the Canadian context, over the past several years there has been some interest in the educational leadership literature on the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous leaders as well as other visible minority groups, but this is quite limited (Cui, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2010; Lewthwaite, 2007; Mbachu, 2011). The focus in this area of research has been on Indigenous Education and pedagogical approaches to addressing the educational needs of Indigenous students rather than on examining the leadership styles and identities of Indigenous leaders (Goddard & Foster, 2002; Munroe, Lunney, Murray-Orr, Toney, & Meader, 2013; Neeganagwedgin, 2013; Nguyen & Mohamed, 2011).

Within the Australian context there has also been some research on Indigenous school leadership but again this interest is uncommon in the literature (Power & Roberts, 1999). For the most part where research is found regarding issues of diversity such as marginalization, exclusion, and inequities, the focus tends to be on how dominant, mainstream principals are leading diverse school populations and addressing diversity issues through employing a social justice, transformational or inclusive approaches (Brown, 2004, Larson & Murtadha, 2002, Ottmann, 2009, Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2003, 2004, 2009; Theoharis, 2007). There is little attention given to how cultural, ethnic and racial minority leaders lead in a similar context.

As long as the dominant, mainstream culture continues to serve as a central point of reference and there are limited attempts to shift the discourse towards being more inclusive of the experiences of visible minorities and women, administrators who come from marginalized communities will continue to feel discouraged, disenfranchised, not

reflected in the literature and diminished for their experiences and perspectives on current educational issues.

Over the course of this chapter, I review the literature surrounding the historical and contemporary roles of principals, particularly focusing on the main facets of the position, how individuals have become principals and how principals' identities and leadership styles are formed. In addition, I will examine the changes in principals' roles as they relate to demographic changes in student population and issues of diversity. Finally, I will provide an overview of the existing literature on visible minority leaders including literature about Black American and Indigenous principals.

### **The School Principal: Historical Overview**

Surprisingly, given the modern day significance of principals in public schools, there is limited historical documentation of the roles of principals especially compared to the robust literature that exists on teachers. The main two educational scholars who have devoted much of their academic career on examining the historical role of principals have been Kate Rousmaniere and Thomas Fleming. Both are considered prominent scholars in the field of education history. Rousmaniere is the quintessential source on the history and evaluation of the American principal. Her examination is relied on heavily in this literature review because of her comprehensive work that provides breadth and depth on the principal's historical role. Fleming's work is also most relevant to this study as his research has filled a significant gap on the historical image of the BC principal. Unfortunately, a gap still exists on a historical representation of principals from a broader Canadian context. This may be the case because education falls under provincial jurisdiction and, unlike some countries; the federal government has no authority. Thus I

rely on Rousmaniere and Fleming as the two main sources to frame the historical examination of the principal. Below I present the findings from Rousmaniere's research and then turn to Fleming's.

*Historical Overview of the Principal: American Context.* Rousmaniere (2007) claimed that:

The principal is missing from both the political history of school administration and the social history of schools. It's as if the principal did not exist at all, except to appear occasionally, without elaboration or explanation, as a spontaneous actor in the experience of a teacher or the development of a school. (p. 4)

Rousmaniere (2013) also offered an explanation for the lack of interest in principals saying that the general public's life-history experience with school tends to focus on memories of an encouraging teacher rather than an "awe-inspiring" principal (p. 2). She goes on to say that "...we may remember the principal only for unfortunate, and assuredly unfair, disciplinary encounters" (p. 2).

In spite of the lack of historical interest regarding the principalship, Rousmaniere (2007) indicated that "[t]he creation of the principal's office revolutionized the internal organization of the school from a group of students supervised by one teacher to a collection of teachers managed by one administrator" (p.4). With this restructuring, teachers and formal administrators experience a significant change in power dynamics that impacts not just at the supervisory/human resource management level between teachers and administrators but also on the creation of a formal relationship between the activities in the classroom and the principal's office (p.2). An examination of the existing historical perspectives on the roles of principals does offer some valuable insights into

how the position originally arose, how it evolved, and how it was perceived by teachers, students and parents.

Although it is difficult to determine the exact time the position of principal emerged, historical and educational references indicate that a formal principal role was established at some point in the early nineteenth century but that the position did not become more widely established until the massive expansion of schools and the incorporation of multiple grade-levels by the mid-nineteenth century (Brown, 2005; Cuban, 1998; Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2005; Fleming, 2010; Kafka, 2009; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Rousmaniere, 2007; 2013). However, this initial position looked quite a bit different from contemporary images of principals, in that the original inception of the position was identified more as the lead teacher and was often called the “principal teacher” or “head teacher” (Fleming, 2010; Kafka, 2009, Rousmaniere, 2007, 2009, & 2013). As the “principal teacher” or “head teacher”, the early principal attended to mostly clerical duties such as taking attendance, processing enrollment, assigning classes, conducting discipline, maintaining the building, and managing the school schedules and timetables as well as providing instructional leadership to the teachers (Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2005; Kafka, 2009; Matthews & Crow, 2003). Thus in general the early 19<sup>th</sup> century appointed principals were often long serving teachers, those who had shown significant competencies as a classroom teacher, more so than demonstrating a particular leadership or management skill set. Those who “fell into” the early role of principal happened to be at the right place, at the right time and happened to have the right mix of ambition and teaching acumen (Fleming, 2010, Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2005; Kafka, 2009; Rousmaniere, 2007).

The literature also indicates that the early principals were almost always white males and that a certain amount of local authority was granted to the principal based on administrative duties. In addition, these early principals were seen as the moral compass for local communities (Fleming, 2010; Rousmaniere, 2007). They carried with them examples of morality and ethical conduct as upholders of Christian ideals (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Although this theme of moral and ethical leadership stays with the principal role well into modern times, the role becomes gradually less focused on teaching and more focused on middle management duties, which included financial responsibilities, human resource management, and facilities management (Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2005).

The literature also points out that right from the inception of the principal position the role was placed immediately in a middle manager role as a connector between the teachers at their local school and district level officials. By the mid-twentieth century, principals were caught in this middle ground acting on the demands of superintendents at the district level and the needs and issues of teachers at the school level. Given this conduit role, Rousmaniere draws a connection between principals and middle managers in the business world where "...middle managerial structures helped to consolidate the control of independent business under a corporate umbrella" (2007, p. 2). Similarly, the principal role helped to consolidate individual schools under a district umbrella. Principals were mostly responsible for the daily, on-the-ground operational issues of their specific schools and had little involvement in decision making and problem-solving of educational strategic issues. Furthermore, some scholars believe it was this middle manager persona that was ultimately detrimental to the development of principals'

professional identities and the downward evolution of their status (Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2005). In addition, this middle manager persona, the focus has been more on understanding the tasks and duties performed by principals rather than who they are. Given this dynamic, principals were under significant pressure to implement large scale initiatives established by superintendents and later by education departments and associations along with addressing local needs (Beck & Murphy, 1993). Thus the early principal is often described as wearing multiple hats and balancing multiple roles on any given day. This image of principal as multi-faceted becomes a more permanent representation of the role and individual throughout the development and evolution of the position.

By the start of the twentieth century, the need for educational reform was being advocated at all levels of the public school system. As Rousmaniere pointed out “The move to improve principals’ status and job description came not from within the ranks of principals but from a new cohort of educational reformers [committed] to improving American education” (2013, p. 31). Reformers at this time included civic, social and education reformers, mostly religious men, who were part of a wider social reform called the progressive movement (p.31). These reformers held the belief that a better American society could be achieved through educational reform like improving pedagogical practices as well as improving the school organizational structure and as such “...a strengthened principal role was seen as the lynchpin to social efficiency-oriented reform...” (p. 32). So here we see the principal being identified as a guide for social morals adding further weight to the position.

This reform movement also resulted in the creation of more administratively focused principals who had greater accountabilities for the wider district needs: references to “principal teacher” with responsibilities for classroom instruction lessened (p.33). With this change in the function of the job, the professional outlook for principals also changed resulting in newly established job qualifications, plus more formal academic training requirements. Thanks to early twentieth century social reform, this new wave of professionalism also brought in higher compensation for principals. In addition the physical office “the principal’s office” was created further increasing the authoritative status of the role. Although the changes brought about through professionalization had some significant positive effects, there was a negative outcome in that “...it restricted the types of people who sat in the office, increasingly excluding women, people of colour, and educators who prioritized community engagement over administrative tasks” (Rousmaniere, 2013, p.5). Women may have held the majority of principal positions at the elementary school level during the first half of the twentieth century; however they had limited access to higher paid principalships at the high school level. These positions seemed to be the exclusive domain of white male principals. The educational requirement at that time included a bachelor’s degree and there were few higher education options for women in the early twentieth century (Beck & Murphy, 1992; Kafka, 2009; Matthew & Crow, 2003; Rousmaniere, 2007, 2009, 2013). In addition, there was a strong view in American society at this time that demanded the presence of more men in the school system, especially white, heterosexual males to provide strong male role models “...which would help boys to become real men” moving the school and education domain away from women, especially in leadership roles (Lugg, 2003a, p. 105).

Scholars like Tom Fleming (2010) and Kate Rousmaniere (2007, 2009, 2013) also commented that many early male principals came to teaching and later principal roles often by default. Many had failed attempts to enter other professional fields such as medicine, but with newly minted bachelor degrees, they moved into teaching and later, for more ambitious individuals, into administration. Thus again, interestingly early on in the development of the principal role, we now see a greater emphasis on exploring the role using the lenses of gender or visible minorities, especially as the role has grown in social stature.

However, even changes in the stature and professionalization of the principal's role in the early to mid-twentieth century did little to bolster the image of principal as an awe-inspiring leader. Rather they continued to be seen as "...rule-bound and distant bureaucrats, delivering orders and rigid evaluations from the office" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 43). Researchers Lynn G. Beck and Joseph F. Murphy (1992) undertook an interesting study on the principalship through an analysis of the metaphorical language used in educational literature. They explained that their rationale for using this approach was

...to get beyond structural analysis – to tap into language that conveyed the essence of the principalship in more evocative ways – we went beyond explicit statements about the principalship and looked at implicit conceptions of the role as conveyed through...metaphorical language... (p. 388)

They implemented this approach through an historical overview. Beck and Murphy's reading and analysis of the education literature published over the first two decades in the twentieth century paints a picture of multiple roles for principals which confirm the

conclusions reached by others (Fleming, 2010; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2005; Kafka, 2009; Matthew & Crow, 2003; Rousmaniere, 2007, 2009, 2013) ). Principals were portrayed in multiple fashions such as spiritual leaders, scientific managers, and social leaders to low level functionaries performing basic clerical and janitorial duties (p. 392). So again we see the scope and range of the position as being broad including everything from being visionary leaders to completers of daily building based tasks.

Schools and subsequently principals faced significant changes in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially in the United States. As a result of several wars, the desegregation of schools, and emerging competition with the Soviet Union, schools and their leaders faced tremendous pressure to address not only educational issues but also societal issues. The landmark Supreme Court decision to desegregate schools in 1954's *Brown v Board of Education* meant the significant loss of Black principals and teachers but also disrupted the long preserved school complements of same race children, "With great speed this decision dismantled "...the long-standing dual system of education..." (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 89). The mid-twentieth century also marked a time of great competition between the United States and the Soviet Union subsequent to the Soviet launch of the satellite *Sputnik* in 1957. Unprecedented scrutiny by the general public was now placed on American schools, as the Soviet Union appeared to be exceeding American technological advances. Rousmaniere (2013) points out that "a barrage of complaints from both the left and the right set in motion a culture of suspicion against educators both in the classroom and in administrative offices..." (p. 91). In the late 1950s, principals became identified as being too bureaucratic and far removed from community values.

By the 1960s with the rise of student protests against government controls and continued international conflicts like the Vietnam War, principals became “...responsible for channeling and controlling...” student culture (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 95). But the social and cultural changes as well as intense pressures from local, state and federal levels resulted in principals losing their identities as authoritative leaders by the 1970s and 1980s and in turn they start to be identified as implementers of government educational policy directives only and no longer having control over their own domains.

American scholarship examining the role of the principal has offered great insights into the inception and evolution of the position. It has also identified how the role became largely the domain of mainstream white males. However, what is lacking in the works of Rousmaniere, Beck and Murphy, Goodwin, Cunningham and Eagle is an in-depth look at the life-histories and life experiences of principals to help identify further who, historically, principals were and not just what they did. Clearly this could be the case because of a lack of historical evidence or it could be because the interest into identities of school leaders is still emerging as an area of study.

*Historical Overview of the Principal: The BC Context:* In addition to all the valuable insights provided by American educational historians on identifying the historical role of the principal, in the Canadian context and even more so in the provincial context of British Columbia (the province in which my study takes place), further information on the principal’s role are offered by the comprehensive historical work done by historian Thomas Fleming.

Fleming (2010) offered an unprecedented study regarding the principals in British Columbia (BC) in a two volume set covering the periods from 1849 to 1960 and 1961 to 2005 respectively. Fleming's study focuses on who became school principals during the broad span of time from 1849 to 2005; as well as a discussion of the social and educational context in which BC principals have operated. Finally he discussed the nature of the principal's work in terms of duties and responsibilities and how the constancy of change has impacted the role of principal in this province.

Fleming's historical recounting of the creation and evolution of the principal in BC has many similarities to the perspective offered by the American educational researchers like Rousmaniere (2007, 2013) Johnson, (2006), Beck & Murphy (1993), Kafka (2009) and Goodwin, Cunningham and Eagle (2005). Although there are some similarities between the contexts, there are some unique local BC issues that are helpful to identify for my study.

What ultimately brought Fleming to his extensive study of *The Principal's Office and Beyond*, was an attempt to reconcile the once favourable image of the BC principal as a pillar of great importance in the eyes of the public with later "...images of distraught school executives in the 1990s" (p. 17). Fleming claimed that there are ample examples of books and articles that have examined many different aspects of the work of the principal "...from recruitment to retirement, from private to public schools, and from small institutions to large" with a focus squarely on the future in terms of conceptual studies of what a principal should do to manage and to lead (pp. 31 -32). In this regard, much that has been written is prescriptive "for" principals, essentially the "how-to" manuals for principalship. In addition, Fleming comments that principals have been given

various attributes by education professors including “...efficiency engineers, human relations experts, community builders, bureaucratic managers, and...transformers of ‘effective’ schools” (p. 31). But, as expressed by Fleming, what is missing from the academic literature about principals has been “...writings that describe who principals are...and how their professional practices, or views of their work has changed...” (p. 32). I agree with Fleming that this context in the academic literature is absent, especially for non-mainstream principals. In my view, however, it is critical to understand ‘who’ formal school leaders are and how their professional practices or views have influenced their work essentially what they do in the job. Inextricably linked to this concept of ‘knowing’ who principals are is an understanding of their personal experiences and how these experiences ultimately inform their work and their praxis of leadership.

According to Fleming, “...the historical status of principals was relatively high” (2010, p. 15). Through an extensive examination of official reports and the grey literature on BC school histories, Fleming found that “...principals seemed fondly remembered by students, teachers, and parents in most provincial communities” and principals seemed “...to enjoy a community status traditionally akin to old-fashioned family doctors” (p.17). By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century schools became the central public institution in most BC communities and:

As construction of magnificent buildings advanced, especially the high schools, principals assumed a more visible civic prominence. They now appeared as the new deans of great educational cathedrals, the provinces’ most vital institutions for learning, as well as gatekeepers for the social and economic mobility expected by an emerging middle-class. (p. 149)

In addition early principals who had a successful long service record were rewarded upon retirement with recognition ceremonies and some received special honours such as having schools named after them (p.15). Thus principals were well-noted educational and social managers worthy of praise and celebrated by local communities. But this early perception and image of the school principal does not last long into the latter half of the twentieth century.

Fleming also provided some context on who the early BC principals were. Again in the most cases they were white males, especially at the high school level. Fleming mentions two early principals in BC who are quite representative of the cohort of individuals during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: E. Stuart Wood and J.F. Sallaway (p. 60). Fleming explained that the careers of these two men are typical of many early principals:

They came to the new frontier of British Columbia, mostly from eastern Canada or the British Isles, to find educational work and improve their fortunes. They were teachers conscripted into school administration by dint of classroom experience, length of service and, commonly, being in the right place at the right time. [B]oth were active in civic organizations and known for their strong denominational affiliations. (p.60)

Therefore, early principals were seen to be socially acceptable to lead being male and from the dominant culture.

Although there were women principals at this time in BC, most were placed as head of rural or elementary schools. Almost all were single women and vastly underpaid relative

to their male counterparts (p. 167). Thus BC female principals had similar experiences to their American counterparts. In addition in BC, historically there is no reference to visible minority principals. They either did not exist at that time or have failed to be noted.

Also, of interest for my study is Fleming's discussion on managing social and cultural diversity by principals. Although so much of the modern day discourse surrounding the changing roles of principals today is claimed to be a result of diversity and changes in school demographics (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Ryan, 2003, 2006; Theorharis, 2008), Fleming however provides evidence to challenge that claim, at least in the BC context, indicating that principals have, since the very beginning of public schools in BC, been responsible for managing diversity.

Fleming said:

Sometimes lost amid descriptions of the principal's duties is the fact that, from public education's beginnings, many school heads presided over institutions of enormous social, cultural, and linguistic diversity – and that successful school management almost always involved considerable skills in human and inter-cultural relations. Certainly, by the early years of the twentieth century, immigration's effects were evident in city and village schools alike. (p. 253)

Fleming profiled the work of Principal J. Elmer Brown who led Strathcona School in the Vancouver's East End from 1918 to 1934. As the East End served as a disembarkation point for new immigrants, Strathcona School was known as Vancouver's, if not BC's, most culturally diverse school hosting students from Chinese, Jewish,

Japanese, Italian, Russian, and Ukrainian families (p. 254). Fleming remarks on Brown and his leadership saying he was “well remembered at Strathcona for his directness and powerful instructional leadership, [and] was also a robust advocate of minority rights...” (p. 255). Brown showed particular empathy for English language learners and “...was a keen student of the syntactic difficulties...” faced by immigrant students (p. 255). His focused and dedicated work on ensuring that his school offered excellent support for the acquisition of English as a foreign language for immigrant students fostered an inter-cultural understanding not often seen at other public schools at this time. His efforts were recognized by the Vancouver East End community (p.255). So there are some historical references of school principals who were dedicated to supporting the needs of diverse students.

Fleming’s observations are worth commenting on further. First, he noted that principals in BC were leading diverse school populations from the very beginning of public schooling. Fleming also noted that, historically, principals were expected to be competent with culturally and ethnically diverse learners. Thus, his work provided an important counter-narrative to contemporary scholarship that seems to imply that diverse student populations are late 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena (Crowther, Hann, & Andrews, 2002; Reed & Swaminathan, 2014; Ryan, 2012).

Towards the latter half of the 20th century, the principal’s role in BC began to change significantly for several reasons. Schools and school boards became more bureaucratic and specialized and as a result, principals became increasingly busy with mid-level management functions:

...including service on facilities planning committees, transportation committees, and liaison responsibilities with various social and community agencies, in addition to their regular duties involving teacher and student supervision, plant management, course scheduling extra-curricular programs, and the administration of aptitude and intelligence tests. (Fleming, 2010, p. 44)

In addition, with the unprecedented growth in local districts, principals became more and more removed from the superintendent's office and their scope of decision-making and influence became more localized at the school level (p. 45).

The BC educational system has been marked with several significant political and labour movements by teachers which have impacted the role of principal in this province. A formal teachers' union, British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) had been placed since 1917 (p. 58). The original federation included the principals and vice-principals as an affiliated group called the Provincial Specialist Association. However, this solidarity between teachers and principals did not last. By 1987 the provincial government granted full-scale collective bargaining rights to the BCTF. It is at this time that the federation excluded the principals and vice-principals (p.117). The principals and vice-principals established the British Columbia Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA). This shift between the BCTF and creation of the BCPVPA is perhaps one of the most defining changes in the contemporary principal role in BC as principals and vice-principals now no longer worked in formal solidarity with the teachers on educational issues. In addition, the principals and vice-principals were now exposed to criticism from not only external groups but now from a powerful internal group, the teachers (Fleming, 2010, p.189). Furthermore, the BCTF started to negotiate directly with government

agencies on the development of school curriculum which did not include or consider the principal and vice-principal voices. Fleming pointed out, "...the federation's involvement in curriculum, along with substantial expansion of its own specialist associations...signaled that teachers, not principals, were becoming the most influential actors in developing and implementing curriculum policy" (p.49). Although once the domain of "principal teacher" for instructional leadership, the BC principal in the 1980s was then moved to the sideline regarding issues of instructional and curricular foundations of the public school system. This BC arrangement with separate unions for teachers and principals was quite a unique phenomenon in Canada for the longest time. Other provinces have maintained a joint union; it was not until 1998 when the province of Ontario joined BC in this segregated structure between management and instructors.

Issues of diversity again heated up for principals in BC by the 1970s and 1980s. With Canada's more open immigration policies and development of more multicultural educational practices, principals were now challenged with building more inclusive environments through cultural awareness to address more pluralistic values and perspectives of larger diverse school populations. In addition, by these two decades we see the integration of students with "special education needs" into mainstream classes. Changing school demographics again show the need for principals to demonstrate diverse skill sets to lead diverse student populations.

In an attempt to highlight the demands placed on the principal and vice-principal positions in the province, the BCPVPA conducted a survey in 1996 to capture how, at that time, 2500 administrators spent one given day, called "Picture Day" (Fleming, 2010, p.195), completing a survey. The survey required principals and vice-principals to record

school their activities, large and small every 15 minutes of their work day. Fleming highlights the findings from this survey and said:

The survey's findings provided numerous insights into principals' work lives measured against the clock and illustrated generally that principals spent much of their time devising less-than-ideal solutions to a constellation of social and educational problems that arrive at school doors each and every morning... In broad terms, it found that school administrators worked about ten hours a day on average, or some fifty-five hours a week, a work-week considerably longer than that of many other jobs or professions. (pp. 195-196)

As for the actual tasks and duties performed, the survey mentioned that the majority of the day involved general administration duties, then formal meetings with teachers, parents and students as well as community agency workers such as health or social workers and providing supervision to students at several points throughout the day (p. 197). This survey shows clearly the range and variety of the work performed by principals and vice-principals, but the focus is on what principals and vice-principals do and how long they take to fulfill such tasks. Little attention was given in the study to why they do what they do and how effective their decision-making is.

Fleming's comprehensive examination of the BC principal highlights the progression and changes in the role from once highly respected pillars of one's local community as sole leaders to middle managers trying to negotiate between district level mandates and the more politically savvy teachers' federation. This position sandwiched in the middle between two powerful-forces has impacted the professional development

and identity of BC principals. But in spite of this reality, Fleming offered hope for the ever evolving principal role and its significance, saying "...the local school remains the last sovereign organization capable of being moved by an individual leader's personality, compassion, energy, humor and commitment..." and as such they are individual leaders worthy of study (p. 343).

As remarked by Fleming, I also agree that principals and vice-principals are worthy of study given the influence they have as leaders. Fleming's work has offered an extensive overview of the principalship in British Columbia using a multitude of historical documents and interviews with a handful of retired principals. Fleming's research confirms that the principal's role was dominated by mainstream, white males, though some did lead culturally and ethnically diverse schools. However, for the most part principals tended to be representative of the dominant culture. Although Fleming's work is insightful and comprehensive, his work is really the first step to understanding who principals are in terms of their identity. I think the next step is to understand more about the people who have led schools or are leading schools in this province – especially those with culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds.

Any background of the identity of the principal that includes an historical and contemporary look would be lacking without mention of Wolcott's (1973), *The man in the principal's office: An ethnography*. This ethnographic study is considered to be groundbreaking because it was one of the first detailed observation and analysis of the principal position. Through this micro-ethnography, Wolcott provides a careful social and cultural analysis of the role an American elementary school principal. Wolcott's meticulous account of the day-to-day activities of the principal, Ed Bell (pseudonym)

both in terms of the actual administrative tasks performed along with the time taken to complete such tasks, provides an in-depth study of what a typical principal of the era actually did that defined the individual “as a principal” (p. xi). Wolcott also pays particular attention to the network of relationships that develop between the principal, his staff, district level officials, and the students. Wolcott’s intention with this study was to extend the educational administration literature available during his time (the early 1970s), because so much of the existing literature for education students and principal practitioners tended to be “...normative in approach – it tells principals and would-be-principals what they ought to do and remains seemingly unaware of what is actually going on” (p.xii). I would agree with Wolcott’s assessment that much of the literature regarding principals from that era read more like a how to manual on how to fulfill the position rather than taking into account the context around what actually is involved in the position. This approach focused on what principals need to do in terms of their day to day roles rather than offering broader concepts about leadership which has continued into the contemporary literature as well.

Of considerable interest to my study is the chapter entitled “The principal as a person.” This chapter covers Bell’s early years as well as the years leading up to his principalship and is told through the combined perspective of Bell, his mother and his wife. It is interesting to note that Bell did not initially consider teaching or the principalship as careers. He was raised on a farm and originally considered being a veterinarian but the length of the education requirements did not suit him. He later attempted to be a Baptist minister only to discover significant anxiety when preparing and delivering sermons. His foray into teaching is described as an accident. As mentioned

by other authors like Rousmaniere and Fleming, early principals often “fell into their role.” Personal financial circumstances drove Bell to find a more stable income and teaching was suggested by a friend. Early in his teaching career he took on the role of “principal teacher.” Wolcott describes that this taste of administrative experience inspires Bell to move into full-time administrative roles. Unfortunately Wolcott does not adequately explain what aspects of the role Bell was passionate about or what drew him to do the work he does and why he felt the role was for him. Instead, Wolcott’s description of Bell presents him as ambitious for status reasons as opposed to ambitious for the public education system and its students. Ultimately it seems like Bell took on the role of principal out of default to ensure a stable income. In addition there is no explanation as to how Bell came to the conclusion that a principalship was viewed as being of high status and if, in reality, through his experiences did he agree with that assessment. Although it is interesting to read some of the formidable development experiences in the review of Bell’s early years and his current family context as an adult, Wolcott’s discussion is quite brief and there is no analysis or connections drawn from the life experience and history of the principal that later relates to or informs his professional work.

As the ethnography unfolds, it is clear that Wolcott saw Bell as a motivated individual for personal status reasons. He actively pursued principalship positions and was very much committed to his role as principal and identified strongly with the school and took personally the successes and failures of the school. In addition, Wolcott spends a fair amount of time analyzing the encounters (formal and informal) and daily activities of the principal. Perhaps the most interesting discussion is around the formal encounters,

meetings that the principal was involved in. The depiction offered confirms the historical discussions commented on by Rousmaniere (2007, 2009, 2013), Goodwin, Cunningham, and Eagle (2005), and Fleming (2010) of the middle ground role occupied by principals with the main power being held at the local school level and a lesser role at the district level. For example, Wolcott talks about the function of school meetings which are led by the principal to "...facilitate communication and to make collective decisions" (p. 121). However, Wolcott notes from his observations that school meetings led by Bell tended to be one-way meetings, saying, "participants were generally called upon to concur with decisions already made rather than engage in significant decision-making...[and] within the confines of the educator group, communication was almost exclusively unilateral, decisions more often revealed than reached" (p. 121). Whereas the meeting which was held at the district level, chaired by the Director of Elementary Education for the district elementary school principals revealed a different role for Bell, one of mediator and adviser to the district offering a perspective from his school's context. Ultimately, Wolcott concluded that it was not so much the purpose or function of the meeting that was most crucial but rather the meetings served to "...validate role – to give visible evidence of being engaged with the 'problems and issues' of schooling. [Also] they served to validate existing status hierarchies..." (p.122). Thus tasks, duties as well as expectations combined to create and define the role of principal.

Other insights offered by Wolcott's study include identifying the multifaceted occupational aspects of the principal role. The meticulous recording of formal and informal daily activities along with time in motion references reads almost like a job description for Bell. The other interesting note by Wolcott is the constant references to

changes in the role of principal as commented upon by Bell and other principals through their professional discourses during formal meetings at the time of this study. In spite of this ample discourse regarding the constancy of change as highlighted by the principals themselves, Wolcott challenged the very notion that principals are seen as “agents of change.” He claimed:

It is ironic and even paradoxical that school administrators have been so touted in recent years as “agents of change.” I believe that their contributions in education is quite the opposite of change ... School principals serve their institutions and their society as monitors for continuity. (p. 321)

Teachers are seen as partners in the conservative approach and equally eager to maintain the status quo along with administrators. He explained the reason for this dynamic is because they are housed in complex and bureaucratic organizations. Thus Wolcott does not see principals within the frame of change agents, at least as he interprets a change agent through his ethnographic study of one principal. Wolcott saw Bell as a stabilizing force for his school and community, an agent of rhetoric, rather than a source of actual change. Whether or not modern day principals exhibit the ideals of a change agent, they are most certainly required to embrace change. The contemporary discourse on school principals is consistently defined by change and the rapidness of change they are expected to manage.

This historical overview of principals from the broader US context, to a more focused BC context, to finally an ethnographic study of one principal in the 1960s contextualizes my study within the inception and evolution of the role of the principal. In

addition, this historical overview provided foundational knowledge on how the principal's role transitioned from principal teacher to administrator, namely that of a middle manager. Furthermore, this review showed that principals – at least in BC – have always managed diverse school settings. But ultimately, this historical overview focused primarily on the mainstream, white male principal as that is who has occupied the role for the most part.

### **The School Principal: Contemporary Overview**

Adding to this context describing the foundational role of the principal, the following section provides an overview of the contemporary understandings of the role. In this section, connections are made between the contemporary and historical roles of principals as well as some emerging trends in the principalship that include adapting to changes for the role. In addition, I examine the popular leadership styles and characteristics expected of the contemporary principal.

**Principal: The Changing Role.** In the contemporary educational literature about principals, the most recent concern relates to how significantly different the job has become from the original inception of the role (Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Murphy, 2002; Murphy, Hawley, & Young, 2006). Educational and social reformers are often seen as responsible for the complexity and multidimensional nature of the contemporary principal's role. Given this dynamic, principals are then pressured by reformers, district heads and the general public to acquire new skills, knowledge and abilities. Thus the predominant discussions in the literature surrounding the contemporary principalship seem to address

two main areas: firstly, the functional role of principals particularly from the perspective of how to be effective and efficient leaders and managers; and secondly understanding leadership through examining the attributes, styles, traits, and characteristics of “successful” principals. Emerging out of these areas has been a growing interest in the exploration of professional identities of principals, although in a limited scope.

Much like the historical role of the principal as discussed in the preceding section was represented as multi-faceted, requiring the incumbent to wear multiple hats; the contemporary role is also defined as being diverse and multidimensional. But now many scholars claim that the role of principal has been marked considerably by changes especially over the last two decades (Darling & Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Murphy, 2002; Murphy, Hawley, & Young, 2006). As a result of how much the position has changed, there is considerable literature on how principals or principals in training should develop leadership skill or learn about various leadership styles to help them become successful in their roles (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Murphy, 2002;). Common amongst these discussions are how leaders need to use transformational, distributed, authentic, or moral approaches to leadership to ensure effectiveness in leading and managing a school. For example Sergiovanni (2000) claimed, “[s]chool effectiveness requires authentic leadership that is sensitive to the unique values, beliefs, needs and wishes of local professionals and citizens who best know the conditions needed for particular groups of students in a particular context” (p. viii). He goes on to say that while no “size fits all” (p. ix) for principals, “Leaders with character ground their practice in purposes and ideas that define the schools they serve...and act with courage and

conviction to advance and defend these ideas” (p. viii). Again tying the historical principal role to the changes for the contemporary role Goodwin, Cunningham and Eagle (2005) said:

When one reflects on the duties of the principal teacher in 1839 and reviews the social, legal, managerial, and political expectations that have been added through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, one begins to understand the complicated and complex role of the contemporary principal. The contemporary principal faces increased expectations for school improvement, demanding social pressures, and conflict between the roles of instructional leader, organizational leader, community leader, and strategic leader. (Goodwin, Cunningham, & Eagle, 2005, p. 7)

Matthews and Crow (2003) discussed the details involved in becoming a principal or vice-principal in today’s environment. They have identified seven role conceptions which include the principal as learner, leader, mentor, supervisor, manager, politician, and advocate. Thus, they describe that there is a particular way to go about one’s leadership to ensure success for the school and its students, as well as highlight the multiple roles that a principal must adopt. Thus their study read more like a manual on how to be a principal or vice-principal and would be of interest to those who are practicing administrators or those who aspire to be in such roles.

**Principals: How to be effective leaders.** As a result of changes in the educational context as well as accountability frameworks and market approaches to education, the contemporary principal is now often seen as needing business and technical skills. They are considered to be executive officers in a comparable role to the Chief Executive Officer in the business world (Begley & Johansson, 2003; Macmillan,

2000; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Murphy, 2002). In fact much of the business and organizational literature regarding how to build effective teams, manage change, achieve accountability measures and ensure efficient financial and resource management goals have made their way into the educational leadership discussion (Boncana, 2014; Schoer, 2014). Boncana (2014) using case study analysis examined how business leadership can and is transferred into the educational context. His examination of four case participants highlights how principals used major leadership approaches including: managerial, transactional, transformational, and distributed leadership to navigate complex, dynamic and ambiguous situations (p. 49). One of the main components of Boncana's work highlighted the success business leaders have had using these approaches and how, when modeled by educational leaders like principals in his study, the principal's efficiency and effectiveness improved. Boncana does not offer any insights into the tensions that could exist by imposing a leadership model from the for profit sector to education.

In a similar fashion to Bonacan, Schoer's theoretical discussions offer another discussion that promoted the use of business sense in the educational context. Schoer suggested that "For high school and middle school principals, the ability to create and maintain positive recognition and identity both personally and for the schools is crucial..." (p.30). In addition, Schoer went on to say that principals can develop this positive image by borrowing from processes large businesses use to develop campaigns to promote their products. Schoer claimed that "[m]uch like a business, schools have a reputation or 'brand' ...that is in need of regular review and change when new leaders, like a principal, come on board" (p. 30). Schoer goes on to employ the nine principles of business branding to a school setting, so that principals can "...move a school to the next

level” (p. 30). These types of how-to articles in the professional literature attempt to transfer business discourse and examples into an educational context as somehow indicating that using a recipe for success in a business context can create success in quite a different context; education. In addition, these types of articles that suggest the business model offers a panacea of positive opportunities for education and educational leaders do not tackle the vastly different contexts surrounding education versus the world of business. For example neither Bonaca nor Schoer acknowledged the differences between for-profit contexts of business versus the non-profit context of a publicly-funded school system. The critical question of whether the business world offers realistic learning for education is not examined. In addition, can principals really be equated with CEO’s given the vast difference in power over decision-making? A principal has the superintendent to answer to whereas the CEO may or not have a governing board that he or she is accountable too. Furthermore, the measurement of leadership success is quite different between the contexts of education and business. In the business context, the measure of success is much more transparent: for example, profit margins rise. But in a school context student achievement and retention is much harder to correlate with leadership. Ryan also pointed out that the use of business and management paradigms applied to education focuses on efficiency and productivity rather than on learning (2006a). Thus one really has to question the values and insights that a business model could offer a school principal given that so much of the work focuses on relationships and human resources.

Given this line of scholarly commentary, several scholars claim that the literature surrounding the contemporary principal has focused on developing technical skills of

leadership rather than on the construction of professional identity and personal attributes that one brings to the position (Fleming, 2010; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Scribner & Crow, 2012). In addition, scholars in the literature concentrated on management, leadership skill, and competency building for principals in order to support practitioners and academic preparation programs for the ultimate recruitment of principals (Matthews & Crow, 2003). Sergiovanni (1995) commented that “Effective principals are seen to be responsible for planning, organizing, leading and controlling...” and specifically “...planning to set goals and objectives; organizing bringing together the necessary human, financial, and physical resources to accomplish goals efficiently” (p. 16). But also foundational to these skills is the need for principals to be community and relationship builders. Thus the skills required according to the literature are wide and diverse and capture everything from needing the technical “hard” skills for planning and budgeting to the “people” skills for effective communication and relationship building.

### **Overview of “Dealing” with Diversity in Education**

In the following section, I outline the themes in educational literature regarding issues of diversity. This overview illustrates that often discussions around diversity focus on the need to “manage” diversity in other words a need to control it. Inequities in policies and practices continue to unjustly impact students who have struggled for inclusion and engagement such as achievement gaps between mainstream majority students and students of colour and the overrepresentation of students of colour in special education classes (Wilkinson, 2008). Wilkinson stated that, “one of the potential dangers of emerging research for diversity and educational leadership is a slippage into an apolitical and instrumental focus upon diversity as a form of management containment of

individuals” (p.102). This approach seems to emerge from the earlier discussion on principal as business manager. Thus again we see the structures from the “for-profit” world being imposed on educational structures.

Education systems continue to be sites that reproduce the status quo of society. As a result they have in some cases continued to perpetuate societal vehicles for oppression and have not made equitable space for diverse student needs. But as Ryan (2006) pointed out “... this inequality does not happen randomly or by happenstance; rather, it displays distinct patterns. These patterns revolve around markers of distinction consistently associated with ethnicity, race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, ...ability, language, and so on” (p. 4). In order to address such inequities, some scholars maintain that schools attempt to “manage” and control diversity rather than provide a space for inclusion that is based on rights and equity (Blackmore, 2006, Niesche & Keddie, 2012). Blackmore (2006) also claims that the shift to managing diversity was a way to ensure that fewer students of the dominant culture would leave schools labeled as diverse because of the school demographics. She mentioned that a pattern emerged where parents from the mainstream culture wanted their children to attend a school with people “more like us.” This created an exodus from some schools creating funding issues. Thus schools in this situation started to promote diversity in schools as an advantage and essentially as Blackmore comments “sold” diversity as adding value to education but not for promoting equity or inclusion for diverse students. As was the case in the business world – where promoting diversity was seen as a good for business – education policies adopted a similar approach in essence what Blackmore called “...capitalizing on diversity” (p. 184).

Articles like Okcu's (2014) are also examples of research showing that diversity is something that needs to be managed which can lead to better run business or in this case school which runs counter to the critiques of approaching diversity as something that has to be managed as outlined by Blackmore (2006) and Niesche & Keddie (2012). Okcu's study investigated the relation between secondary school principals' leadership styles and skills to diversity management in a school. In this quantitative study, the researcher conducted two surveys with 735 public schools in the US. One survey pertained to the leadership skills called "Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire" to determine the leadership styles of principals and the other called the "Questionnaire for Diversity Management" which is a scale used to indicate the degree of principal behavior to diversity management. The author claims that, "Human differences are considered as a phenomenon that needs to be managed in all areas of life and becomes even more important in the organization life" like in schools (p.2162). The author also highlights that diversity management is an approach that is required for leaders to "...show awareness and respect to the diversity among a school population..." (p. 2164). Finally he also concluded that diversity management is an understanding within business management that helps a leader and an organization maximize on diversity and individual difference in a positive way (p. 2167). According to the author "...this is done when an organization values the 'richness' diversity can add (p. 2167).

Growing advocacy in educational circles of the "management" of diversity has created a tension between managerial approaches to addressing issues of diversity – borrowing from businesses and corporations best practices – versus addressing diversity in terms of "...specific cultural, linguistic, economic social needs" (Blackmore, 2006, p.

182). The demands of social and political pressures are ever present to ensure efficiencies and achievement through standardized test scores, especially in the American context (Blackmore, 2006). Pressures sit with principals to improve the academic gap among student groups. Although teachers are not left out of this discussion to support diverse students, principals - as primary, formal leaders - bear significant weight in providing the necessary leadership to make school success a reality for all. Thus we see the continuation of tensions between providing equality, meaning fair and equal access for all, versus equity, meaning providing services based on the needs of individuals (Shields, 2011; Theoharis, 2008). Most of the educational literature which discusses these tensions has focused strongly on racially and ethnically diverse students, those who differ from the mainstream, white, middle class norm.

Another persistent and almost ubiquitous theme is the dominance of the deficit discourse. This discourse has been used by scholars for decades to help explain the achievement gap between student groups. Deficit thinking is the concept that someone lacks a certain ability or quality because of some innate trait based on several factors including race, culture, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic status. Valencia (2010) explained that:

The deficit thinking model, at its core, is an endogenous theory – positing that the student who fails in school does so because of his/her internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, adherents allege, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior. (pp. 6-7)

Although this discourse has been part of the research literature for some time, especially as it relates to students who are marginalized because of race and ethnicity, there has been a more recent emergence of this discourse as it pertains to students with disabilities, in particular for students with intellectual disabilities. As students with intellectual disabilities have gained access to mainstream classrooms, emerging from the disability rights movement; challenges have been expressed in terms of how to provide instruction for students identified in this category. Also underpinning the deficit discourse has been the emergence of the “at-risk” discourse. Vasudevan and Campano (2009) examine the social production of the “at-risk” discourse in the school context. They shed light on how “...institutionalized labels and policies seemingly designed to attend to risk unwittingly reinforce such labels, paradoxically placing students at risk.” (p. 313). Although this discourse is applied to all students who are marginalized because of their race, ethnicity, culture, gender, ability and sexual orientation there has been a growing emphasis on students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as part of the *diversity equals deficit* discussion discourse. Vasudevan and Campano (2009) also add that “...deficit discourses situate risk as an inherent trait of children and communities, rather than identifying social conditions that create risk” (p. 316). Overall the deficit discourse continues to identify and separate out the “other”; that is “...those groups that traditionally are marginalized in society, i.e. that are *other than* the norm...” (Kumashiro, 2000, p, 26). The social construction of “others” and how they need to be repaired or remediated in order to “fit in” with the dominant, normative standards within society is also part of the deficit discourse.

As mentioned there is limited discussion in the academic literature of visible minority principals including Indigenous principals. Any related topics involving diversity and principals tend to arise from research regarding Caucasian principals working in an Indigenous context or schools with majority student population from the non-dominant culture (Blakesley, 2010; Blakesley, 2012; Keddie & Niesche, 2012; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2007; Shields, 2010; Taylor, 1995). Most of the discussions from these articles focus on the experiences of the Caucasian principals and their learning and leadership development and praxis working in a diverse school context. There is a need for changes in educational leadership graduate programs in order to better prepare principals to work in school contexts with non-mainstream populations. The voices of ethnically diverse leaders are often left out of the academic discussions.

### **Dealing with Diversity: A Call to Leaders**

As a result of the issues that surround the discussion of diversity in our schools, researchers have argued for a stronger emphasis on leadership which fosters, promotes and demonstrates commitment to inclusion, social justice and equity through school leaders' discourse and thus their praxis. The challenges in meeting the needs of diverse student populations give principals an opportunity to disrupt our current constructs around diversity and education as well as to address, or at the very least challenge, large educational and societal structures which have created barriers to access, equity and inclusion.

**Social justice, transformational, transformative styles and diversity.** Although there is a long history of assimilation strategies to encourage conformity and

homogeneity in our school systems, there has been a more recent emergence of change in this area. According to the literature, a new way in which some principals have attempted to address issues of marginalization, exclusion, and inequities for diverse student populations has been to implement social justice approaches. Principals leading through a social justice lens advocate, lead and keep their practice and vision focused on issues that create marginalization because of race, gender, class, disability/ability, and sexual orientation work towards eliminating these marginalizing structures (Brown, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002, Ottmann, 2009, Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2003, 2004, 2009; Theoharis, 2006). Social justice theory provides a framework for principals who are moving from nominally administrative leaders to leaders leading through their values. Principals who embrace social justice approaches counter the management and business orientated theories of leadership. Also within the context of social justice leadership, school leaders are being called upon to assume “transformative” learning roles and leadership roles. The term “transformative”, it should be noted, differs from the more commonly used term within the leadership literature, “transformational”. Whereas “transformational” implies changing the collective interest of a group or organization, “transformative” assumes that the needed changes must go beyond the institutional or organizational level (Shields, 2004). Thus transformative leadership roles require individuals who can guide, direct, and influence others to bring about a fundamental change in internal thinking and in external structures (Shields, 2004). As for transformative learning roles, that Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) maintained that

...school leaders are being called on to take up the role of transformative intellectuals, public intellectuals, or critical intellectuals - that is, individuals who engage in critical analysis of conditions that have perpetuated historical inequities in schools and who work to change institutional structures and culture (p. 202).

In addition, a social justice and transformative approach to leadership has given principals the opportunity to reform schools. Thus a social justice perspective has not only provided school leaders with the opportunity to go beyond a superficial level of analysis of inequities but also given them a new language, a new discourse, to probe and to critically examine the pervasive and systematic nature of oppression that exists within the education system. As Sayani (2000) mentions, social justice and transformative approaches provide a counter-narrative to the "...modernist leadership paradigm which privileges reason at its center and emphasizes a discourse of accountability, rationalization, and order..." (p. 72). Now we are seeing an emergence of a discourse that highlights difference, diversity, and pluralism. Furthermore, the social justice lens has given all school leaders a new role, one of advocacy for those who are impacted by policies and practices that perpetuate inequities, thus giving principals a transformative role (Sayani, 2011; Shields, 2007, 2011; Theoharis, 2009). This approach is used by school leaders who seek to improve educational outcomes for students who have been historically marginalized because of race, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic background, ability and sexual orientation (Bogotch, 2002; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). According to educational scholars, social justice leaders recognize the inequities in school policy and procedures which perpetuate marginalization and are compelled to take action (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Furman,

2012). The main focus then for social justice leaders is taking action to undo oppressive structures within school systems. In addition, scholars also point out that social justice leaders exhibit certain traits and characteristics like persistence, commitment and risk taking (Jansen, 2006; Theoharis, 2007). But closely tied to social justice leadership orientation is a moral purpose. According to Rivera-McCutchen (2014), the common thread with social justice leadership is the moral dimension. Rivera-McCutchen also claimed that “[l]eaders who employ a social justice frame believe they have moral obligation to address the marginalization of historically disenfranchised groups” (2014, p. 749).

In addition, authors like Kaser and Halbert (2009) furthered this discussion and claimed that educational structures perpetuated inequities with initiatives continuing to focus on being sorting systems rather than systems designed for learning. This means that the focus is on the teaching of the formal curriculum and emphasis placed on grading, test scores, academic performance which are tracked and categorized by student type (p. 10). In this structure a sorting system of schooling, assessment is geared to determine if a student has the ability to gain knowledge rather than actually developing that ability through a learning system of practice. Thus standardized tests are relied on to sort, divide, and determine a student’s educational path. Principals in the sorting system of education are expected to manage and organize the administrative structures of the school (p.12). In the sorting system, practices placed on the traditional roles and functions of evaluation and assessment of student performance go unquestioned and are viewed as the norm. The impact of such an approach continues to marginalize minority students. Kaser and Halbert (2009) added that school leaders who recognize that a shift needs to happen

between the sorting system to a learning system realize that an essential change is required to ensure the engagement of all learners but in particular the marginalized learner and thus this educational change is about ensuring not only quality of education but most importantly equity (p. 16). But rooted in these approaches of social justice, inclusion, equity and transformative leadership is the leader's own ethical and moral values as well as their identity, influences, life experiences and life histories which have informed their practice. However, often missing in this discussion is a focus on the life experiences and life histories of leaders.

Day (2005) examined the work and characteristics of ten principals in a United Kingdom (UK) study. The ten participants were deemed successful by the district leaders and superintendents because the average student's national test scores had increased during their tenure and the retention of students had improved. Using an in-depth interview protocol, Day determined ten themes which allegedly reveal:

...not only the intellectual, social, and emotional complexities of successful leadership in schools...but also provide clear indicators of the understandings, qualities, strategies, and skills through which these ten principals managed to sustain their success. They thus provide potential benchmarks for all principals who wish to achieve success. (p. 275).

The ten themes are performativity and vision; building and sustaining an inclusive community; narratives of school identity; values, beliefs and ethical dimensions; renewal of professional trust; moral purpose, agency and culture of courage; expectation and achievement; leaders who learn; building internal capital; and passion (p. 275). His work

provides lengthy references to participant data to support each of the themes. In his final conclusion, he comments that the approaches used by the successful participants were a result of their "...collective view, that much of what they aspire to achieve through education in their schools was challenged, if not undermined, by marketisation [and] new forms of managerialism..." (p. 286). Day's data indicated that the principals resisted the overly technical aspects of the job which they felt provided them with only short term gains. But rather they focused on inclusive practices involving teachers, parents and students to build capacity to sustain goals (pp. 278-279). So through Day's article we see a counter-movement among principals who are pushing against the norms set by prescriptive directives borrowed from business practices to including ethics of care and compassion through capacity building and inclusion.

Similar to Day's work, Lontos (1993) looked at a principal who exhibited aspects of transformational leadership. In this scholar's opinion, transformational leadership has developed as a way for principals to implement school reforms (p.1). He goes on to say that it is a new vision of leading which is facilitative in contrast to the old ways of leading that were hierarchical and authoritative (p.2). But Lontos also claimed that in today's context, principals who are transformational leaders "...are called upon to be able to do almost everything – to be editors, cheerleaders, and resource finders as well as managers and administrators...visionaries, collaborators, facilitators, problem solvers and consensus builders" (p.2). So again, we see in the educational literature a multi-dimensional principal's role that is varied and expansive. In order to bring this list of principal abilities to life, Lontos offered a profile through a case study of one particular mainstream male principal of a mid-size high school in Oregon State. This principal was

deemed by the school district to be a success for the improvements in graduation rates and increases in test scores. After conducting interviews with the principal and teachers of the school, the author concluded that the principal embodied certain qualities that made him a transformational leader; such as building collaborative teams, understanding the big picture, empowering staff, sharing decision making, and promoting on-going growth and development of the staff (p. 53).

The research by Day (2005) and Lontos (1993) showed that there are paths outside the business management approach to leadership that is available to the contemporary principal. Although the studies are covered briefly, they do provide some examples of discussions on styles, attributes, and qualities of effective leaders. In both cases the principals discussed are from the dominant mainstream culture and the discussion focuses on what they do in the job that makes them successful according to the researchers, the school districts the principals serve and to the principals themselves rather than what my main interest is which is looking at who the principals are in broader terms and what has contributed to their approach to the leadership they have embraced.

Although it is exciting and inspiring to see this discussion on educational leaders using a social justice, inclusive, equitable and transformative perspectives, empirical studies in the literature almost always reveal the perspective of leaders who represent the mainstream, dominant culture or how mainstream leaders have adapted these approaches into their style of leading to be more successful in managing diversity. But Wilkinson (2008) provided a caution here saying “that without a move towards a more transformative discourse in educational leadership research, issues of diversity and multiculturalism will continue to be presented as marginal, using primarily the white

male experience as a central point of reference” (p.102). Thus less well documented are the leadership of visible minority principals and their leadership identity.

**Principal Identity Literature.** An examination of principal identity formation is relevant to my study as I am examining who the principals are and what has shaped their identities as leaders. The following section provides a selected overview of the educational literature that provides a discussion on principal identity formation.

Although limited in scope, there has recently been a growing interest in professional identity formation of contemporary school principals. When it comes to identity studies in an educational context, most contemporary identity formation research has centered on teachers. More recently, educational researchers have begun to use empirical studies to understand principal identity formation (Blackmore, Thomson, & Barty, 2006; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Scribner & Crow, 2012; Theoharis, 2008; Thomson, 2010).

In Browne-Ferrigno’s (2003) study, the researcher conducted an exploratory study examining the professional growth of eighteen educational practitioners as they go through a principal preparation program. Although the researcher has several goals that are fulfilled through the study, one of the main goals is role-identity formation through transformation. About role-identity transformation, Browne-Ferrigno said: “Changing educational careers requires an individual to relinquish the comfort and confidence of a known role – such as being a teacher – and experience the discomfort and uncertainty of a new unknown role – being a principal” (p.470). She also maintains that constructing a principal identity “...is an intricate process of learning and reflection that requires socialization into a new community of practice and assumption of a new role identity”

(p.470). Clearly in her opinion role-identity formation will occur well beyond a preparation program, but Browne-Ferrigno's main intention was to examine how that identity starts to be constructed through participant's formal learning processes as part of overall professional growth (p. 472). Her findings revealed that participants' experiences in leadership, both informal and formal, were instrumental in shaping their ideas of the principalship (p.494). The very fact that the participants were willing to step out of their comfort zone as teachers to take on more administrative positions was an indication of "...a willingness to take risks, demonstration of self-confidence, and orientation toward change..." (p. 494). In addition, Browne-Ferrigno's findings indicated some role-identity confusion and that participants struggle at times with letting go of their teacher identities and adopting administrator ones. Some admitted to "...feelings of grief due to identity loss as experienced teachers..." (p. 495). Although this study does not go beyond the preparation program stage of principal identity formation, it does highlight some valuable tensions that can exist for future principals just through a professional development process of learning to becoming a principal. Browne-Ferrigno concluded that role-identity transference from teacher to principal is an essential component to ensure success in the formal leadership role.

Where Browne-Ferrigno examined the construction of principal identity through the professional principal preparation programs, Blackmore, Thomson and Barty (2006) explored the production of normalized principal identities through the selection process for principals. The researchers perceive that the declining potential number of applicants for principalships in Australia is a result of problems with the principal selection process. Through an extensive document analysis from interviews, case studies and administrative

hiring guidelines, the researchers conclude that there are five key problems in the selection process and ultimately these problems in the system ensure that particular kinds of people are successful when competing for a principalship. Thus the researchers concluded that "...whether the selection process is managed by progressive or conservative personnel..." (p. 299) the tendency is to select people just like oneself, a form of homosociability. The authors defined homosociability in this context to mean "normalized principal identities." (p. 299) Thus those who fit within the typical, mainstream, white, dominant culture tended to be selected for principals. The researchers say this is a huge detriment to the school system by perpetuating leadership roles with individuals that personify the dominant cultural norms and favour those with a stronger business orientation to leadership by emphasizing financial management skills over other skills. In addition, they argued that selecting candidates based on normalized principal identities is an outcome that limits the scope and potential of the position and is at odds with equity and diversity policies. This research provided some insights into the concept that the principal's identity as one that conforms to the dominant views of who "should be leading" schools.

Moving from principal identity formation from the perspective of a selection process to a more personal view, Thomson (2010) provided an examination on the forming of her own "identity" as a principal. Using personal narrative, Thomson explored the notion of principal identification. Her research was funded as part of a larger research project investigating the declining supply of school principals in Australia. Through a critical incident approach, Thomson presented her concerns through a story and then interrogates it in order to view it through a more critical lens. Thomson

recounted her emotional tension and anxiety having to reapply for her position as a principal when her five year contract concluded. Although this is standard practice for Australian schools, the level of anxiety came as a surprise to Thomson especially dealing with the feelings of possibly losing the position and no longer being principal. She then concluded that her self-identity structure was intimately tied to her professional identity of principal. In fact she claims that she "...took up the principalship as a kind of identity" (p. 43) and that she viewed being the principal as if she was, in fact, "the school" (p.44). Thomson indicated that this belief of equating the principal and school as one is not a new phenomenon but rather it is a well-known situation that often arises between identity developments through a profession. However, she claimed that this conclusion of professional development with a job is not well supported with empirical research and is worthy of further study (p.45). But Thomson also defended that, given that teacher identity literature strongly identifies a tie between teacher efficacy and their classroom, it is only logical to see an extension to principal self-efficacy and the entire school (p. 45). The author also spent a fair amount of the article exploring other ways in which the daily work of a principal has defined their identity pointing to the heavy managerial aspects of the job such as budgeting, as well as financial and human resource management. Thus pressures on accountability and planning and that these aspects of the position are creating a wedge between the principal's role and the school's main objective of providing education to students (p.50). Although Thomson's article provided an interesting account of her personal struggles with her principalship identity and the tensions that exist in defining identity for herself and the collective, it is a speculative discussion and does not offer much in terms of primary research. But she does highlight

potential areas for further investigation that could greatly inform identity formation for principals. Thomson encourages "... a phenomenological study of the work of principals as well as an enquiry into principal identification practices" and questioning how leadership as theory and leadership as practice inform how principals construct identity narratives (p. 54). Such an approach would add to the contemporary discourse "... into the ways and being and acting 'principal'" (p.53).

Moving to the Canadian context, Grodzki's (2011) – in an article entitled "Role Identity: At the Intersection of Organizational Socialization and Individual Sensemaking of New Principals and Vice-Principals", conducted a case study analysis of a mid-sized Canadian school district to "...uncover and document the influences of organizational socialization, sensemaking, and perceptions of self-efficacy on the development of administrators' role identities" (p. 1). The author noted with great concern the declining number of qualified and interested principals and vice-principals available to take on administrative roles as incumbents approach retirement. This study may help provide district administrators with ideas on how to develop and support new administrators in the principal and vice-principal roles especially in terms of identity with the goals of the organization and to develop their professional and personal identities in such roles.

Using semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations, Grodzi examined how adjusting to the demands of the organization, providing leadership and the district impacted the identity development of new school administrators. Findings indicated that the new principals and vice-principals in the study struggled with adapting and creating a new professional identity as administrators (p. 23). Relinquishing aspects of teacher identity can be hard to do for new administrators. Grodzi also cited issues

similar to those of Browne-Ferrigno (2003), such as the difficulty new principals had letting go of their old identities as teachers, roles they felt competent and confident in; to take on a new role and identity where ambiguities existed. But over time with the help of mentors, the new administrators were able to emulate senior administrators "...to learn the normative, beliefs, and modes of action expected..." and eventually promote self-sense making (p.30). Once this change was achieved, participants became organizationally socialized to their positions; in other words, they had adapted to the demands of the work and new task orientations. Effective organizational socialization and administrator identity adaptation resulted in the development of shared norms, beliefs, values and expectations and success for incumbents (p.37). Therefore the main focus of Grodzi's examination of a principal identity is based on defining their identities through the job tasks. He does not consider how life-experiences could foster their identity development.

Johnson (2009) offered an in-depth study on a principal's identity formation using narrative inquiry. Through this investigation, the researcher reveals the complexities that exist in principal identity formation through the principal's storytelling. The author claimed that a narrative approach allowed the participant to both reflect on her practice through storytelling and at the same time to be critical and scrutinize her own choices and decisions. Using two different stories, the participant revealed how her leadership identity came into being. The first story took place early on in her tenure as principal at her school and the second story takes place 3 years later. The researcher concluded that the first story revealed "...that [the principal] positioned herself within a normative discourse of centrist leadership..." where the principal is desperately working hard to construct

management strengths (p. 280). Many of the examples raised in the first story reflected on how the principal established a vision and goals for the school, implemented a new management structure, brought school practices into compliance and provided much needed guidance to the teachers. All this was put into place for what the principal referenced as "...institutional shortcomings..." (p. 274). From this particular narrative we see the identity of principal as an authority figure and that "...she was a leader who knew how to solve the school's dilemmas through a focus on management" (p. 275).

By the telling of the second story, three years later, the identity of the principal shifted from the central authority figure primarily focused on management structures to revealing a discourse focused on distributed leadership (p.280). The principal's views on how she wants to be seen as a school leader shifted as she became more established in the position. Over the three years since the first story, the school had undergone significant curriculum changes. Johnson indicated that by the end of the telling of the second story, the teachers have become the principal's co-agents in creating a vision for the school. Her style was no longer top down as the leader setting direction while the teachers were tasked with simply operationalizing the direction given (p. 280). Rather her leadership style became more distributed the longer she engaged in her role as principal. Johnson defined distributed leadership as a shared responsibility for leadership among the staff of her school. Thus the duties of leadership no longer resided with just her and the formal position of principal, but are collective engagements with leadership duties.

Although this study is a highly focused qualitative study of one principal it does offer some valuable insights into principal identity formation, outlining how identity can be created while performing the tasks and duties associated with the job. In addition, the

researcher demonstrates the value of using a narrative approach for this type of identity work. She indicated that "...a principal's identity cannot be determined by ticking boxes matched to a standards framework" (p. 281). I agree with Johnson's assessment. The study of identity development in principals or educational leaders takes time and commitment and cannot be rushed using generalized and standardized approaches. Finally Johnson confirmed that identities are works in progress that can be extracted through narrative telling because it is not a phenomenon that can be easily understood.

There is no denying that the predominant discourses in the contemporary academic literature surrounding the principal role contain claims that the position has become more and more complex. Although there are several reasons given for the increase in complexity including the proliferation of educational reforms and pressures from standardized accountability measures; perhaps one of the most cited major reasons for this new found complexity is the requirement for principals to now lead schools with increasingly diverse students (Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Matthews & Crow, 2003; Ryan 2002, 2006; Theorharis, 2008).

In order to situate my study in a broader context, following is a brief discussion of the literature documenting the leadership of principals who are themselves visible minorities.

### **Principals Who are Visible Minorities: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives**

An examination of the literature regarding visible minority leaders in educational administration positions was made difficult by a lack of studies. Of particular interest to

my study is the fact that no research has been conducted into understanding the life histories and experiences visible minority school principals and vice-principals who are immigrants and children of immigrants and how their experiences have shaped their identities as leaders or their practice of leadership. That is not to say, however, that there is a complete void in the historical and contemporary literature on visible minority principals. Some valuable insights from historical and contemporary visible minority leaders help to provide some useful background context for my study.

From an historical perspective and primarily from the US context, the literature does provide examples of Black males who only had access to leadership positions in segregated schools. Within this context, the Black principal held a position of local authority and was highly respected among their communities for the leadership they provided (Johnson, 2006; Tillman, 2002, 2004). Johnson concluded that African American principals were change agents not only for their schools but for their local communities and were noted for being culturally responsive leaders of schools with dominant ethnic and minority populations (Johnson, 2006). Tillman references the Black Principal as one with a dual role: one as educational leader and second as an activist for the education of Black children. This principal exhibited social justice leadership qualities long before this approach became adopted in the contemporary mainstream (2004, p. 104). Thus the early Black principal is often portrayed as a caring professional who emphasized strong academic achievement of all students. Unlike the references to early principals from the dominant culture where principals were seen as middle managers focused on local operational, school level issues, the Black principal was seen as important role models and were regarded as professionals with responsibilities "...for

up-holding the black school as the cultural symbol of the community's aspirations for its youth" (Rousmaniere, 2007, p. 20). Given the stature and respect Black principals held within their communities, their identities evolved quite differently from their White principal counterparts. Although Black schools garnered little attention from the district-level which meant they were constantly dealing with a lack of resources, there was a benefit in that schools flew under the district radar. This lack of attention from the district allowed Black principals to exert local authority that gave them more control over their schools in terms of personnel decision-making and implementing academic programs deemed necessary and relevant to their schools.

Contemporary literature on Black principal leadership continued to provide evidence on how Black principals lead and met the challenges of the modern educational environment (Brown, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Lomotey, 1987, 1989, 1990; Lomotey, 1993; McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012; Tillman, 2004). In the contemporary literature, we also see an emerging focus on Black women leaders and what they bring to their leadership role thanks to the influence of critical and feminist theories in educational academic literature (Blackmore, 1996; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Dillard, 1995; Reed, 2012; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010).

Through this review what appears to be the main focus of such literature is on different leadership qualities Black principals bring to school leadership, as well as how their role may influence bridging the achievement gap between students of colour and their Caucasian student peers. In addition, the literature in this area focuses on recruitment and retention of African-American principals as a result of the barriers and

challenges faced by racially diverse principals. In all cases the research has been conducted using qualitative research methods such as case study and narrative inquiry.

A closer examination of the literature focusing on empirical studies regarding visible minority principal experiences, leadership style and learning is provided below as well as a look at some relevant recent dissertations. The focus is primarily on the dissertations because that is where the empirical research is being done on topics related to visible minority school leaders. The published articles tend to focus more on speculative discussions on minority leaders. In a recent publication by Chin and Trimble (2015), the authors also concluded that there is a significant gap about diverse leaders in the literature. Chin and Trimble explain that keyword searches on diversity and leadership yielded fewer than 100 publications with the vast majority being dissertations rather than published works or articles focused on managing diversity and how to manuals for leaders leading diverse workplaces (p. 11). I also found the same situation existed for me when I did keyword searches in library databases on diversity and, in the case of this study, educational leadership rather than leadership more broadly. Thus the discussion below looks at dissertations that provide a more in-depth examination on issues relevant to my study.

Researcher and scholar Tanya Fitzgerald has been researching Indigenous women and educational leadership for over twelve years (Fitzgerald, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2006, 2010). Much of her work is relevant to this literature review but her 2010 study, which examines the voices of Indigenous women leaders in education, is most compelling for its learning and connections to my study. In this somewhat “unorthodox” academic article, partly because of the topic but more for its structure, Fitzgerald takes issue first with the

template of academic articles referencing that "...authors outline their argument in an introductory section, summarize their theoretical framework and then present empirical data to highlight and support this theoretical framework" (p.93). But in the author's opinion, she feels that this positioning of theoretical dimensions before the empirical data puts the participants at the margins and is not respectful of their voices and experiences. Therefore she represents the voices of 15 Indigenous women from Canada, Australia and New Zealand front and center. As a privileged woman from the dominant culture, Fitzgerald expresses her caution as a researcher representing the voices of Indigenous women and thus places herself as an outsider and novice researcher. With a thoughtful disclosure of her own identity and issues inherent in her position as a researcher of a minority group, Fitzgerald's study offers valuable insights from the Indigenous women participants. The participants all felt that there was an absence in the literature that spoke to their concerns regarding dominance and privilege as well as a lack of scholarly literature expressing the work of Indigenous leaders (p. 96). The participants felt strongly that their personal struggles and issues related to being minority females has influenced how they chose to lead. Thus as Fitzgerald said, "...in the educational leadership literature, there is little or no attention paid to who leaders might be and, in particular, their own professional biographies" (p. 97). Consequently, her article "...attempt[ed] to provide a form of prosopography (collective biography) in order to uncover similarities between individuals and their professional and personal backgrounds" to disrupt the metanarrative on educational leadership (p. 97).

The themes in the findings related closely to findings in other literature which studies minority leaders. First the participants in Fitzgerald's study all held a belief that

their work belonged to others, those they served more than to themselves (p. 98). This feeling was also combined with a feeling of purpose to give back to the community around them. Another theme was that the participants all suggested that their identity as a leader was inextricably connected with who they are – as people - and where they came from. In other words, there were strong connections between how each participant identified themselves from their past experiences including their family backgrounds and childhood experiences. Their past influenced their identities and how their leadership was enacted (p. 99). Many also discussed this feeling of walking between two worlds: the Indigenous and non-Indigenous world. For many this feeling created conflict and internal complications. Some even disassociated from their Indigenous identities and adapted mainstream identities when the situation requires it, “...provoking a sense of double identity” (p.100). Many of them expressed that working in a bureaucratic form of leadership meant that they were working in contrast to “...Indigenous cultural practices that are embedded in the importance of kin, family relationships, a strong sense of spirituality and connection with the past, present and future...” (p. 100). Fitzgerald concluded that in terms of research and theorizing of leadership practices, “we cannot adopt a ‘one size fits all’ approach to the philosophy, practice, and knowledge for/about educational leadership; this is no less than a paralyzing approach that serves to reproduce and reinforce dominant paradigms” (p.100). Although Fitzgerald and the participants agreed that there needs to be a greater diversity of voices in the educational leadership literature, they emphasize the need to legitimate and validate their experiences and knowledge. What needed to be avoided is the “...surface (superficial) inclusion of Indigenous voices in our theorizing as this replicates the condition of white privilege and

continues to simultaneously misplace Indigenous voices...” (p. 102). Rather Fitzgerald argued for more research that authenticates experiences of diverse leaders in order to counter the hegemony that exists in the current research literature. I agree with Fitzgerald’s caution and found using a life history allowed for a respectful approach to conducting my research and to avoid a superficial accounting of experience. I discuss this further in chapter three and seven.

Benham, Maenette, and Cooper’s (1998) detailed analysis of nine minority women educational leaders added to the limited literature about the ways minority leaders lead. Through a narrative analysis, the authors examine the contributions of minority women in principal, vice-principal and superintendent positions in the US. The main purpose of their research is to determine how gender and ethnicity influence the way leadership is enacted by their participants (p. v). Using two main research questions: 1) how do life experiences and personal attributes contribute to successful leadership, and 2) how do particular social and cultural situations determine successful leadership, the authors determined several themes from the research data that were common among all participants. Women all recognized their differences and as a result of their difference they feel compelled to contribute to a collective voice to share their learning as leaders with others. They were also relentless pursuers of equity and fairness in their schools and throughout the school systems. The researchers also discovered that although these women held traditional hierarchical positions of power, they derived their power through relationships of equality with their staff, students and community. Benham and Cooper also indicated that their participants’ strong sense of equity and justice, for all students, was influenced by their own direct experiences as minorities (p. 144). Their work helped

to expand the leadership paradigm by highlighting the experience of these minority leaders.

A study conducted by Alexis S. Montevirgen (2011) entitled “Consciousness, Resistance, Praxis: Counter-Narratives of Transformative Leaders of Color” attempted to extend the paradigm of educational leadership literature by adding the experiences of minority leaders to the dominant discourse. In the case of Montevirgen’s study, the focus is on situating the experience of transformative leaders of colour using counter-narrative and counter-storytelling methodologies. She also commented that:

...without a move towards a more transformative discourse in educational leadership research, issues of diversity and multiculturalism will continue to be presented as marginal, using the white male experience as a central point of reference and thus further alienating minority communities from mainstream leadership values. (p. 2)

Montevirgen argued that when traditional leadership qualities such as power, authority and control are exhibited by leaders of colour it only fosters their further marginalization. Rather Montevirgen argued that by introducing “...the analysis of the counter-narratives and transformative values of consciousness, resistance and praxis, a new lens can be used to examine the leadership experiences of transformative leaders of color” (p. 4). The overarching research question which guided Montevirgen is “how can transformative leadership values of consciousness, resistance, and praxis be used instead of more traditional leadership values of authority, power and control to better understand the leadership experiences of community college administrators of color?” (p. 4). Thus by

analyzing the counter-narratives and introducing transformative values of consciousness, resistance, and praxis, contributions of leaders of colour can be examined. Using semi-structured interviews, Montevirgen gathered data from eleven participants who fit the research criteria.

From the stories heard and analyzed, Montevirgen isolated themes of awakening, acknowledgement and connection to determine how leaders of colour use counter-narratives to facilitate transformative leadership. Although this dissertation shed much needed attention on leaders of color and the values of transformative leadership for the leaders discussed in the study, it does leave open a discussion about life history and early experiences which help influence and construct identities of visible minority leaders.

Tammy Melitta Miles Brown (2009) completed her dissertation called, “The Perceptions of African American Women Principals Who Have Been Influential in Public Education.” In her study, Brown used a narrative case study approach to explore the lived experiences of six African American women principals working in the Pittsburg area. Specifically she examined their past experience to identify the impact those experiences have on their leadership practice and influence in their urban school environment. Brown also investigated the participants’ perceptions of necessary competencies a leader must bring to an urban school environment and finally to determine if African American women principals have specific leadership characteristics that help them positively impact urban schools. Brown examined the past experiences of her participants and draws some conclusions about how their own lived experiences in urban settings and experiences as racialized minorities have influenced their leadership approaches. Some of the common threads that Brown uncovered are that the lived

experiences of the principals had similarities that impacted their development as leaders. For example, all of them had grown up in urban settings and had faced racial discrimination as children and later as professionals. These types of experiences developed a resilience and determination to make a difference in similar school settings that these principals had experienced in their youth. In addition, there seemed to be a role model that had an influence on their development and thus they now feel compelled to develop others as a way to give back. Brown concluded that based on the experiences of her research participants they had then developed leadership competencies such as resilience, courage and empathy that allowed them to succeed at their urban schools.

In Yejide S. Mack's (2010) dissertation, she examined how African American women principals in selected urban schools lead school improvement. This dissertation, like some others, focuses on how the racial and gender diversity of a principal can influence school culture and effectiveness. Using a narrative case study approach, as well as document analysis and field observations, Mack described and analyzed the feelings and attitudes of three African American women principals. Her study indicated that one of the greatest drivers in the way these women approached their leadership responsibilities linked back to their identity as African American women. As a result of their personal backgrounds and life journeys, they were committed to providing resources and opportunities to support minority students in their academic achievements. In addition the author argued that the shared experience of the African American principals with African American students in their schools allow for strong connections to be formed and an ethic of mutual care (p.7). Furthermore, her study identified multiple roles that the principals took on her study including that of surrogate mother or "othermother"

and it is through this type of role that allowed the principals to shape and even redirect future directions of their students (p.8).

Jeremy C. Vinzant's (2009) dissertation looked at how perceptions of race, culture, personal and professional identities affect the leadership of Black American principals in the New England public school system. This dissertation was also of particular interest to me because Vinzant looked at leadership identity issues for racialized minority principals, in this case Black minorities in the US context. The driving research questions for Vinzant are: 1) how do black principals perceive their personal, professional and racial identities to affect their leadership? 2) what experiences have been salient in the formation of black principals' leadership identities?

Vinzant attempted to uncover the experience of being a black principal in America. He employed a multi-case study methodology to explore these perceptions with research participants. Using critical race theory to frame his analysis of the in-depth interviews Vinzant conducted, he found that race greatly influenced the principals in their approach to leadership and created a much stronger connection with minority students. On the flip side, the researcher also found that race had a negative impact for the principals finding that earning the trust and respect of colleagues, teachers and parents was harder to achieve (p.6). In addition, he concluded that the participants felt caught between two worlds. They were under pressure to conform to mainstream American culture yet wanting to stay true to themselves and their racial, ethnic and cultural identities. Thus the author concluded that the research participants must maintain multiple identities and multiple responsibilities without creating professional and personal conflict and halting progress that needs to be made. In addition, he indicated that

Black principals worked hard at ensuring an inclusive environment for students and they felt the pressure to do so acutely (p.142). Black principals felt an increased need to promote diversity and equity at their school to support higher academic achievement by Black and minority students.

Thomas Johnson's dissertation (2006) provided a phenomenological study of African American educational leaders and examines the lived experiences and perspectives of such successful administrators. The researcher specifically looked at how prior lived experiences of African American educational leaders contributed to their acquisition of leadership positions in Florida. The motivation behind this study arose out of the imbalance of African Americans in leadership roles compared to the number of African American students in the state's public schools. The main goal of the researcher was to find ways to encourage more African Americans into educational leadership positions to serve as role models and mentors for African American students and teachers (p.7).

Johnson conducted in-depth interviews with twelve research participants that met his criteria and analyzed the results "...to discover any important characteristics, themes, patterns, or significant interrelationships between the respondents that led to their leadership success" (p. 140). The findings from the principals and vice-principals in his study revealed patterns that were common among them. Some of the themes that were consistent among all participants included that the successful school administrators were from families where an immediate or extended family member was also a school administrator. This relationship proved to be an inspiration to them to also seek a leadership position within education (p. 149). Another common connection among the

participants is that all were raised to believe in the importance of education to change themselves and society (p. 150) and that ultimately they wanted to be in a position of power that would allow them to engage in a process to change the academic outcomes of diverse students. The desire to be in a position to control a certain amount of change or to make a difference for marginalized students also connect with many similar studies already discussed here (Brown, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2010; Mack 2010; Benham & Cooper, 2009). In addition, the participants spoke often about the need to possess leadership qualities not only equal but even better than their mainstream counterparts to be considered equal. This, too, was a similar finding in other research including studies by Frank Brown, 2005; Latish Cherie Reed, 2012; Linda C. Tillman, 2004; and Collette M. Bloom and David A. Erlandson, 2003. One finding that was quite dominant in Johnson's research which is not as consistent with other research on Black American principals was the importance of religion to the participants in this study. According to Johnson, the participants' connection to their religion as an inspiration to better the lives of others was a significant finding although they were all working in a public school context.

In the Canadian context, there were few dissertations that focus on experiences of minority principals. Bing Cui (2010) researched the administrative work life of five visible minority female school principals in Western Canadian public schools. Using case study methodology and in-depth interview techniques, Cui examined and described the career path taken to becoming principals by the research participants, the challenges they faced in their leadership roles and the strategies they used to foster inclusive schools. The findings of Cui's study indicated that the path to the principalship for visible minority female principals is influenced by many factors including: personal abilities and

strengths, challenges they encountered, support they received from colleagues, and preparatory and training programs. Overall the findings concluded that the strategies used to build inclusive schools by the five participants stemmed from the participants' personal attributes, skills, support systems, and the contribution of their minority status. My study differs from this work by adding the examination of the life histories, journeys and experiences that have influenced the overall leadership praxis of minority school principals.

Lewthwaite (2007) looked at the role of an Aboriginal principal's leadership and at the subsequent transformation of the school from a "...school based in a community to a community-based school" (p. 8). The author's conclusion indicated that the principal's commitment to a collaborative leadership approach and the importance of constructing a shared vision for the school with the community led to the successful transformation. Although the principal mentioned past experiences such as having been a social worker prior to entering the teaching profession, the researcher did not explore her past experiences or life history by way of explanation or as contributing factors to her approach as a principal and leader.

Ebenazar Mbianda Mbachu (2011) looked at ways to increase the number of minority principals to help close the achievement gap of minority students in Canada. She examined the American context regarding Black and Hispanic principals to determine the keys to their successes in situations where academic achievement increased among students of colour. To further the field of study, the researcher looked at the Canadian context of minority principals, specifically in Saskatchewan to study the approach taken by a small number of research participants who have influenced the overall academic

achievement of minority students. Mbachu's conclusions matched those found in the American context determining that principals approaches such as fostering a culture of community and engaging student heritage in the school context and also being seen as role models for visible minority students all contribute to engagement and improved academic achievement (Benham & Cooper, 2009; Brown, 2009; Johnson, 2006).

Although this study provided some helpful conclusions which confirmed other findings in the area, its focus was on the current practice of the principals and did not explore past experiences or life history which might have contributed to the leadership development or identity of the principals involved.

### **Conclusion**

As the chapter has outlined, the principal role has played a significant part in the development of public schools, their culture and environments. The educational literature examining early principals has shown that the position developed out of the growth and expansion of schools in the late nineteenth century. As the school system grew to become more complex and bureaucratic, so did the role of the principal which went from principal teacher to a position of power and authority within a more established school hierarchy. At that time "...principals were often white males, and were expected to represent the moral and religious values of the community" they served (Fennel, 2002, p. 10). Although the literature does not discuss women and minority leaders until later into the twentieth century, there is a consistent message within the literature that no matter who occupies the position, principals are expected to fulfill roles that are multi-dimensional and require varied skills and abilities.

The literature on principals also points out how the role has changed to meet the challenges posed by numerous educational reforms and the needs of racially, culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse students. It is clear from the literature that principals are still required to be effective and efficient in their positions, providing strategic direction, goal setting, managing budgets, but they are also required to be moral, ethical, and transformative leaders. We have also seen the emergence of social justice approaches by leaders to address issues of diversity and to ensure equity and fairness for all students; and how these ways of leading are impacting the development of principal identity formation which is still an evolving area of discussion in the literature. In addition, the literature points to different ways of leading based on the background of principals, who they are, and what has formed their leadership style. Although the majority of this discussion is reflective of the mainstream, dominant culture, there are contributions in the literature about minority leaders, in particular regarding Black principals. From the limited but growing research on minority principals, we see that there are contributions made by such leaders to overall discussions of principal identity and ways of defining leadership for inclusion and equity. But these examinations are mostly from American sources and unpublished dissertations, and although they offer primarily narrative analyses, there are none that have examined the identities and contributions of minority leaders from a life-history analysis.

This literature review helps to inform my study by providing a historical and contemporary overview of the role of principal beginning with how it was originally conceived to its evolution through social and cultural changes. In addition, the review of different modes of leadership provides valuable context to my study that frames potential

ways leadership may be demonstrated. This foundational knowledge allows me to place the findings from my study in a broader context. But little attention still is given to who principals and vice-principals are in the current academic literature.

Therefore, given this research context, there seems to be an opportunity to fill a research gap in the literature. The experiences of visible minority principals working in a Canadian context are greatly under-represented in the research literature, specifically the academic and peer-reviewed literature. Also, given the context of the ever-growing culturally diverse student population in Canadian schools, in particular BC, there is merit in examining the life history of visible minority principals and vice-principals and their life experiences which have shaped their identities as leaders. But as Chin and Trimble (2015) pointed out “the challenge in defining identity is to move away from the simplistic categories of race and ethnicity and move toward the understanding of the complexity of culture, ethnicity and race in its relationship to leadership” (p.9). In particular, I am interested in whether or not early experiences influence their praxis as leaders. The life histories of the principals and vice-principals on the margins of mainstream educational leadership, presented in this dissertation, expand current perspectives on formal school leaders in BC and offers new insights on who are our diverse leaders and what they offer in terms of leadership. The academic educational literature has not been inclusive of ethnically diverse and racialized leaders. Understanding the meaning of race, culture, ethnicity, and minority experience is of value because existing leadership models and approaches have been built from the experiences and perspectives mainstream leaders – largely white, middle-class males.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology and Research Design**

The purpose of this research is to give voice and attention to the experiences and life histories of school principals and vice-principals who are from marginalized, non-mainstream backgrounds, specifically visible minority leaders and to explore how their life experiences have influenced their leadership praxis. The literature review identified that educational leadership studies, even those focused on issues of diversity, inclusion and social justice, have under-represented the thoughts, opinions, knowledge and experiences of leaders from diverse cultural backgrounds. In this chapter, I discuss the purpose and scope of the study and the life history research approach used to undertake my study and explain the participant criteria for recruitment. As well, I discuss my epistemological orientation, researcher stance and approaches to data analysis including the theoretical lenses used to frame my analyses. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations for this study including the researcher's role, reflexivity, and ensuring validity as well as some comments regarding the methodological challenges that impacted the overall study design.

As discussed in Chapter 1, I was struck by Riehl's (2000) comments that an administrators practice is related to their identity and given this dynamic it is important to know who our administrators are. My interest in Riehl's work led me to an examination of the literature on frontline school administrators: specifically principals. From the examination of the academic literature in the previous chapter, it is clear that the education field has a growing and thriving discussion regarding the role of principals and approaches to leadership. Although there are discussions in the literature which include the voices of visible minority principals and vice-principals, this area of the literature

needs to be expanded so we might learn from how their diverse identities are created through their life experiences and how those life experiences inform their practice of leadership. This gap in the literature and Riehl's compelling quote led me to my research questions:

**What are the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians?**

**Do visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians feel that their life histories and experiences have influenced their leadership praxis, philosophy, and identity as leaders? If so, how?**

Given that my research questions are focused on life experiences and how the life journeys of my research participants have influenced their praxis and identities as leaders, this study falls within the qualitative research paradigm.

### **Qualitative Research and Researcher Epistemologies**

The nature of this inquiry is about understanding phenomena from the perspective of my participants rather than attempting to support or refute an existing theory; thus, it falls within the qualitative paradigm of research. Creswell (2012) states that:

Qualitative research is best suited to address a *research problem* in which you do not know the variable and need to explore. The literature might yield little information about the phenomenon of study, and you need to learn more from participants through exploration. [Thus] a central phenomenon is the key concept, idea, or process studied in qualitative research. (p.16)

In addition, Creswell encourages the use of qualitative inquiry "...when a problem or issue needs to be explored...that cannot be easily measured or to hear silenced voices" (2009, p. 48). Certainly, in the case of this study, a qualitative focus provides me the avenue to explore the life histories and life experiences of visible minority principals and

vice-principals and to give voice to their experiences. Furthermore, Creswell asserts that “We conduct qualitative research when we want to *empower individuals* to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and their participants” (p. 48). Given the peripheral role marginalized educational formal leaders have had in the academic literature, a qualitative research approach allows the focus of study to sit with the research participants.

Erickson (2011) also reiterated that “[q]ualitative inquiry seeks to discover and to describe in narrative reporting what particular people do in their everyday lives and what their actions mean to them” (p. 43). I would also add to Erickson, that qualitative inquiry is the appropriate approach when seeking to describe what particular people have done in their past, the meaning they subscribe to those events and how these influence the present. According to Maxwell (1996), qualitative research design is an interactive model consisting of five parts: purpose, conceptual context, research questions, methods and validity. Using an inductive approach, I explore the meaning my participants have placed on their life experience as visible minority immigrants or children of immigrants as they grew up in Canada. Holstein and Gubrium (2011) said:

...qualitative inquiry has focused increasingly on the social constructed character of lived realities. Much of this has centered on the interactional constitution of meaning in everyday life, the leading principle being that the world we live in and our place in it are not simply and evidently ‘there’ but rather variably brought into being. Everyday realities are actively constructed in and through forms of social action. (p. 341)

The meaning that the participants place on their experiences is vital to understanding how those happenings have influenced their development and later praxis of leadership as well as their identities as leaders. In addition, a qualitative orientation is well suited to my study as it uses inductive means to generate theories versus deductive approaches that flow from or test existing theories. Therefore the strength of qualitative methods is their inductive approach and focus on specific situations or participants, along with an emphasis on words over numbers and statistical data (Maxwell, 1996).

**Researcher and Epistemological Stance.** As the sole investigator for this study, the research question, data collection and analysis are influenced by my researcher bias. I have identified as a visible minority female who immigrated to Canada as a young age and I have tried to be as transparent as possible about my bias, but naturally there are be impacts on the study. My choice of a qualitative inquiry, using a life history methodology and epistemologies linked to social constructivism, interpretivism, and subjectivism reflects my belief that our versions of reality are shaped by our historical, cultural, social and political contexts. I believe that in conducting this research that I cannot separate myself from the research being done. That from the process of developing the research question, through to data gathering and analysis, that I and the research participants are active in the co-construction of our realities based on our past experiences and current contexts. Thus as a researcher I believe that knowledge and the creation of knowledge is based on transactions and interactions; and that "...the researcher and the focus of the enquiry are linked" (Hall, Griffiths, & McKenna, 2013, p. 18). Charmaz points out that as a researcher we are deeply shaped by our experiences which not only impact what we ask, but also "...the kind of data we collect, our modes of analysis, and what we take as

evidence” (2012, p. 136). I thus acknowledge that my personal background as an immigrant, visible minority in a leadership position has impacted the creation of my research question and interpretations of the data as well as my interactions with the research participants. I also employed an open-ended data collection approach which allowed the participants to create their own realities and therefore I acknowledge that the research conducted is specific to the participants in this study and to me.

Finally, I believe that participant experiences are unique and that no one person has lived someone else’s life. However, I do acknowledge that patterns and similarities can and do arise in personal and independent constructions of reality and thus I recognize that these patterns can imply a greater learning or understanding of a phenomenon.

Although I go into greater detail about the theoretical assumptions I have made at the start of my research and the theoretical lens used in the data analysis later in this chapter, here I explain my epistemological orientation which have influenced my overall research design and myself as a novice researcher. Like all researchers who embark upon qualitative scholarly inquiry it is critical to have a clear understanding of one’s own epistemologies and worldview. According to Moser, “epistemology, characterized broadly, is an account of knowledge” (2005, p. 4). Schwandt (2007) mentions that epistemology is “the study of the nature of knowledge and justification” (p. 87). Epistemology is then a theory of knowledge, how it is created and its components (Carter & Little, 2007). Crotty references epistemology as being concerned with “...providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (1998, p. 3). Within my epistemologies are values that I hold about knowledge creation.

My epistemological orientation leans towards constructivism specifically social constructivism, interpretivism, and subjectivism orientations regarding the construction of knowledge which fit well within the qualitative research paradigm. Given that my epistemological orientation fits within a constructivist, social constructivist, interpretivist and subjectivist stance, I posit that some forms of knowledge, especially social knowledge, are socially constructed and co-constructed and open to interpretation and thus subjective in their analysis. This is quite different from the positivist's epistemological views that outline that reality and knowledge is discovered through careful objective structuring of the research method to reveal "truth" of evidence and knowledge (Charmaz, 2000, 2006, 2011).

**Constructivism.** Scholars working from the constructivist paradigm propose that knowledge is put together, in essence constructed through our everyday life and given meaning (Hall, Griffiths & McKenna, 2012; Holstein & Gubrium, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). Thus they challenge the notion that knowledge of participant realities exist out "there" but rather, "...participants actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements" (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008, p. 3). A constructivist approach "...places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants..." (Charmaz, 2006, p.130).

Constructivists also outline that reality is subjective and created within a specific context through our interactions (Schwandt, 1994). Constructivist epistemology fits well then with qualitative inquiry because it creates a significant link between the researcher conducting the investigation and the research participant indicating that through this intimate interaction knowledge is constructed and "...deeper meaning is uncovered.

[Thus] the researcher and her or his participants jointly create (co-construct) findings from their interactive dialogue and interpretation” (Ponterotto, 2005, p.129).

**Social Constructivism.** Social knowledge also has multiple meanings and interpretations based on the social and historical context in which it was created (Ponterotto, 2005; Chilisa, 2012). Therefore knowledge construction and interpretation of knowledge are not undertaken in isolation but within a context of mutual understandings, practices and language (Schwandt, 2007, Chilisa, 2012). Creswell states that:

In social constructivism, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings directed toward certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas. (2007, p. 20)

Schwandt (2000) also comments that knowledge is not found or discovered but rather:

We invent concepts, models, and schemas to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in light of new experience.

Furthermore, there is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth. (p. 197)

Thus knowledge does not exist “out there” waiting to be revealed but rather we construct knowledge (Crotty, 1998) throughout interactions with phenomena. As Holstein and Gubrium discuss, socially constructed knowledge is centered on:

...the interactional constitution of meaning in everyday life, the leading principle being that the world we live in and our place in it, are not simply and evidently 'there,' but rather variably brought into being. Everyday realities are actively constructed in and through forms of social action. (2011, p. 341)

For a social constructivist, knowledge is created between a researcher and their research participant(s) through reflections, discussions and contact (Ponterotto, 2005). Ponterotto (2005) further explains that reality is constructed in the mind of an individual instead of existing externally but that reality comes forward through interactions between the researcher and participant.

Since I am interested in understanding how the life histories and experiences of my research participants have shaped their identities and influenced their praxis as leaders, a social constructivist frame allows me to examine the unique stories, experiences and behaviours of the participants. Given that there are multiple connections and interactions, reality and ways of knowing are pluralistic and interpretive based on the experiences, biases and assumptions brought forward between myself and the participants (Crotty, 1998). Underlying this approach is the belief that different people construct meaning in different ways, even with respect to the same phenomenon. Therefore as a researcher I am afforded the opportunity to explore the views and comprehensions of different participants about the same subject matter and I understand that each one will have different experiences, views and interpretations. As a researcher, I explore multilayered meanings inherent in their stories and – given that approach – meaning is not derived from the account itself but from the interpretations placed on it by

me and the reader (Preissle & Grant, 1998, p. 176). Given that perspective, interpretivism is deeply connected to the constructivist approach.

**Interpretivism.** Interpretivism is part of the constructivist stance and as a paradigm has been influenced by hermeneutics and phenomenology (Crotty, 1998; Willis, 2007). Duffy and Chenail (2004) refer to interpretivism as a paradigm for ...conducting inquiry focusing on how people make meaning out of their lived, everyday experiences of being embodied subjects in the world. This meaning making includes how people make sense out of who they are, what they do and experience, and what happens to them in the course of their lives (p.30).

Given this research perspective, interpretivist epistemology implies that in order to understand reality or to produce knowledge, one must have a lived experience of an event or phenomenon. Knowledge then emerges from lived experiences of the research participants' life events. So if knowledge is generated from lived experiences, then reality is created out of a subjective view of the world which does not privilege an objective analysis or critique because no one other than myself can see the world the same as I do (Darlastson-Jones, 2007). Thus an observer or researcher can only interpret actions of the research participant(s) through their own understanding of what she or he thinks the research participant(s') worlds are like (Darlastson-Jones, 2007). Interpretivism's main tenet is that our personal experiences can never be objectively observed from the outside; rather they must be observed from inside through the direct experience of the people involved. The aim of interpretivism then is to understand the subjective experiences of those being studied, how they think and feel and how they act or re-act in their lives. Creswell (2009) also says, that with an interpretivist paradigm, "...researchers make an

interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand. Their interpretations cannot be separated from their own backgrounds, history, contexts and prior understandings” (p.176). So at the core of interpretivism is an assumption that people generate meaningful constructs of the social world in which they operate. Knowledge is generated through an inductive process. Researchers who approach their studies from an interpretivist frame are not looking for explanation but rather to understand human experiences. Meaning is found from the intentions, goals and beliefs of individuals and the interpretations they place on such thoughts and experiences (Ponterotto, 2005; Chilisa, 2012; Willis, 2007). So the intent of this research was to get at the meaning behind the actions participants took and meaning they placed on past experiences and how they interpreted that those actions have impacted them as formal school leaders in their contemporary contexts.

**Subjectivist.** Deeply coupled with the interpretivist stance is the subjectivist position. Preissle and Grant (2004) further explained subjectivism as “...the position that the knower imposes meaning on the known. The known plays no role here; the knower uses past experience... to attribute meaning to the known” (p. 175). An objectivist worldview posits “...that meaning is independent of any consciousness, that things have intrinsic meanings to be discovered or revealed by inquiry” (p. 171). Within the objectivist paradigm, the researcher is seen to be neutral, thus objective, and does not influence or bias research results through the use of specific research techniques and training on the part of the researcher so that bias is not revealed. As part of this stance, objectivist researchers “...report little about themselves or their relationships to those in the setting. The research participants are foregrounded and self as researcher is

backgrounded” (p. 172). In contrast with the subjectivist stance, the researcher is upfront about who they are and their biases recognize that their subject lens on reality will impact the construction and realities found in the research (Crotty, 1998). Thus I believe the interpretations I make about the data are subjective rather than objective because of the construction of this dissertation is based on subjective interactions and observations made both by my researcher lens and that of the participants.

### **Research Approach: Life History**

Fitting within the qualitative paradigm, this study was conducted using a life history methodology for data gathering and a qualitative content analysis approach for data analysis. A life-history approach was valuable for this study as it allows for a more holistic way of gathering data and respecting the experiences of research participants as their entire life experiences are taken into consideration to explore and understand a phenomenon. MacLure (1993) explained, that a life history study allows for “...virtue and validity to the research enterprise by striving to remain faithful to subjects’ own values and experiences, and letting them speak in their own voices” (p. 314). The claim by MacLure is also supported by Calmore (1995) who added that telling one’s life-history is a respectful approach when researching the experience of visible minorities because the focus is on how voices from the margin can differ from the dominant voice. It was important to me to keep a mindful approach to conducting a life-history study so that I was careful to avoid a superficial inclusion of visible minority voices in my analysis and theorizing as Fitzgerald cautions that without a mindful approach a researcher has the potential to reproduce the dominant privileged paradigm and manipulate authentic voices (2010).

Furthermore, this study used life history methodology because it has "...the potential to illuminate people's actions, decisions, motivations, and identities" (Freund, 2014, p. 19). Coles and Knowles (2001) explain that, through the life history process, a researcher becomes intimately acquainted with her or his participant(s) by listening to the stories of past experiences and the feelings and meanings attached to those experiences (p.7). A life history investigation is about connecting with the personal and how personal experiences have influenced professional identities. In addition, life history inquiry is about developing insights into the broader human condition by becoming aware of and understanding the experiences of others. Coles and Knowles further elaborate on this saying:

Life history inquiry is about comprehending the complexities of a person's day-to-day decision making and the ultimate consequences that play out in life so that insights into the broader, collective experience may be achieved. Always, lives are understood within their respective and collective contexts and it is this understanding that is theorized. (2001, p. 11)

Thus my goal is to use the construction of life history to understand how life experiences have shaped the research participants' identity as principals and vice-principals and established their leadership praxis as well as to give voice to their experiences.

According to Adriansen, "life history research has had a long history of going 'in and out of fashion'" (2012, p. 41). Life history methodology emerged from sociology in the 1920s and was been adopted for broad educational inquiry during the 1980s (Goodson & Choi, 2008). Although life history has fallen out of favour over the past decade, giving way to other forms of human experience methodologies like narrative

inquiry, it has been used by many scholars who are examining lived experiences from a social history perspective. Life history and narrative inquiry are just two examples of the multitude of methodologies in social sciences focused on understanding the human condition through examining personal experiences.

Goodson and Sikes comment that researchers use life history for the following reasons:

1. It explicitly recognizes that lives are not hermetically compartmentalized into, for example, the person we are at work (the professional self) and who we are at home (parent/child/partner selves), and that, consequently, anything which happens to us in one area of our lives potentially impacts upon and has implications for other areas too.
2. It acknowledges that there is a crucial interactive relationship between individuals' lives, their perceptions and experiences, and historical or social contexts and events.
3. It provides evidence to show how individuals negotiate their identities and, consequently, experience, create and make sense of the rules and roles of the social worlds in which they live. (2001, p. 2)

Goodson and Sikes (2001) also described that life historians "...are concerned with inviting their informants to consider and articulate answers to questions such as: Who are you? What are you? Why are you? Why do you think, believe, do, make sense of the world and the things that happen to you? Why has your life taken the course that it has?" (p. 1). They also commented that "[i]t is easy to get carried away and to slip into comic parody when asking what might be described as the 'big' questions about people's

experiences and understandings of the world, their place, or rather places, within it and the things which happen to them” (p.1). By comic parody, Goodson and Sikes mean the potential for a life history study to become overwhelming in its attempt to answer such substantial questions about one’s life. I appreciate this acknowledgement as the task of writing a life history study can feel rather daunting but they also explain that these types of questions are necessary because they deal with the essence of identity and our place in the world and our participants’ places in the world (p.2). Given that I am deeply curious about how my participants’ identities were influenced by their experiences as immigrants or as children of immigrants, there is an alignment with the method of life history.

**Life Histories and Other Similar Methodologies.** In the qualitative research literature, life history research is sometimes referred to as a methodology and a method, part of biographical research including: life story, life history narratives, oral history, biography or narrative research. Several scholars point out that it is difficult to make absolute distinctions between and among various personal experience methods (Adriensen, 2011; Denzin, 1989a; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995b). All of them share in common the study of “lives” (Roberts, 2001). They all seek to understand the changing experiences of individuals in their daily lives and through their past experiences as well as interpretations about what they see as important (Roberts, 2001). Clearly there are many similarities among them but other scholars mention the subtle distinctions that exist between these terms (Adriensen, 2011; Cole & Knowles, 2001, Gough, 2008 Glesne, 2011). Below I outline some of the areas of convergence and divergence as debated in the academic literature and specify my use of the term life history

Both narrative and life history research involve telling the stories of life experiences; as well, both are committed to respecting the unique contributions of individual experience. But then the two approaches part ways when it comes to the broad purpose and analysis of each methodology. Cole and Knowles (2001) described this divergence:

...life history goes beyond the individual or the personal and places narrative accounts and interpretations within a broader context. Lives are lived within the influence and contexts as far ranging as cultural, political, familial, educational, and religious spheres. Whereas narrative research focuses on making meaning of individual's experiences, life history research draws on individuals' experiences to make broader contextual meaning. (2001, p. 20).

Thus life history is used to examine the impact of one's life experience to constructing meaning to the individual involved. This seems to me to a respectful approach to understanding the experience of someone else.

Furthermore, Coles and Knowles (2001) also explained that narrative inquiry ...is based on the assumption that human experience is episodically ordered and best understood through a reconstruction of the natural narrative order in which it is lived. Significance is given to the personal, temporal, and contextual quality of connections and relationships that honor the complexities of a life as lived as a unified whole. (p.19)

In addition, narrative inquiry can be a methodology and a method. As a methodology it is a theory which provides a framework around how the research inquiry should be conducted. Therefore narrative can also be associated with life histories as a method for

gathering data by interviewing. Gough (2008) points out the significance of context in life history research “by positioning descriptions of everyday life within the contexts in which they occur, life history narratives can convey a sense of how individual lives are not free-floating, but are socially constructed” (p. 485). In essence, a student of life history interrogates “...the meaning and significance of the past as it influences the present and the future” (Coles & Knowles, 2001, p. 20), whereas narrative inquiry looks at how we interpret our life from the current point of view (Zinn, 2004, p. 8).

Biography, another personal experience method, also tries to convey meaning and learning through a personal narrative like life history. But it is a “...structured account of a life written by another, usually according to literary conventions” (Coles & Knowles, p.17). A biographical approach tends to emphasize the construction or “...reconstruction of a single case and the development of the ‘personality’ in the life course” (Zinn, 2004, p. 7). Often researchers who use biography as their research method are “...particularly interested in the things not mentioned in an interview” but rather that which exists under the surface of the self-representation (p. 7). In addition, researchers who focus on biography “...assume that the link between structure and individuals could only be understood sufficiently by analyzing the development of the individual personality in the life course. Thus the analysis of the single case is emphasized” (p. 7).

Oral history is often referred to as a life history. Shopes (2011) suggests that there are specific characteristics of an oral history. First, it begins with an interview which is an exchange between the question asker, the interviewer and the responder, the interviewee (p. 451). But she explains that “[i]t is not simply someone telling a story; it is someone telling a story in response to the queries of another; it is this dialogue that shapes the

interview” (p. 451). Shopes also pointed out that oral history interviewing is historically focused in that it “...seeks new knowledge about and insights into the past through an individual biography” but with an interplay between past and present (p. 452). According to Freund (2014), the academic usage of oral history defines it “...as a person’s life story that focuses on personal experience” (p. 5). He also comments that oral history and oral tradition should not be confused as one in the same. They clearly have points of intersection in that “...people draw on oral traditions, often sub-consciously, to make sense of their lives...however oral history is a multi-faceted term...” (p. 6) which describes a methodology and method by which qualitative research can be conducted. Since oral history relies on the memory of the participant, the telling is inherently subjective and fundamentally it is an in-depth inquiry. Although many of these characteristics of an oral history are consistent with life history, Shopes cautions that there is a distinction between the interview focus of the two: “Life history interviews often...record a narrator’s biography, addressing topics such as family life; educational and work experiences” (p. 452) but within a particular context. This life history interview looked at the past and present aspect of a participant’s life within a social or historical context and often involves few participants; whereas oral history may not be restricted to a small number of participants as the purpose of an oral history maybe to contribute to archival collection and historical documentation (Adriansen, 2011). In the case of my study, I look at the lives of participants grounded within the social context and perspective of being immigrants or children of immigrants who later become principals and vice-principals with the intention to examine how they tell their stories and how their identities have developed. In addition, oral history relies on archival materials or

historical collections to supplement and provide context to the interview. But given the nature of this study, there are no archival or historical collections to draw on for context, the main source of data are the participant interviews.

What constitutes a life history and life story is also an issue of debate in the academic literature. When distinguishing life stories from life histories, Bertaux and Kohli (1991) showed that the histories correspond to a wider context. Life stories are a major component within a life history but are complemented by being placed within a social or educational context. In the past, some scholars have argued that life stories become a life history when validated by external sources (Freund, 2014; Goodson & Sikes, 2001); but Miller (2000) claims that there "... is no longer a necessary requirement for a life history" (p.19). Goodson and Sikes (2001) also mentioned that "...a life story is concerned with understanding a person's view and account of their life, the story they tell about their life" (p.87). Furthermore, Adriansen (2012) claimed that in "...life history research, the intention is to understand how the patterns of different life stories can be related to their wider historical, social, environmental, and political context" (p.41). Both life story and life history focus on the narrative or narration but life history has a different connotation relating to the purpose of research, usually to understand a particular social, political, and educational context.

Like various social science methodologies that focus on human experience, life history researchers are also interested in the way stories are told. Goodson and Sikes (2001) mention that when we focus on the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, then the way we tell the story is very important especially with respect to what is told and what is not being told (p. 6). Adriansen furthers this point saying "It is not only how the

story is told, which is relevant, it is also how the story relates to what has happened in the interviewee's life and how the person has reacted towards it" (p. 42). Another benefit to life history stories and narratives is the emphasis on the whole of a person, in that lives as a whole, public and private, are not separated and that ultimately lives are contextual and are studied and understood in this manner (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). This approach is appealing as part of my investigation is to examine how early experiences have influenced the professional identities of the principals and vice-principals. Issues connected to professional work such as personal events are therefore not separated from the lives of the individuals in this study. But rather private experiences connect to professional work.

**Life History Interviews.** Although there are these distinctions between life history, narrative, and oral history, in general it is agreed that these methodologies involve the researcher as the main instrument for data collection through the use of interviews. Shopes claims, "...the best interviews have a measured, thinking-out-loud quality, as perceptive questions work and rework a particular topic, encouraging the narrator to remember details, seeking to clarify what is muddled, making connections among recollections..." (p. 452). Freund explains, "[I]f life history interviews, attempt to record...a story that focuses on the interviewee's personal experiences but may stretch back to memories about his parents...and will often include ruminations about the interviewee's general view of life and the world around her" (p. 6).

Data from these interviews are used to create a narrative of a life or lives; thus, life histories are often called life history narratives (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Freund, 2014; Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Additional data sources such as personal diaries,

journals, letters, and observations can be employed but can be difficult to access and rely on the relationship of trust between the researcher and participant which can take much time to develop. Often the key to successful life history research is dependent on the researcher's ability to foster a strong and positive relationship with the research participant(s). As Cole and Knowles (2001) explained

more often than not, 'the researched' – the person who has agreed to be the focus of a life history exploration – comes to the first moment of involvement with particular expectations and is mindful of or curious about the purpose of the spotlight's focus. (p. vii)

Naturally there could be some anxiety on the part of the research participants as suddenly their life histories are about to take centre stage in a research study. As the researcher, I was mindful and sensitive to such feelings. To build the relationship, I relayed my personal story focusing on my immigration to Canada and transition as well as my identity issues and how those impact my identity today, thus I placed context about me within this research.

In addition, I felt because I am ethnic researcher, this would afford me a certain degree of "insider" status (Griffiths, 1998). Mirza stated "...the researcher should be a competent member of the culture h/she is writing about" (1995, p. 172). Although this is a controversial statement in light of the shifting and multiple nature of identity, still I fervently hoped that my "insider" status, due to my age, gender, and ethnicity would be more powerful than my "outsider" status as I am not a teacher and have never worked in the public school system. I honestly did not go into this research thinking about how deeply I would be able to connect with participant experiences, yet in the midst of it I was

struck by how often I heard from research participants that it was easy to share with me because I just “get it” meaning I just get what it is like to have grown up as a visible minority in the 1970s in this province. Visible minorities were truly the minority during that time and I could relate to comments like “trying to be whiter than white” or “trying not to draw attention to my culture difference.” Participants also expressed that it was easy to share with me because I would not judge them for their experiences and their reflective thoughts on those experiences because I was seen as a safe person with a similar background.

Through sharing of my own story, I was able to build a relationship and trust among my participants. With many, we realized similarities and parallels between our lives. My ability to relate to some of the participants, helped significantly in the data collection. In addition, I tried to emphasize the value that bringing their stories to the forefront of educational discussions would have in terms of the enhancement of knowledge for other school leaders. I think this helped several participants to open up on their views of school leadership and issues of diversity and inclusion.

Another appealing aspect of using life histories for this research study was the opportunity to enhance an understanding of oneself; that is, myself as the researcher and on behalf of the readers of the study. Glesne pointed out that “a good life history illustrates the uniqueness, dilemmas, and complexities of a person in such a way that it causes readers to reflect upon themselves and to bring their own situations and questions to the story” (p. 20). As outlined in chapter one, my own personal story brought me in part to this research study. Learning from my participants has allowed me to reflect on my own leadership journey. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (2002) pointed out

that “The identity, character, and history of the research are obviously critical to the manner of listening, selecting, interpreting and composing the story” (p.13).

In addition, life history is an appropriate methodology for my study as it fits within my social constructivist paradigm and my belief that lived experiences can neither be quantified, nor observed independently from social, educational, or familial contexts. Life history also connects well with the interpretivist epistemology as it focuses on the construction of meanings by participants as they describe their situations, behaviours and rationales (Jacob, 1992). In addition, it invites readers into the interpretive process.

In the following section, I discuss the participant recruitment process and data collection process.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted using purposeful sampling with hopes of finding 6 to 8 participants that fit within the criteria of this study. Researchers working with life-history methodology caution having large sample sizes and recommend anywhere from just one participant to about half a dozen (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Freund, 2014). The reasoning for this is that life-history research can lead to deep, rich data that reflects the life of a participant and thus the data collection phase can become overwhelming (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Freund, 2014). Also, Creswell (2009) comments that “[t]he idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants...that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p.178). My criteria for selection were as follows:

1. Self-identified visible minority
2. Immigrant or child of immigrant parents

3. Principal or vice-principal currently working in the K to 12 public education system in British Columbia who saw themselves as inclusive leaders.

Additionally, my thought was to start with requesting participants from BC and going broader if I did not find enough participants. But as it turned out, there was enough interest from participants who fit my criteria within the province.

After receiving approval from the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (Appendix A), I requested the help of the BC Principals and Vice-Principals Association (BCPVPA) with recruitment. The Executive Director of BCPVPA was quite supportive of my research inquiry and agreed to include a write-up about my research and call for participants in the BCPVPA electronic newsletter. The Executive Director believed the formal letter was rather long for the newsletter and asked that I work with their Communications Officer to create more of a poster style advertisement (Appendix B & Appendix C). The newsletter reaches all members of the association and within days of distribution, I had received emails from prospective participants which included 5 principals and 2 vice-principals. All prospective participants met the criteria. I emailed each participant my original lengthier call for participation letter and an informed consent letter (Appendix D). Once each participant's letter of consent was received in the mail, I contacted them to schedule times for a first interview.

Without hesitation, I can say that the participants in this study brought to life my research interest and continued to validate the importance of including their voices in larger educational discussion. My initial contact with each and every one of my participants was marked with their enthusiasm to have the opportunity to share their experiences and to be part of the educational discourse. Following is a chart listing brief

information about my participants using pseudonyms to provide anonymity and protect their confidentiality.

**Table 3-1. Brief Participant Information**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Ethnicity/Cultural Background</b>	<b>Immigrant or Child of Immigrant Parents</b>	<b>Professional Role</b>	<b>Type of School</b>	<b>Number of Interviews</b>
Paul	South Asian-Canadian	Child of Immigrant Parents	Vice-Principal	Elementary	2
Aarti	South Asian-Canadian	Immigrant	Principal	Elementary	2
Nureen	South Asian-Canadian	Child of Immigrant Parents	Vice-Principal	Elementary	2
Sanjay	South Asian-Canadian	Immigrant	Principal	Secondary	2
Gurmeet	South Asian-Canadian	Immigrant	Principal	Elementary	2
Manuel	Hispanic-Canadian	Child of Immigrant Parents	Principal	Secondary	1
Min-jun	Asian-Canadian	Immigrant	Principal	Elementary	1

## Data Collection

The main data collection method that I employed in this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Interviews are the main and essential source of data collection when using life history methodology. Although interviewing was the main method, I also requested journals/diaries, photographs, scrap books, student yearbooks and personal letters that research participants might be willing to share which might provide further context to their life history. Only three participants shared photos, letters and yearbooks. Two shared during face-to-face interviews and one sent a link to images on their Facebook account. I was not given permission to include photos of any personal items, but such personal items were used to provide me with additional context to comments made during the interview.

Interviewing also is the most appropriate tool for my data gathering as it aligns with my epistemological belief that knowledge is socially constructed. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggest that the interview is a social production between interviewer and respondent. Thus it is a collaborative construction between myself and my participants. Borer and Fontana (2012) also suggest that "...the interview is situationally and contextually produced, it is itself a site for knowledge production rather than simply a neutral conduit for experiential knowledge..." (p. 50). Johnson and Rowlands (2011) indicate that researchers who use in-depth interviewing:

commonly seek 'deep' information and knowledge – usually deeper information and knowledge than is sought in...informal interviewing... This information usually concerns very personal matters, such as an individual's self, lived experience, values and decision, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective. (p. 100)

In particular, I determined that in-depth interviews would be the best approach for me to use as this approach allowed me to both investigate the phenomenon of life experiences and the research participants' perspectives on factors which they believe have influenced their leadership identities and development as principals and vice-principals. Charmaz (2006) indicates that the nature of in-depth interviews elicits each participant's interpretation of his or her experience. Therefore, the interviewer's "...questions ask the participant to describe and reflect upon his or her experiences in ways that seldom occur in everyday life" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 25). Thus life history narratives are not told in a social isolation. As explained by Seidman (2006), the purpose of in depth-interviews "...is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to 'evaluate'...At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience...and an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (p. 9). The main purpose of interviewing, then, is to help shed some light on research participants' behaviours in a context as a way to understand actions taken.

Seidman (2006) argued for the use of multiple interviews, at the very least more than one, when conducting research that involves understanding experiences and meaning around a phenomenon. He comments that "people's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience" (pp. 16-17). Given that context is fundamental to life history inquiry, a multiple interview process holds merit. The first interview is seen as the one which focuses on life history. Seidman explained that in the first interview, "...the interviewers'

task is to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (p. 17).

The purpose of the second interview, a procedure I followed was to focus on the specific details of the research, plus to probe deeper based on data from the first interview (Seidman, p. 18). In addition, the follow-up interview allowed the participants to reflect on the meanings of their experiences, especially after having reviewed the transcripts from the first interview. Meaning in this case implies "...the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p.18). I posed questions such as "given what you said about your life at the time you moved to Canada, how do you understand the impact of that move on your life?" The follow-up interview also allowed for further exploration of the past to clarify the events which had contributed to where the participants are in terms of their identity and how they behave in the present.

I selected in-depth interviewing since this approach is best suited to inductive modes of research and because it helps with providing knowledge on questions that explore, describe, and attempt to provide meaning to complex human phenomena. Although the interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, this process did not preclude digressions or allowing participants to emphasize areas of most interest or concern for them. In addition, I found conducting the in-depth interviews revealed deep self-disclosure on the part of my participants and in some cases from myself, which helped to build trust and mutual understanding. This mutuality is important for in-depth interviews within a life history study. Atkinson (2012) comments on this point saying,

There may well be an undeniable research agenda for the interviewer, but there is just as much a high level of sensitivity required because of the inherent

interactional nature of the interview...there could be no other kind of interview [that] could be more personal...(p. 116).

The audit trail for this study included maintaining memos and research journals that cover the context of the study from research design to decisions on methodology and scrutiny of my theoretical assumptions. Critically analyzing my reflective notes, memos and journal have all contributed to the construction of an audit trail (Birk & Mills, 2012).

**Interview Process.** First interviews took place from October to November 2013. All seven interviews were undertaken using teleconference technology. Interviews were recorded using a digital audio-recorder and interviews ran from 47 minutes to the longest being 127 minutes. Each interview began with a review of the consent letter and reminder to participants that the interview would be recorded and that they could request that the interview be stopped at any time. Interview questions were sent to participants prior to the first interview and the same set of questions were asked of all participants. Twenty-five semi-structured open-ended questions were asked as well as prompts for probes depending on the responses (Appendix E). The initial questions were focused on their early years either growing up in another country, transitioning to Canada or being raised in Canada as immigrants or as children of immigrant parents and details about their family life. Then the questions led into early experiences at school and what it was like growing up during the time they did. School experiences were also probed from elementary through to higher education and their interest in education and teaching. Later the interview focused on being a principal or vice-principal and providing leadership as well as questions regarding their philosophical approaches to leadership, identity as formal leaders and their definitions for terms like diversity, inclusion, social justice and

equity. Participants also showed interest in my experiences and curiosity about what led me to this research inquiry. This exchange often involved sharing some of my own history as an immigrant and early memories of growing up in Canada. Many commonalities and shared experiences emerged in these discussions.

Once the first interview was concluded, I listened to the oral recordings and transcribed one interview. I then hired a UVic graduate student from Anthropology to complete the transcription process. I then spent a great deal of time reading, re-reading, taking notes and journaling my thoughts and reflections as I read through the first interview transcripts. For a time I was paralysed, unable to start coding the data. I felt reluctant to encapsulate such heartfelt and personal reflections into a mere word or phrase. After reading each transcript five times over, sharing the transcripts with participants and with the help of my supervisor, I realized my paralysis was a result of fear that I would not be honouring the voices of the participants by coding for themes that emerged. I reviewed the fundamentals of content analysis and managed to work through this initial difficult stage. Advice from my supervisor and participant feedback were very helpful at this stage. Several were overwhelmed to read their life story in such detail but touched to see it represented. None of the participants requested any changes. One of the participants, Aarti said about the first interview transcript, “Well, there it is my whole life in black and white. I can’t hide from it. It feels meaningful to see it there. Thank you for asking me” (Second Interview, line 43-44).

### **Data Analysis**

An initial coding of the first interviews led to unique and specific follow-up questions for each participant for the second interview. This time round the questions

were not generic as the need to probe in particular areas varied between all of the participants. It was an intense and lengthy process to develop the follow-up questions. As I coded the first set of interviews, follow-up questions arose for further probes. Being a novice qualitative researcher, I also realized that I missed opportunities to dig deeper into a response during the first interview. For example stories that were shared about the pressure for some participants to fit in with mainstream culture, provided an opening in the second interview to probe on how that pressure or impact of that has influenced how they lead or respond to visible minority students today, or to probe further on what that experience meant for their identity development.

The second interviews were scheduled for May and June 2014. Five participants took part in second interviews. Unfortunately, two of the original 7 participants declined the follow-up interview due to the BC teacher job action – and later strike – that marked the end of the 2014 school year and the start of the 2014/15 school year. Both were administrators in small schools embedded in small communities. Although I proposed rescheduling into the summer, it became much too difficult to schedule as one was returning to Asia to visit family and the other was participating in volunteer projects in Latin America. I felt I needed to move on and complete the data collection and analysis in order to be prepared to start the dissertation. I also felt that the data gathered from the other 5 participants in the second interviews were incredibly rich and added enough depth to the overall study. Three of the follow-up interviews were conducted via teleconference and two were conducted face-to-face at the schools of the participants. Interviews ranged from the shortest being 52 minutes to longest being 152 minutes. Again the interviews were recorded using a digital audio-recorder and transcribed by the same graduate student

from Anthropology. Below I provide a discussion regarding my approach to data analysis as well as my theoretical assumptions.

With life history inquiry there is no specific or prescribed tool or technique for analysis or write-up (Cole & Knowles, 2001). This concept is both freeing and daunting for a novice social science researcher like myself. Cole and Knowles suggested that:

...preparing for analysis of life history material requires a kind of mental readiness to understand and accept the complexity of the task, the creative nature of the process, and the requirements of time, patience, and commitment to a sometimes convoluted and chaotic process. (p. 99)

Although this quotation did not necessarily completely calm my nerves when starting the initial analysis of the data from a life history inquiry, it is the creative aspect that has allowed me to build meaning with my research participants and to place it within specific contexts.

Staying true to the qualitative approach, I used a qualitative content analysis method for data analysis (Franzosi, 2008; Neuendorf, 2002). Qualitative content analysis, "...as all qualitative approaches, does not draw a sharp separation between data collection and analysis; the two processes proceed in parallel and simultaneously, in a reflexive interaction with the text" (Franzosi, 2008, p. 10). An inductive content analysis approach was used to identify themes in the data (Franzosi, 2008). As the name suggests, inductive content analysis relies on inductive reasoning, in which themes emerge from the raw data through repeated examination and comparison (Thomas, 2006). Thus, I looked for similarities and differences asking myself to consider questions such as "what

is this sentence or text about?” “how is it similar or different to other statements or text?” and finally “what does this remind me of?” This organization was done deliberately so as not to lose the complexity of the concepts covered in a theme (See Figure 4.1 – Sample of Coding). I read, reread, and wrote memos; underlined keywords and phrases, and essentially did what Ryan and Bernard (2003) called “lived with the data” until patterns emerged. Clearly some themes can be determined by frequency and repetition or what Bogdan and Taylor reference “...topics that occur and reoccur” (1975, p. 83). Thus the mere reoccurrence of a concept among the data will lend itself to a theme. But frequency and repetition was not the sole driver in my determination of themes. Fortunately, content analysis allows for a process for locating relationships between concepts and themes across interviews using constant comparative analysis a process at examining the similarities and differences across units of data (Franzosi, 2008; Neuendorf, 2002). Following Strauss and Corbin’s advice through line-by-line analysis and asking myself “what is this sentence about?” and “how is it similar to or different from the preceding or following statement?” helped to keep me focused on the data (1990, pp. 61-62). Also sub-themes emerged when I considered Ryan and Bernard’s question “how is one expression different or similar to the other by degree of strength” (2003, p. 91). Finally, in determining themes and sub-themes, I kept in mind the question Bogdan and Biklen (1982) recommend when reviewing passages of text, “what does this remind me of?” (p. 153). This helped me to recall the literature and the theoretical frames in which to ground the themes.

The advantage then of using content analysis is that it allows for the systematic inductive approach to inquiry but it also allows for rigorous examination of data and

developing analyses (Birks & Mills, 2011; Charmaz, 2011). Cole and Knowles (2001) explained it must be used with caution with life history inquiry, given the heavy emphasis on coding procedures which may fragment the data and remove some of the meaning that is created between individual participants and their experiences in the interest of finding patterns across cases. I also relied extensively on note-taking and journaling as I read through the data and along with the codes from the first interviews to create the questions for the second interviews. Qualitative content analysis method allows researchers to go back and forth between data analysis and collection since each can inform and assist the other. Rather this "...iterative analytical method of constantly comparing and collecting or generating data that results in high-level conceptually abstract categories rich with meaning..." (Birk & Mills, 2012, p. 94). This interactive aspect of data analysis was a highly engaging part of the data analysis phase for me.

Also central to my analysis of the data was writing notes or memos. As mentioned earlier, I was a reluctant coder at first as I did not want to reduce the stories of the participants, in spite of the fact I was using open coding (Saldana, 2013) methods essentially allowing meaning to emerge from the data rather than using a constructed priori, nonetheless this phase was a challenge to me. The qualitative analysis process of memoing (Saldana, 2013) was helpful to me as I read and re-read the transcripts since it kept me productive and engaged with the data but also helped me avoid adding preconceptions to the data (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008; Birks & Mills, 2011; Elo & Kyngas, 2007; Thomas, 2006). Birk, Chapman, and Francis also commented that:

Through the use of memos, the qualitative researcher is able to engage with their research to a greater degree than otherwise would be the case. An intense

relationship is established with the data, enabling the researcher to feel a heightened sensitivity to the meaning contained therein (2008, p. 69).

I was at the point that I could not read the data without simultaneously memoing by thoughts, insights, feelings, drawing connections, writing further probing questions.

Birks and Mills mentioned that memos often include:

- Your feelings and assumptions about your research.
- Your philosophical position in relation to your research.
- Musings on books and papers that you have read.
- Potential issues, problems and concerns in relation to your study design.
- Reflections on the research process, including factors that influence quality in your study.
- Procedural and analytical decision making.
- Codes, categories and your developing theory. (2012, p. 42)

From there I was able to move to open coding, axial coding (intermediate level of coding where codes and concepts are related or linked to each other), constant comparative analysis and creating hierarchical themes (Birk & Mills, 2012). Through open descriptive coding and content analysis, I attempted to summarize the primary topic of data passages and then determine codes. As recommended by Charmaz (2006), I stayed close to the original data by using the participants' own words rather than applying my own terms right away. Relying on the exact language used by participants or *in vivo* coding (Charmaz, 2006), I became more comfortable with data given my initial fears of not being true to the participant's voice. Thus Charmaz (2006) suggested that *in vivo*

coding as an initial process helps a researcher to stay true to the participants' meanings of their experiences.

As data coding continued with line-by-line analysis, I reached 78 codes from the first interviews and 47 from the second interview that were entered into a code book. I then moved on to axial coding which allows for codes to be sorted, synthesized, and organized in new ways after opening coding (Charmaz, 2006; Birks & Mills, 2012) and this helped to categorize the codes (Saldana, 2013). Using this inductive approach, a number of themes emerged that are shared among all participants as well as some that applied to just some of the participants but not all. Key words and phrases were categorized into common themes and these data was repeatedly re-sorted as additional information or new information was generated. I grouped synonyms and related words and eliminated redundancies. This approach was taken during the data analysis to ensure that a focus on the empirical data was maintained along with considerations of my interpretive and social constructivist epistemological orientations as well as the critical theories and research assumptions outlined earlier in this chapter. My intention throughout was to maintain the voice of the research participants and to highlight how their experiences have provided context to their identities and influenced their enactments as leaders. I also took the approach that Bogdan and Biklen (1982) recommended "what does the text remind me of?" as this approach helped to bring to mind readings from the literature, my own experiences and experiences of each participant.

From the initial coding, twenty-four broad categories were created. As I worked deeper through the analysis of data, the memos were invaluable to me. If I became muddled in the data, revisiting the memos helped to reorient me and clarify my thinking.

From the coding and creating categorizations and further analytical reflection, six major themes emerged from the data. These major themes are broad and encompass sub-themes and pull together the codes into interpretive concepts. This approach was done deliberately to try to honour the voices of the participants and to not limit their experience by trying to sum up their thoughts and lives in a single word or two. In addition, I did not count the frequency of certain words or codes to claim some further significance as St. Pierre (2011) points out qualitative researchers "... know that the most significant data in a study might occur only once" (p.622). Also, I did not claim thematic significance via frequency of codes as that would be a reductionist approach to understanding the complexity in a life history examination. However the data do support an emergence of patterns and themes that may apply to all participants or in some cases just to a few.

Since all themes and sub-themes did not apply to all participants, this situation may have been because not all participants participated in a second interview and thus data were limited for a couple of them. In addition, in a life-history study a researcher will not find two of the same stories. There clearly are some similarities given the criteria for participant selection based on the research questions, but ultimately no one has lived the life of another. Each life and each experience is unique. So much of the analysis and coding was based on interpretation and informed by interpretive and critical theories.

### **Research Assumptions and Theoretical Frames: Critical Race Theory, Identity Development Theory and Assimilation Theory**

In addition to qualitative content analysis approach to data analysis, the theoretical frames I outlined earlier, constructivist, social constructivist, interpretivist, and subjectivist orientations as well as Critical Race Theory, Identity Development

Theory and Assimilation Theory were all influential during the data analysis phase. Although I did not start this research using Critical Race Theory, Identity Development Theory and Assimilation Theory these theoretical perspectives became invaluable to my understanding and analysis of my data. Below I explain these theories and their relevancy to my study and data analysis.

**Critical Race Theory.** Although Critical Race Theory (CRT) has developed through American legal scholarship to critique the privileges and power still extended to the dominant white culture to the detriment of Black Americans, it is an appropriate lens through which my study can be analyzed. CRT contends that racism is normalized in our everyday lives (Ladson-Billing, 1998). Historically, the white majority have benefited as a result of being socially defined as superior to visible minorities (Starratt, 2003, p. 142). Thus race is seen as a social construct and not a biological difference. CRT provides a way to analyze these social discussions. According to Gillborn (2007), CRT is more of a perspective than a theory. He further explained, "...CRT does not offer a finished set of propositions that claim to explain current situations and predict what will occur under a certain set of conditions; rather it is a set of interrelated beliefs about the significance of race/racism and how it operates in contemporary western society..." (p.19). CRT also provides a powerful way to challenge mainstream assumptions.

In *Critical Race Theory: the Cutting Edge*, Delgado and Stefancic (2000) explained that historically black and visible minorities have not been represented accurately and appropriately. A new focus on representing Blacks and minorities is critical to redefining abilities, characteristics and traits of the non-majority because for too long Delgado and Stefancic claimed "The history of racial depiction shows that our

society has blithely consumed a shocking parade of Sambos, coons, sneaky Japanese, and indolent, napping Mexicans – images that were perceived as amusing, cute, or worse yet, true” (2000, p. xvii). Visible minority school leaders have to contend with these pre-conceived images and historical social stereotypes while providing leadership in their schools. Ladson-Billings (2010) asserted that “Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed in order to maintain their power” (p.14).

The importance of conducting studies involving marginalized leaders is to give voice to their experiences through counterstory. Developing the “counterstory” has the potential to subvert mainstream realities about minorities and their experiences. CRT according to Ladson-Billings (2010) “...becomes an important intellectual, social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourse, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power” (p.9). Delgado (2001) further explained, “[t]he hope is that well-told stories describing the reality of black and brown lives can help readers bridge that gap between their worlds and those of others” (p. 41). In addition, the stories and narratives from visible minorities can help to “...reduce alienation for members of excluded groups, while offering opportunities for members of the group to meet them half way” (Delgado, 2001, p.44). According to Calmore (1995) stories legitimize experience so story-telling and narrating one’s life history is respectful to “...how voice is expressed, how voice is informed, and how our voices differ from the dominant voice” (p. 320). Finally, Ladson-Billings claimed:

[s]tories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting. The ahistorical and acontextual nature of much law and other ‘science’ renders the voices of dispossessed and marginalized group members mute. In response, much of the scholarship of CRT focuses on the role of ‘voice’ in bringing additional power to the legal discourses of racial justice. (p. 13)

According to CRT, a story is respected for its subjective nature. Subjectivity is valuable because it implies that “...the scholar places herself in the linguistic position of subject rather than object, a being capable of acting upon the world rather than as one upon whom others act” (Lawrence, 1995, p. 338). Thus CRT has the power to include minority experience as part of the educational discourse rather than keeping it on the fringe or worse in continued silence. This fundamental aspect of CRT aligns well with my other epistemologies of social constructivist, interpretivist and subjectivist world views. Solorzano and Yosso further offer that “critical race theory challenges traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (2002, p. 26). In this way, CRT challenges white privilege in education and rejects the idea that research is objective and neutral.

Within CRT, context matters especially in the telling of experiences by visible minorities because the context grounds the story and legitimizes the voice. This theoretical approach aligns well with life-history methodology where an individual’s context is also central to the inquiry. Lawrence explained that without the contextual background, there is a risk that the listener or reader may add their own context which can bring different and potentially harmful outsider implications and interpretations to the

story, thus distorting the context (1995, pp. 345-346). But according to Lawrence it is not enough to just have stories told by visible minorities, the stories and experiences must be part of research in order to add another paradigm to the existing literature. Thus by not including the voices and experiences of visible minorities, I believe educational leadership literature continues to favour the experience of white, mainstream leaders and thus tie the dominant professional identity of leaders to whiteness for educational leaders in positions of power and minority leaders as being alternative from the norm.

Another important concept in CRT is the counter-story; that is, outsider/insider tensions. Although the experiences and life-histories of visible minority principals and vice-principals have the potential to subvert the metanarratives in educational leadership literature, there are some words of caution. Iverson (2007) referenced these cautions saying that minority groups may attempt:

...to produce sameness in relation to a White, male experience situated as the norm, and by attributing insider status to one's elevated placement on a hierarchy of achievement, reports denote that not all people of color are eligible (capable) of gaining insider status, further marking those who gain insider status as different...thus only exemplary or elite people of color are eligible candidates and the target of diversity efforts (p.594).

So only some visible minorities are granted insider status through their positions and could have the potential to perpetuate the metanarrative on educational leadership rather than provide a counter-narrative. Although I see that there is a potential for perpetuating the white, mainstream voice and experience in order to gain insider status, I believe this

may occur mainly in situations that are not safe to expose or share a counter-narrative. Additionally, visible minority principals' and vice-principals' views about leadership and education have the potential to provide new and insightful perspectives that can enhance the development of leadership for diverse school populations. Understanding how identity also impacts leadership praxis is another significant theoretical frame for consideration.

**Identity Development Theory.** Although investigating identity formation is a critical aspect of my study, I do not do so from an objectivist, positivist perspective; rather, my intention is to challenge dominant perspectives on identity formation. Theories of identity formation arise principally from the academic disciplines of psychology and sociology. In psychology, the works of Erikson (1963, 1968, & 1982) have been most influential on the early development of identity formation theory. Although Erikson's work has been critiqued for being out of date for its depiction of sex and gender roles (Mishra & Shirazi, 2010; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Urdan & Munoz, 2012), there are some more generally accepted elements from his early work. His approach to identity construction focuses on self-development as a life-long endeavour with the purpose of creating an optimal self in one's social environment (Kaplan & Flum, 2010). In addition to this, Erikson viewed the stage of one's adolescence or youth to be the most critical in developing one's sense of identity (2010). It is during this time in one's life where "...the first integration of childhood identifications and introjections occurs to result with a structure that provides the foundations for continuous reformulations of the self throughout the rest of the person's life" (p.55). Thus the early experiences in one's life play a critical role in later identity formation which has

relevancy to my study especially in the examination of the early years in the principals' and vice-principals' life-histories. Unfortunately, Erikson's work does not provide a clear and concise definition of the term "identity". For him, identity is not seen simply as self-concept or social roles and identifications. Erikson viewed identity as something that is located in the core of an individual and it is this core which gives one a "conscious sense of individual uniqueness... [and] an unconscious striving for a continuity of experience" (1968, p. 216).

From Erikson's early discussions of identity formation, many scholars have built on his foundations for defining identity. For example Marcia (1966) defined identity as "an internal, self-constructed organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history" (p. 159) whereas Waterman (1984) defined identity as "a clearly delineated self-definition comprised of those goals, values, and beliefs to which the person is unequivocally committed" (p. 331). And finally Berzonsky (1992) defined identity as a "self-constructed theory of the self... [that] serves as the conceptual framework within which life experiences are interpreted..." (p. 193). Although there are variations in these definitions there are some commonalities. Identity is seen as an integrated psychological framework of personal attributes, values, and goals. In addition, identity is a construction of one's abilities, beliefs and goals. Furthermore, the construction of identity occurs through social interaction and is thus located within a social-cultural environment.

Identity formation theorists also agree "...that the more integrated and coherent the identity structure is, the more adjusted the individual is. Individuals with a strong sense of identity are aware of their unique qualities, strengths, and weaknesses and they employ them adaptively in fulfilling their social roles in their groups and society" (p. 56).

The opposite is seen to be true when an individual lacks a sense of identity, as Marcia (1980) indicates “...the more confused individuals seem about their own distinctiveness from others the more they have to rely on external sources to evaluate themselves” (p.159).

Erikson not only influenced the theoretical discussions of identity formation in psychology; his work also influenced identity formation seen through a sociological lens (Cote & Levine, p. 47). Where psychology sees identity as part of the individual, as in part of one’s psyche, sociology sees identity as not the sole domain of the individual but rather it is something that is also realized or created through one’s interaction with others (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995). As Cote and Levine pointed out,

For sociologists identity is both ‘internal’ and ‘external’ to the individual. It is internal to the extent that it is seen to be subjectively ‘constructed’ by the individual, but it is external to the extent that this construction is in reference to ‘objective’ social circumstances provided by day-to-day interactions, social roles, cultural institutions, and social structures (2002, p. 49).

Thus for sociologists identity is created from both an internal source and external circumstances. The internal identity construction is seen to be subjective with some of the construction being accepted or adopted and others rejected. Yet external construction is seen to be objective and thus more neutral in construction of identity. I would disagree with this view and say that both the internal and external construction is situated in a subjective construction of identity.

Furthermore, contemporary sociologists view identity “...as a product of the person negotiating passages through life and reflecting on these actions. These reflections can

then culminate in the creation of ‘stories’ or ‘narratives,’” that help to explain past actions, the meanings of these actions and influences on identity formation (p.49). I agree that identity is constructed from the meanings and reflections of stories and narratives.

In the social sciences, identity is seen generally as the type of person we are internally, as in an internal construct, but also how we are viewed by others (Konkin & Suddards, 2012, p.586). Gee (2001) offers four inter-related and overlapping ways to think about identity and ways of being (p.100). These four are: nature-identity meaning identity derived from natural forces such as gender; institutional identity, meaning holding a particular role and position within an organization; discourse identity, meaning having certain traits as seen by others; and finally affinity-identity, meaning experiences we share with others. Thus Gee claims that it is not enough for us to declare a particular identity for it to be so, we must also be seen to have that identity by others. Gee explains “...human beings must see each other in certain ways and not others if there are to be identities of any sort...” (p. 109).

Ethnic identity creation is also of great importance because of the direct impact that it is thought to have on identity formation (Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992; Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Several researchers claim that the process of identity development can be more challenging for members of visible minority groups than for members of a dominant group (Markstrom-Adams, 1992; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Ethnic identity formation researchers indicated that ethnic minorities, especially those who are adolescence may struggle with identification with a group that is viewed as subordinate to a majority group that is believed to be superior. Added to this, ethnic minorities may also have to contend with negative stereotypes associated with their ethnic group creating

further struggle in ethnic identity formation within a society that is ethnically different from one's heritage (Phinney & Rotheram, 1987; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990). Although development of one's ethnic identity can be a challenging task, research indicates that it is important for minority adolescents' overall identity development and without it can lead to identity conflicts and self-esteem issues (Marcia, 1980).

Also noteworthy are discussions related to fluid concepts of identity explained by Hall (1990). He said that identity:

...is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something, which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Culture identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power. (p. 225)

Professional identity formation stems from theoretical discussions of identity formation from psychology and sociology and from a socio-cultural view (Konkin & Suddards, 2011). For example, professional identity formation occurs at individual, social and organizational levels. Professional identity development involves the acquisition of new role behaviours and new views of the self. In addition, the development of professional identity refers to the process by which one assumes the identity of one's profession (Austin, 2004; White, Borges, & Geiger, 1995). As Hoffman-Kipp (2008) explained "...while identity involves the individual, it is an invention of situated activity, in various communities, that both enable and limit certain identity creation and sustenance" (p. 153). The contributing factors in its development include personal

identity, role identity, and social identity development. Personal identity development refers to one's personal life influences, such as an individual's life-history, experiences, personality, feelings, goals, and values that contribute to one's self-identity; whereas, one's social or role identity refers to one's assumed social or professional role in terms of its functions, activities and responsibilities. Therefore professional identity formation is co-constructed through identities created and re-created at many different stages of one's life. It is this particular theoretical discussion around identity formation that guided my analysis of how life histories contribute to identity development and thus praxis of visible minority leaders.

This interconnection between work, the workplace and identity brings to mind Wenger's work (1998). Wenger's work suggests that schools exist as "communities of practice" (p. 29). The main premise of his theory is that identity is created through processes by which members of that particular community engage and take ownership of the work and how it is accomplished. Wenger also says that there is indeed "a profound connection between identity and practice" (p. 149). Thus principals' identity formation is a result of their ownership of not only the work itself but how they conduct the work, in essence through a structured social learning process. As Wenger suggests, "[i]dentity in practice is defined socially not merely because it is reified in a social discourse of the self and of social categories, but also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities" (p.151) and as a result we see the development of a community of practice that creates an attachment to certain ways of working and even strong commitments to a collective identity.

Borrowing from Hoffman-Kipp (2008) who examined teacher identity, I too see principal identity (in this case) as a mix of values, beliefs, attitudes, approaches to interaction, and language that has been developed in personal realms through one's life-history and life experiences with influences from family, community of origin combined with understandings, leadership views and approaches, and professional leadership praxis. Thus identity is shaped by pivotal experiences which can be identified through a life-history study.

**Assimilation Theory.** Given that the participants in this study are either immigrants or children of immigrants, assimilation theory offers context and background to help frame my analysis of the data. The study of assimilation theory is broad and encompasses perspectives from a traditional view of assimilation now called Classic assimilation theory (Gordon, 1964; Warner & Srole, 1945) which looks at how immigrants have attempted to be accepted into the broader mainstream culture of the host nation to more contemporary views of assimilation theory that focuses more on the impacts of race, ethnicity and culture of immigrants and how that impacts their acceptance into a host nation that is distinctly different from their ethnic, racial and cultural heritage (Alba & Nee, 2003; Gans, 1992; Harris, 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993). It must also be noted that most of the work done of assimilation theory, whether the classical theory or alternative theory is based mostly from the US context (Alba & Nee, 2003; Gans, 1992; Gordon, 1964; Harris, 1999; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Warner & Srole, 1945)

Classic assimilation theory, as proposed by Gordon (1964) and Warner and Srole (1945) believed that a single, unified culture and society exists within a host nation and

that in time immigrants are unified into this culture. These scholars added that this process was a “straight line” method for cultural assimilation of immigrants into a Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class society (Gordon, 1964; Warner & Srole, 1945). Gordon (1964) added that immigrant groups conform to an already established and dominant core identity of the host nation through a multi-step process that involved giving up ones culture and ethnic heritage while adopting social norms and ways of being from the host nation. Thus through this process, immigrants conform to a new identity by incorporating behaviours and attitudes of the dominant, mainstream culture and society of the host nation. This process of assimilation was viewed as being inevitable for all immigrants.

Gordon also proposed that only through this multi-step process of assimilation, immigrants’ incorporation into a host society could be quantified by examining language usage, celebration of new holidays versus ethnic holidays. Adding to the work of Gordon, Warner and Srole, scholars Blau and Duncan (1967) examined the socio-economic structures to determine successful assimilation of immigrants. For example, Blau and Duncan looked a status attainment, occupation, income and education levels to measure assimilation.

Classic assimilation theory came under criticism in later years by scholars including Alba and Nee (2003), Jung (2009), Portes and Rumbaut (1996). Scholars who were critical pointed out that classic assimilation theory speaks more to the experience of immigrants from white European nations to the US and Canada in that European immigrants found quicker paths to acceptance. However as immigration policies opened up in the 1960s, immigrants now entered the US and Canada who were ethnically,

culturally and racially diverse. As a result of this change in immigration, assimilation was not a straight line. Rather scholars explored the complexities of assimilation and the segmentation of assimilation for diverse immigrant populations (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1996; Bankston & Zhou, 1997; Zhou, 1997; Gibson, 2001 ; Portes & Rumbaut, 2003).

Alternative assimilation theory, like segmented assimilation theory proposed by Portes, Zhou and Rumbaut, suggested that the process for “new immigrants” (post-1965 immigrants and their children) was no longer a positive “straight-line” trajectory in which they gradually integrated to the mainstream white American middle class, while losing their ethnic culture and values. Thus they concluded that for culturally, ethnically and racially diverse immigrants, assimilation is not easy to achieve because of the visible differences that exist as well as differences in cultural practices (Jung, 2009).

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to ensure that this research project was conducted ethically, it adhered to the policies and procedures established at the University of Victoria specifically policy RH 8100 and RH 8150 which are written in accordance to the protocols for conducting human based research outlined by the Canadian *Tri-council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.

There are several key concerns with respect to ethics and my research study. Firstly, I am aware that anonymity of my research participants is critical. Given the small number of visible minority principals and vice-principals in BC, I have used pseudonyms and removed regional identification pertaining to school locations to ensure the trust of my participants and to protect their identities from possibly resulting in negative reactions

to their discourse. Secondly, further to the issues of discourse, I recognize that as the researcher, I am the main instrument for data collection and analysis, thus I am aware of the perceptions of power that my role may have on the participants as they disclose their life histories. Thus thirdly, I must continually be aware and forthcoming about the biases that my values and behaviours may impose on the participants and indeed the entire study. A way in which I have attempted to mitigate this power imbalance is self-disclosure about who I am and my life history. Fourthly, as with other forms of qualitative inquiry which involve understanding human experience, as a researcher I was cautious of moving from a research inquiry position to counselor or therapist. There were times when the interviews were intense and generated emotional responses. I did my best to be sensitive and empathetic without providing counsel and offered the participants a break from interviewing.

**Reflexivity.** Given the focus of this study on the life-histories of visible minority principals and vice-principals, there is potential for concerns inherent in positions of privilege, control, and power held by me as the researcher as mentioned above. As this dynamic is possible in relationships between researcher and participant, I have carefully identified to participants my epistemological stance and my personal background. Through a social constructivist lens, I assume that both data analysis and representation of findings reflect both my perspective and the perspective of my participants and I attempt to become aware of how these presuppositions affect the research. Thus as a novice constructivist, interpretivist, subjectivist, qualitative researcher, reflexivity about my own interpretations are critical to presenting this study (Charmaz, 2006).

Reflexivity involves the researcher critically reflecting on how all aspects of a research study connect and impact each other. In other words, reflexivity involves researchers examining how they – as researchers – as well as research participants, setting/context, and research procedures all connect and impact each other (Glesne, 2011). The concept of reflexivity also requires the researcher to contemplate on the contribution to the construction of meaning and to interpret and reinterpret those constructional meanings (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). In addition, Glesne notes that “researchers tend to discuss reflexivity by inquiring into either their own biases, subjectivity, and value-laden perspectives or into the appropriateness of their research methodology and methods, including concerns regarding data collected, interpretations made, and representations produced” (2011, p. 151). Again given my own life history as an immigrant to Canada (outlined in Chapter One), I have some natural biases and subjectivities on the topic of how that experience has influenced my identity as a leader in a higher education context. Ways in which I have been reflexive during this research process was to position myself upfront in the study, discuss my own life history with the research participants, and to keep a research journal to record my thoughts, impressions and reactions during every aspect of this research study. Consulting my supervisor and colleagues greatly assisted my reflexive process.

**Validity.** Using a constructivist approach in a qualitative study such as this one, validity refers to the trustworthiness of the study and findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). As there are no systematic controls in qualitative research, trustworthiness and validity are demonstrated through an audit of the research process (Birk & Mills, 2011; Merriam, 2001). This inquiry meets the criteria of trustworthiness

through members' checking of the data to ensure accuracy of the interview conversations, a review of the brief participant profiles by participants, designing a unique second set of interview questions per participant based on their first interview data, and through the development and maintenance of an audit trail.

As with the nature of any research study, there are inherent methodological strengths as well as challenges that result from the approach used in conducting the study. Below I discuss the challenges of the life history approach how such challenges have impacted the overall study design.

### **Methodological Challenges that Impact Study Design**

In all methodological approaches there are inherent challenges which place limitations on the study. Although the primary data collection method in life history studies is in-depth interviewing and was thus the main source of data collection for this study, it also allows for the examination of other data sources such as participant journals, diaries, letters and photographs. These types of artefacts are not crucial to a life history study but they do add to triangulation and validity. I made requests through the consent form and again during interviews if participants would like to share such personal ephemera, but as mentioned only a few offered to share such items during the interview discussion. Permission was not given to reproduce such artefacts for inclusion in the dissertation; however, I was allowed to take notes as participants discussed the significance of these items. It is hard to say if there was a lack of trust with me as the researcher for the disclosure of personal artefacts. If there had been more time to build rapport, it may have been different and perhaps a deeper level of trust and familiarity would have been established. The reason many gave for not sharing artefacts was the

time necessary to locate such items which might be in storage and thus not readily available.

Another challenge with my research study was possibly having too many participants to conduct in-depth life histories. Seven participants was rather ambitious and I realize now that I was so delighted to have received interest from the number I did and who fit the research criteria, that I was reluctant to turn anyone down. I think in order to do life-history justice; I would have preferred three to four participants and to have conducted observations in addition to in-depth interviews.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed the research design for this study including the methodological approach, methods of data collection and data analysis as well as the theoretical lenses used for interpreting the research findings. In addition, I discussed my approach to reflexivity, constructs of validity and trustworthiness of the data, including the use of an audit trail. This life-history analysis aimed to provide understanding of a phenomenon, the life histories of visible minority, immigrant or children of immigrant principals and vice-principals in BC and how their life journeys had influenced their philosophy and praxis as leaders as well as to illuminate a wider socio-historical and political context. In chapter four, I provide descriptive snapshots of each participant. In chapter five, using qualitative content data analysis, I describe the emerging themes focusing on the participants' voices.

## Chapter Four

### Findings: Participant Profiles

The goal of this study was to give voice to the experiences and life-histories of visible minority principals and vice-principals of BC who are immigrants or children of immigrants and to relate how their experiences influenced the creation of their identities and to explore the following research questions:

**What are the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians?**

**Do visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians feel that their life histories and experiences have influenced their leadership praxis, philosophy, and identity as leaders? If so, how?**

Thus I begin with the life histories of Sanjay, Manuel, Gurmeet, Min-Jun, Nureen and Aarti (pseudonyms).

#### **Sanjay: Principal of a Secondary School**

Sanjay was born in a small rural town in South Asia. He has a sister who is three years younger. By the mid-1970s, when Sanjay was 8 years old, his family immigrated to a rural town in Southern BC where they had some relatives. They later relocated to a city in Southern BC where his parents found work as labourers.

In South Asia, Sanjay attended an English school and he credits his language skills as a significant reason for his relatively smooth transition to schooling in BC. Having experience with the language not only helped Sanjay's transition but also helped his parents. Neither parent was proficient in English. So Sanjay became a translator and interpreter for his family. In addition, Sanjay remarked that having English helped him

build relationships at school quickly. His only remark regarding school frustration pertained to his arrival in Canada when he was placed in a grade younger than he ought to have been placed based on his age. Sanjay believed this was only done because he was a recent immigrant as there were no formal assessments conducted to gauge his academic or English abilities. To Sanjay's relief, this placement did not last long as he did not like being held back. The school soon realized that Sanjay had strong academic skills especially in mathematics and moved him up a grade level.

The school years in the Southern BC city, from completing elementary through to secondary school, were described as comfortable and positive for Sanjay. He enjoyed school and excelled academically as well as in sports. He talked about his neighbourhood and school being multicultural. As a result, Sanjay explained that he did not feel isolated or all that different from his peers and the local community because of the ethnic diversity. His best friends growing up were also immigrants and they all shared a passion for learning and, above all, sports. As a result, he commented that this experience allowed him to grow up in Southern BC with confidence:

...as a student, I never really felt isolated or felt bad at any point for not being the typical Anglo-Saxon, you know, I had a number of friends, all from different nationalities, ... and being in a multicultural setting allowed me to grow up with comfort, the confidence that you get from being accepted... (First Interview, lines 82-85)

Sanjay also described the various expectations placed on him. When at school or hanging out with his friends in the neighbourhood, Sanjay blended in with the boys by

fitting in and not drawing attention to his cultural differences. He described his close friends at school as being guides and supporting him through his transition to Canada. This, he said, was very helpful for him to make the adjustments necessary to be accepted by his peers because the expectations at home were more traditional. As a result he explained that this time in his life taught him how to balance the traditional expectations at home and the expectations of fitting in at school. He felt this helped him later in life as an administrator since he can relate to the dominant culture and the minority cultures in his school.

Upon graduating from high school, Sanjay went on to university originally to study genetics. After completing a BSc, he worked as a genetics researcher for a professor at the university but realized the work was too isolating and that he would prefer a career that had more people contact. A meeting with an education advisor encouraged him to enroll in the post-degree professional (PDP) program for secondary education. He has never regretted his decision to transfer into education.

Initially, Sanjay taught science in a remote community along the coast of BC. He loved teaching and discovered he had a strong ability to connect with and relate to kids. Sanjay described teaching as aligning with his personal traits and characteristics as a “people’s person” (First Interview, line 101) and he enjoyed inspiring and generating excitement in kids about wanting to learn. Sanjay also saw one of his greatest strengths as promoting student engagement and doing so by getting at what motivates the learner in front of him.

When asked what drew him to administration, Sanjay offered that after a few years of teaching he was ready for another challenge as he "...thrives on change" (Sanjay, Second Interview, line 315) and sees himself as an ambitious person. He also wanted to make a difference that went beyond what he could do in the classroom. After completing his Master's degree in Educational Administration, Sanjay was hired as vice-principal at a secondary school in southern BC. After 5 years in that role, he landed a principalship also at a secondary school which he has held for 5 years. By the time of our second interview in May 2014, Sanjay had just accepted a new principalship within the same district.

When it comes to leadership, Sanjay believes that "synonymous with leadership is change and to implement change effectively is really the core of being an effective leader. I think to be an effective principal you have to be an effective change agent" (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 135-137). He also defines his philosophical approach to leadership as collaborative, data-driven decision making; and building trusting relationships. He believes in a process of leadership that puts people at the centre and ensures everyone is heard.

He talked with great pride about inclusivity when asked about diversity and inclusion at the schools he has led. Sanjay mentioned that the administration and teachers work together from a common vision to ensure that all students feel included at school by providing a multitude of opportunities to create, engage and participate in school-based activities. But it was not easy to achieve an inclusive and welcoming environment at one of the schools he led because there was a noticeable divide between the white majority students and the Indo-Canadian students. Bringing these groups together was something

he worked actively on during his first year by engaging teachers, staff, parents and students. In fact, he made the students central in the process and developed a student-led diversity and inclusion club that was responsible for promoting diversity and inclusion. Sanjay explained that most efforts have focused on multicultural nights.

...it is the easiest first step that comes to everyone's mind, you know, either the dress or the food that's associated with a particular culture, but there's, you know, way more to it than that when you take opportunities through curricular studies but we aren't there yet. (Sanjay, Second Interview, lines 81-84).

When asked how this could be changed in the education system, Sanjay mentioned that was something he grapples with but does not have a specific answer.

With respects to reflecting on his identity as a South Asian leader, Sanjay indicated he did not think about it much but did recognize it was important to others. He described an incident where a Sikh gentleman had stopped him on the school grounds to thank him for his work and expressed great joy in seeing Sanjay, a South Asian, as principal of the school. This event helped Sanjay reflect on how he was a role model to the community and that there was cultural pride for others to see him in the role of principal. He said "it's those kinda moments that we don't often get in our careers where the work you do gets recognized and you realize that you are making a difference" (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 245-246). Sanjay also believes that being South-Asian allowed him to better connect with the local community and thus better able to understand and serve their needs given his background.

By the second interview, it was clear our discussion had an impact on Sanjay and he spoke in more detail about the need for ethnically diverse role models in the school systems and the frustration that exists for diverse communities when they do not see themselves reflected in the administration. He emphasized the importance for administration to reflect the community they work in. Sanjay felt his connection with the local community has been a strong asset to him as he is able to build stronger ties and is able to authentically represent the community. In addition, Sanjay believes being from a similar ethnic background to his community makes him more approachable and less intimidating. Sanjay added that having language skills in South Asian languages was a benefit in his role saying, “Being able to communicate allows us to build effective relationships and to focus on the needs of the students” (Sanjay, Second Interview, lines 127-128).

As we were wrapping up the final interview, we discussed further how his past had influenced who he is today. Sanjay offered that he had the benefit of friends who accepted him and he learned to make connections. As a result of this, he feels he excels at building relationships and connecting with people at all levels of the school and district. Today, he sees that it is just part of his practice to celebrate differences and to create inclusion in the hopes that his students will grow up confident because they are accepted as he was in his youth.

### **Manuel: Vice -Principal of a Secondary School**

Manuel was born in a small northern Alberta town in late 1960s soon after his parents emigrated from a Latin American country. Although his father’s background is

European, he had spent most of his adult life in Latin America. According to Manuel, his family relocated to Canada for the “classic” reasons – for a better life as Canada was seen as “the land of opportunity” (Interview, line 9).

When asked about his early schooling in Alberta, Manuel remarked that his primary years were formative for him. In the small northern Alberta community he attended a school that was populated predominantly by Indigenous students and this is where he “...developed an appreciation for First Nations people and their sense of community” (Manuel, Interview, line 30) The family later moved to a city in Alberta where Manuel excelled at school and was placed in an advanced class. But this was short lived as the family moved again to another city centre in Alberta and at his new school Manuel experienced bullying. This experience took a toll on him and he was labeled as having behavioural and learning problems. He reflected, “I went from being gifted to being learning disabled, which I found actually kinda intriguing but it was mostly to do with being bullied” (Manuel, Interview, line 54). Although this was a tough time, the family moved again: first to Germany and then Singapore. Manuel explained that his father’s work in the oil industry required numerous moves by the family. The regular moves were hard for Manuel but he appreciated the opportunities to live and learn in diverse settings.

In Germany, he attended a Jesuit boarding school where the majority of the students were from extremely affluent families. A year later the family moved to Singapore and here Manuel attended an International Baccalaureate (IB) school. At the IB school, Manuel found himself in a school rich in diversity which he enjoyed thoroughly and described as “... a wonderful learning environment” (Manuel, Interview,

line 88). Then at 16 the family moved back to Alberta where Manuel completed high school and attended university to obtain a BSc in biology.

After completing his bachelor's degree, Manuel travelled in Latin American countries and he described this period as his "hippie phase" (line 181) because he lived an alternative life style in communal settings and was not employed in conventional jobs. He expressed that this more carefree time was in direct reaction to what he saw his dad doing growing up. He commented: "I saw my father working his brains out as an immigrant...putting in fourteen hour days" (Manuel, Interview line 187). But Manuel grew tired of this 'hippie' lifestyle and, upon the advice of a friend, moved to Japan to teach English. Through this experience, he uncovered a passion for teaching and Manuel returned to BC to complete a post-degree education program. After graduating, he found temporary contract positions with various Indigenous bands in remote areas of BC. He then went on to work in alternative schools. He described his work with Indigenous students and at the alternative schools as difficult: "It is a hard job. Its kids with extremely challenging psychological behavioural issues and with...addictions...and learning disabilities..." (Manuel, Interview, line 235-237). But he said it was a good fit for him and many of his life experiences had prepared him for the work he was doing. When probed about the connection between his life experiences and working with diverse students, Manuel mentioned that his travels and different learning environments exposed him to diverse ways of being and learning. He feels more comfortable in a diverse setting than a homogeneous one. Manuel also mentioned that many of his colleagues in the post-degree education program could not understand why he would choose to work in such challenging settings. He offered, "My colleagues would not go there because of the

challenges, but what drew me there were the challenges. I wanted to make a difference” (Manuel, Interview, lines 246-247). He attributed that view on life to his parents’ influence, “I get that from my folks, my folks are incredibly hard workers as most immigrants are” (Manuel, Interview, line 254).

After working as a teacher for 8 years and mostly in the area of special education, Manuel decided to do a Master’s degree in educational technology in order to broaden his knowledge in technologies for special education programs. Although his intention in doing the degree was not to go into administration, he ended up in a vice-principal role on the encouragement of a local principal he regarded as a mentor. He described his early time in administration and especially the leadership piece as “...phenomenal and a huge learning curve, although not completely [an] unrelated job to teaching, but yet different in terms of scope and responsibility level” (Manuel, Interview, lines 321-322).

When asked to reflect on his work as an administrator, Manuel talked about his motivations and identity as vice-principal. He sees his position as one of the greatest opportunities “...to enact some pretty significant change.....to influence practice to focus on student needs” (Manuel, Interview lines 327-328). He tried to influence change through modeling and leading discussions on pedagogical practices with teachers, yet being patient and developing relationships and building trust.

Manuel defined his leadership approach to be an egalitarian one linking his philosophical ideals back to his past experiences especially to his Kindergarten to Grade 12 school years and values fostered by his mother. He does not see himself as being superior to anyone else and said “I stand shoulder to shoulder with the custodian, the

teachers, the staff, we all have to do our part in order to do the job and the job is focused on the children” (Manuel, Interview lines 351-352). When asked to elaborate on those formative experiences and his egalitarian ideals, Manuel talked about the range of experiences from seeing poverty yet strong family and community connections in the northern Alberta town among the Indigenous populations, being singled out in a bullying situation in his youth, and then being exposed to extreme wealth among the boarding school students in Germany. In all settings, Manuel talked about feeling like an outsider and noted that the bullying forced him to retreat and become more of an introvert. Nevertheless, through all these experiences he learned his keen observational skills. While in Germany, he said the students were extremely wealthy with titles like Counts and Barons and he mentioned:

...at that point I was being referred to as a ‘da proletariat’ and I didn’t know what that was. So I looked it up in the dictionary. I’m like me the Proletariat? That would mean you guys are the bourgeoisie. And then I got exposed to socialism, Marxism. That experience fermented a life time commitment to socialism and is a key reason why I’m working in a public school. (Manuel, Interview lines 98-103)

He goes on to say that he has extreme gratitude to his parents for providing him such a rich and diverse education where he was exposed to those living in poverty and others with extreme privilege and now as a leader is committed to give back and “...to mitigate the inequities that exist in education and in society” (Manuel, Interview line 112).

In closing, Manuel mentioned that he had great pride in being a visible minority leader. He was grateful to his parents having watched them achieve what they did as immigrants. As a child of immigrant parents Manuel said he felt like a “strong contributor to the fabric of Canada because I learned to work hard and to be grateful seeing the sacrifices my parents made” (Manuel, Interview line 444). Given this background and his experiences Manuel said he feels that he can relate and connect to new immigrants at his school and his goal is to ensure they are accepted.

In addition, he added that his formative years were instrumental in shaping who he is today as well as his leadership style. For one, Manuel explained that he feels most at home in a public school with a diversity of students. From his own school experiences he developed a belief that where there is diversity, the best learning can happen. In closing he explained “...public school has the greatest diversity. We all have something that makes us different [ranging] from our culture, to learning abilities, to our personality traits. It is something to respect and it is why this job interests me” (Manuel, Interview lines 371-373).

### **Gurmeet: Principal of an Elementary School**

Gurmeet was born in a small village in South Asia, a village he described as being “desperately poor” and “extremely rural with no electricity and running water” (Gurmeet, First Interview, line 23). The eldest of three, he enjoyed his time growing up in South Asia and had many friends and loved school. In 1969, at the age of seventeen, his family immigrated to Canada and settled in a city in southern BC. His family came to Canada, “...mostly for economic reasons and to give us a better life” (Gurmeet, First Interview,

line 19). Gurmeet described his early days in BC as difficult and requiring a lot of adjustment.

As the eldest, he worked at a bakery to help his parents, who worked as labourers, to support the family. After a year and half at the bakery, Gurmeet was encouraged by his family to pursue his education. He completed a BC high school equivalency program at a local college and later moved on to university in Alberta. He was highly motivated to get an education and to establish himself in a career. As Gurmeet expressed, he did not want to end up in what he referred to as "...a typical immigrant job working at the sawmills or [as] a taxi driver" (Gurmeet, First Interview, line 43).

Gurmeet majored in education on the recommendation of his uncle who was a teacher and whom Gurmeet valued as a mentor. But it was not an easy transition. Gurmeet mentioned: "It was quite scary when I moved to U of [...]. I was lost. I was confused a lot. I didn't have the courage to stop some[one] to ask for help because of my language" (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 48-49). Gurmeet dealt with loneliness and isolation. He said, "There were times, I cried myself, cried by myself in my room. I was so lonely at U of [...]. It was not like when I was in [South Asia] where I had many good friends" (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 84-85).

Things turned around for Gurmeet when he joined a recreational soccer team on campus. He started to make good friends and improved his English. Gurmeet described his soccer friends as being inviting and welcoming. He feels that it was during these interactions that he learned about "Western culture." In addition, his soccer coach – along with his uncle who was a teacher – became mentors to him. His coach was encouraging

and appreciative of Gurmeet's effort on the soccer field and his collegial nature with his team mates which built his confidence. Gurmeet successfully completed a bachelor's degree in elementary education.

When asked about those early days in BC and then in Alberta, Gurmeet explained that although those were the toughest years of his life, he realized that he had resilience and said, "I learned not to give up, so I don't give up easily, that's my personality, I am determined" (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 87-88). He also mentioned that he felt he stayed true to himself during this time, "I never really had a desire to be like someone else. I was growing in confidence in who I was and who I wanted to be" (Gurmeet, Second Interview, line 66). When asked to elaborate, he shared he did not feel he had to completely assimilate or fit into Western culture perhaps because he came to Canada in his later teens. But he felt it was a constant struggle to improve his spoken English. Yet the struggles with English, he claims, have made him a better teacher, especially to ESL students. He was vigilant about being versatile in his approach to teaching to ensure he was meeting the diverse learning needs of his ESL students as well as his regular students who struggled with his accent: "I was aware that they also might not understand me because of my pronunciation. But by changing methods, checking in, I became a better teacher in many ways" (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 93-96).

Gurmeet's first teaching position was in northern BC. He spent four years working and living in this small northern community. He loved the school he taught at and soccer again as with other participants in this study figured prominently for him as a player and a community coach. Gurmeet also taught in other remote communities on Vancouver Island, the Fraser Valley, and later in the lower mainland. He described his

teaching years as “quite positive. I get along with people; I collaborate with everyone I work with. [Be]cause for me it’s about being part of a team and being a great team member” (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 131-134). But after twelve years of teaching, he recognized that he wanted to do more and to give back in a different way than teaching allowed and in a greater leadership capacity. He completed a Master’s degree in educational administration through an online program in the US. He found the program invigorating and he was fascinated by the leadership discussions around ethics, morals and transformational approaches. With his graduate degree and what he thought was a robust Curriculum Vitae, Gurmeet applied to several vice-principal positions. He explained, “I went for about ten interviews for vice-principal and I was turned away for everyone” (Gurmeet, First Interview, line 145). When he asked for feedback from interview panels, Gurmeet noted a sinking feeling that he was not getting a straight answer. Often he was told something superficial as to why he was not the successful candidate, but nothing concrete about lacking a skill, ability or qualification. Gurmeet drew from this his own answer to why he was not successful in competing for administration positions, “. . .but I knew, I accepted that I was different, I had my accent that was different, I looked different, I was not one of them so that’s why I didn’t get the jobs” (Gurmeet, Second Interview, lines 108-111) When asked to elaborate on “not being one of them,” Gurmeet added, “. . .not being white, Anglo-Saxon, more of the typical leaders in education. . .” (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 112-113). In spite of all the rejections, Gurmeet drew on his early experiences of determination, perseverance, and self-motivation to stick to his goals; on the eleventh try he secured a vice-principal

position on the coast of BC. Four years later he applied to a principal position of a nearby elementary school, a position he has held for almost five years now.

As a vice-principal and principal, Gurmeet felt the administrative role has been a natural fit with his personality. He found that both the positions have a lot of responsibility, similar to a teacher but on a larger school-wide level with greater connections to the district administration. Gurmeet thrives on responsibility as he feels he has done that his whole life. He said: “Being a principal is just being responsible for everything that happens in school [from] A to Z. I have to be available to anyone who needs help or needs support and I like that part of the job” (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 158-160). He approaches leadership as a collaborator and strongly believes in being student focused for decision making and constantly comes back to asking himself, teachers and staff “how do students benefit from our decisions?” (Gurmeet, First Interview, line 169).

Gurmeet did not just face adversity trying to secure an administration position; he also faced challenges with parents in the community. He described some difficult times with parents who reacted to his ethnicity. But he managed these interactions by showing his competence and skills to do the job. As he explained, “I allow my actions to speak for me. People see what I do and how I conduct myself and minds change over time” (Gurmeet, Second Interview, lines 226-231). He also recognized that it takes time to change attitudes and perceptions especially at his current school where the population is 99% from the dominant white community and he is the only visible minority in the school.

Although Gurmeet felt that there was no cultural diversity in his current school, he found other ways to create awareness of differences in non-standard approaches to defining diversity such as in the heights or ages of the students. Later we discussed what multicultural day or celebrating diversity looks like at his school especially given the demographics or as Gurmeet describes "... this school--it's just a monoculture" (Gurmeet, First Interview, line 190). Gurmeet also mentioned that several years back the school did have a strong Indigenous student population but most students moved from his elementary school to a new Indigenous school that was built in the same district. Even with this change, he still has elders come to the school and teach the local Indigenous language to all grades.

When reflecting on being an immigrant and visible minority, Gurmeet mentioned that it can be challenging, he said "well to be honest, there's some things I have accepted like, you know, if I go out, somebody calls me a name. I wouldn't get upset at [that] person because that's all they know" (Gurmeet, Second Interview, lines 251-252). He is resigned to the situation that discrimination happens even at his school as he said "...I've had some difficult times with some parents but that is the way, that's the journey, you can't just have everything perfect all the time" (Gurmeet, Second Interview, lines 253-254). But his goal is to show others through his actions that he is knowledgeable "...and quite in control of the situation, [and] I am a competent principal" (Gurmeet, Second Interview, line 264). Gurmeet also mentioned that he does feel he has to prove himself over and over again and that does take a toll on him and he can get exhausted by it. In spite of that situation, Gurmeet believed he learned perseverance in his early years in Canada. That the transition helped him to be resilient, to keep going and to stick to his

goals but above all to be patient as change will come. These traits he feels are important to him in his leadership position as it has helped him to persevere in his leadership role and he feels he tries to instill in his students the values of working hard, keeping to your goal, and offering and accepting help as you go.

### **Min-Jun: Principal of an Elementary School**

Min-Jun was born in an urban centre in a South East Asian country. She is the eldest of two. In the early 1970s, when she was 8 her parents immigrated to Canada and settled in a small urban centre in southern BC. Her parents relocated so that Min-Jun and her sibling could grow up in a country that offered more opportunities for girls than the patriarchal society of their home country.

When asked what the early days of transition were like, Min-Jun described it as being difficult. She expressed that her parents suffered from culture shock and they did not speak English. As a result she remembers the family being isolated and completely cut off from anything they knew. Nevertheless, it was not long before her parents both found work.

Although Min-Jun does not recall the transition to school being fraught with hardship or difficulties, she did recall struggles with learning English and supporting her sibling who had a much more difficult time with the transition. As the eldest, Min-Jun had assumed adult responsibilities to care for her sister. She ensured both of them were at school on time, made their lunches and helped her sister with homework in the evenings. Min-Jun mentioned that it was only upon reflection that she realized most of her childhood was spent as a caregiver to her sibling. But she does not regret or resent that

role. As a result of this situation, the two sisters were very close growing up and still remain close today. Also, neither felt the need to establish friendships at school given their strong family bond.

Her main struggle was learning English and Min-Jun remembered being pulled out of class to work in the hallway with an older adult who taught her English. Her sibling also had difficulties with English. Given their struggles to learn English, the school advised Min-Jun's parents that the children should no longer speak their first language as it was hindering their progress in English. Min-Jun pointed out, "that was the thought at the time that if [we] dropped [our first language] it would accelerate our English abilities" (Min-June, Interview, lines 55-56). Later in life, Min-Jun became an ESL teacher only to learn that this existing language theory ability can prohibit the learning of another was debunked. Although the family complied with the "English only" request, it came at a high cost in that not only did she lose her first language, but Min-Jun was no longer able to communicate with her parents. This created a rift in her relationship with her parents that have lasted to the present. Looking back, Min-Jun said it was one of the greatest regrets of her family and she described the whole situation as being tragic. She drew a parallel between herself and Indigenous cultures in Canada saying "the same thing has happened to Indigenous cultures here where language and culture was [sic] halted and the same happened to us. Everything was focused on English only" (Min-Jun, Interview, lines 80-82). When asked how the experience of losing her language and disconnecting from her parents has impacted her in her role as a principal or teacher, Min-Jun said that was one of the reasons she went into teaching ESL and she explained that as a teacher: "...I was very cognizant of my own experience and encouraged the use

of first language and culture. And in my leadership role as well I talk about it as part of inclusion ... is being aware of your own culture because that is part of our identity” (Min-Jun, Interview, lines 85-87).

Min-Jun talked about her time as a classroom teacher with much enthusiasm, but in just a few years she realized that she wanted to be in a position that would allow her to make a greater difference than what she could achieve in the classroom. She explained, “I guess what I really wanted was to have an impact on a global level...within the district” (Min-Jun, Interview, line 147).

After completing a Master in Education Administration degree, Min-Jun has held vice-principal and principal positions in rural parts of BC. She currently is a principal of an elementary school, Kindergarten to Grade 7, in a rural community. When asked how she identifies with the role of principal, Min-Jun commented that although she identified with being a teacher, she felt an even stronger affinity to being a principal because she now has the opportunity to create a vision and work with a team to implement that vision in the best interest of the students. I further asked how that identity piece links to her practice as a leader. Min-Jun said that she approached her work from the perspective of a capacity builder rather than from a deficit perspective. In other words, she believes that everyone has strengths to bring to the table and it is her job to develop and encourage those strengths. She also believes in inclusive decision making and “...enabling everyone to have a voice in how things are done or just in being able to express an opinion” (Min-Jun, Interview, lines 153-154). So her leadership approach comes from a place of support, encouragement, inspiration and inclusion.

When considering what it means to be a visible minority, Min-Jun felt that initially did not mean much to her. However reflecting on what it means to be a visible minority in her position as principal she expressed pride especially in the work ethic her immigrant parents instilled in her. But she did comment on one area of concern regarding being an ethnic minority, in that she worried that the community she serves may have thought she originally got the job out of some affirmative action approach. Min-Jun feared that this perspective may have been out there and what she hopes is that people have realized that she is highly skilled for, and competent in, the job.

Finally, Min-Jun did comment on how her up-bringing and past experiences have developed her as the leader she is today, saying "...because I lost so much of my culture growing up here, I actively encourage diversity and hanging on to one's culture and language. It is so important to who we are and it is a strength" (Min-Jun, Interview, lines 360-362). Ultimately, Min-Jun sees that her loss and regret around her culture and language can be a way to inspire others to learn from her experiences. Her goal as a leader is to make it possible for diversity to thrive in her school environment.

### **Nureen: Vice-Principal of an Elementary School**

Nureen's family emigrated from a country in the Middle East to Manitoba in the early 1970s and she was born within the first year of her parents' arrival. She described her parents' move to Canada as one for better opportunities and a better life. Nureen is the eldest of five siblings. Her father trained to become a heavy duty mechanic and relocated for work in a small northern Manitoba town with Nureen's mother. At this time,

Nureen's grandparents immigrated to Canada to become the primary caregivers for the children in the family home.

As a result of being the eldest and spending more time with her grandparents than her parents during her early years in Manitoba, Nureen described her elementary years from kindergarten to grade 3 as being "tough" (Nureen, First Interview, line 71) because she had to be an adult for the family at a young age. Her grandparents did not speak English and they did not understand the school system. So from the age of five, Nureen took on the responsibility to navigate school and daily life. She described having "...to suck it up" (Nureen, First Interview, line 66) and not complain about the responsibilities placed on her or burdening her family with her "younghness" (Nureen, First Interview, line 67).

Nureen commented that most of her early years also involved her being a mediator between the external world and her grandparents, whether at the grocery store or at the doctor's office. However, being the mediator between home and school was the most challenging as she felt caught in the middle defending each to the other. Nureen described pressure from her teachers regarding family attendance at parent teacher interviews. Teachers interpreted the lack of family participation to mean not caring about her education. Yet on the other side, she recalled being frustrated by the restrictions from her grandparents in terms of her friendships and school activities. This intermediary role made Nureen feel trapped and this experience has influenced her goal to unburden children of any role as the mediator between the school and their families.

Nureen described her school population as being diverse. But there was a clear distinction between the white majority kids and the visible minority kids. She mentioned that there was an actual physical divide in that the "...white kids hung out at the front of the school, while all the minority kids hung out at the back of the school" (Nureen, Interview, lines 123-124). Nureen mentioned that all the non-Caucasian kids stuck together as a way to protect and validate each other and "...because being friends with the white kids wasn't gonna work and their families didn't want them playing with us" (Nureen, Interview, line 125). Although she found some comfort at school among a multicultural group of peers, Nureen expressed that she still felt isolated. Her family was Muslim which was not common among the immigrant students at her school and she was being raised by her grandparents. As result she felt like an outsider and different even from her multicultural friends.

Things dramatically changed for Nureen when at the age of eight her parents relocated to a small rural town in northern BC. Nureen described moving from an urban centre to a rural area as a shock. She had gone from a diverse multicultural prairie metropolitan setting to a small homogenous rural town with a population of less than 3000 where her family members were the only visible minorities in town. Given this situation, Nureen said that her parents decided the family would be "...as normal as possible" (Nureen, First Interview, line 168). Normal meant to assimilate. Looking back at that time, Nureen realized that her parents were concerned about their acceptance and they "...were basically trained not to make waves, just to be average kid[s]" (Nureen, First Interview, line 170). According to Nureen not to make waves meant "...not to

display our culture” (Nureen, First Interview, line 171). In spite of this attempt to assimilate, the family still endured racism, discrimination and isolation.

Although to a large extent Nureen’s parents wanted her to fit in and be “normal” in their new community and at school, they did have some traditional ideals that they expressed to the school, such as not wanting their daughters sitting next to boys at school or participating in music and dance because of their religious and cultural beliefs. Nureen mentioned that all teachers would comply with the request, until her grade six teacher who “rocked the boat” (Nureen, First Interview, line 201) by questioning some of her parents traditional and religious beliefs and ended up being a great influence in her life. It made a big difference to Nureen to have a teacher who cared about her as a person not just as a student. Nureen added “...that teacher impacted my life and [was] why I became a teacher” (Nureen, First Interview, line 211). In addition, she credited her approach to leadership especially with minority students, to what she saw this teacher do. Nureen elaborated, that “he inspired me to constantly look out for those kids that are...trying not to make waves, that are trying so hard to fit it in ...and I try to find out about their lives...” (Nureen, Second Interview, 411- 412). So becoming a teacher was her main reason for attending university.

Neither the decision to go to university nor Nureen’s decision to become a teacher were well received by her parents. Although they acquiesced on Nureen’s decision to attend university, her parents did not support her becoming a teacher as they wanted her to become a doctor or a lawyer. Nureen’s parents end up pulling out all financial support and by second year matters became worse when Nureen moved in with her white boyfriend. Sadly Nureen’s parents disowned her and it took years for them to reconcile.

Upon reflection on this difficult time between Nureen and her parents, she realizes now that it made her a stronger and more independent person. After completing a Bachelor of Education degree in elementary education, she accepted a contract teaching up north near the Yukon border in a small rural town made up mostly of Indigenous communities. Nureen described this time as enlightening and said that the experience "...opened me up a bit, like that [Indigenous students] were having some of the similar problems that I was [around] cultural conflict..." (Nureen, First Interview, lines 345-346). The experience working up north helped Nureen see that her issues and conflicts between her ethnic culture and the dominant culture were valuable in her role as a teacher as she could empathize from a shared experience.

Eight years later, after graduating with her bachelor's degree, Nureen landed a permanent position as a kindergarten teacher with a local district in southern BC with a diverse student population. Nureen describes this feeling as "coming home" (Nureen, First Interview, line 402) – being able to work in this diverse, multicultural community. She is still in this district but now as a Vice-Principal. When I probed what she meant by coming home, Nureen mentioned that she was no longer in a place where she had to hide her culture. Nureen described her time as a teacher as being fulfilling. Later Nureen decided to do her Master's degree in Educational Administration but not with the intention to go into administration but rather to pursue an academic career path to research issues of diversity and leadership.

But as it happened, Nureen has found herself in administration, landing a permanent vice-principal position which she has held for five years. When reflecting on her identity as a vice-principal, Nureen expressed that her identity is strongly connected

to being an advocate for students. She keeps at the forefront of her mind what is best for the students. She also sees her role as one "...to push teachers into thinking what's best for children and to influence change" (Nureen, First Interview, lines 476-477). Nureen also said that "I like to see myself as a person who likes to push the limits of teachers into thinking about changing their practice." As part of her vice-principal role, she is committed to organizing teacher conferences at her school, where teachers can be exposed to new pedagogies and methods of instruction from using educational technologies and differentiated teaching styles as well she has lead cross-cultural communications workshops.

Nureen's leadership practice is modelled from her grade six teacher who focused on personal stories. So as a leader Nureen practices her leadership by "listening to kids 'stories and listening to parents' stories about what's going on in their lives..." (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 299-301). Nureen also elaborated that as a leader she wants to help students feel comfortable in their own skin so they do not feel the pressure to assimilate in order to be accepted.

Nureen identified strongly with being an inclusive leader and a change agent. For her as an inclusive leader she believes that it is her role to implement opportunities for all students so they can have full participation and that means that they feel included and valued at school. One of the things Nureen has noticed from administrators and teachers from the dominant culture is this impulse to force integration and think that is inclusion. But she feels that teachers and principals from the dominant culture are not asking the critical questions around why integration is not happening. As a result of her own experiences, she is focused on what the school can do to create safety for integration but

she is also sensitive to kids who need to connect with kids from their own culture especially when they are new to Canada. But at times she recognizes her own internal struggles with this. Nureen does have concerns that displaying one's ethnicity too visibly can have a negative impact. These fears stems from her personal experiences. Although she has this concern, Nureen hopes that as a leader she is creating safety and acceptance of differences rather than expecting conformity.

As a visible minority leader, Nureen is hoping not to be pigeon-holed, as the cross-cultural expert or being seen to be in a leadership position because of her ethnicity versus her abilities. As a result, she feels like she has had to work "150% harder" (Nureen, Second Interview, line 847) than other administrators – especially white administrators – to show her various skills and abilities. In addition, by the second interview, Nureen had applied to several principal positions but was not successful in securing a position. She was feeling quite demoralized and said "Being in a [southern BC] school district where we have a high South Asian population, I am shocked that in 109 elementary schools, we only have 4 South Asian principals and 7 vice-principals" (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 725-728).

When we revisited how her life experience has influenced her as the leader she is today, she mentioned that it has helped her to be a reflective person which has helped her leadership praxis. She is deeply interested in the stories of her students and encourages them not to lose their cultural identities. Yet she also recognizes that her life experiences have created perfectionist tendencies and some anxieties. This she feels is a result of having to grow up so early and being in a position of defending herself at school and at home. But overall, she saw her life experiences as important in creating a strong leader.

**Paul: Vice-Principal of an Elementary School**

Paul's father immigrated in the early 1970s ahead of the family. Paul described his father as having an "adventurous spirit" (Paul, Second Interview, line 10) and looking for better life opportunities. Coming to Canada, his father settled in a small, rural town along the coast of BC, where he found work in a resource industry. When his mother settled with the rest of the family, she also worked outside of the home.

Paul was born eighteen months after his entire family moved to Canada. He is the youngest of three. When asked to describe his early years and the impact of relocating on his family, Paul mentioned that his family especially his parents and eldest sister had to deal with explicit racism in the small rural town that they first settled in. The family endured name calling, intimidation, and isolation.

As a result of the racism, Paul described his childhood as one in which his parents did everything they could to ensure their children "fit in" to Canadian culture. Although his parents gave him a culturally traditional name, they soon reverted to Western names. The family also celebrated Western holidays and stopped speaking their language as a way to help the children "fit in." But as a result of the assimilation, Paul expressed a host of emotions including guilt, confusion and shame for having lost his cultural identity.

When asked what key events or memories from his youth have influenced his development and identity, Paul mentioned dinner customs, his school years and a trip back to his parents' country of birth when he was a bit older. One of Paul's most vivid memories is of having dinner – at age five – at a friend's house where he used a spoon to eat his peas, only to invoke ridicule and reprimand to use a fork. He said, "I remember

being quite embarrassed. [And] thinking that I needed to figure this stuff out” (Paul, Second Interview, lines 58-59). From then forward, he recalls becoming hyper observant to develop what he called “survival skills” (Paul, Second Interview, line 69). So he began watching people, even on TV, with the purpose of figuring out how to fit in.

Paul’s determination to fit in worked, in that he expressed having “...socially acceptable skills, like being a good athlete and being academically good in school. It bought me some capital” (Paul, First Interview, lines 184-185). The school he attended was not diverse, “in the hall there was literally no diversity” (Paul, First Interview, line 252). Paul mentioned that although he had a large group of supportive friends throughout school, he still felt like an outsider. He never invited friends over, not because he was not allowed, but because he was embarrassed about his family’s differences like the smell of certain foods or the religious figures displayed in the family home. During his teen years, he started to skip classes and experimented with drugs and alcohol to escape what he now realizes was identity confusion. Paul explained that although he was doing well in classes, at sports and in band, “...I just didn’t know where I did belong and school just didn’t work for me... [be]cause I didn’t really care about what we were learning and [it] just didn’t seem applicable to me...” (Paul, First Interview, lines 320-322). Although Paul did not graduate from high school with his friends, he did credit his music teacher for inspiring him to eventually finish up through the college equivalency program and later to attend university and become a teacher.

Another key moment for Paul was when he first visited his country of origin in South Asia. He described thinking that going back would be like “going home” back to a place “where he belonged” (Paul, First Interview, line 160). But that was not what

happened. His family in South Asia said he was “North American” (Paul, First Interview, line 164) and everything was different about him from his mannerisms to appearance. He also was not able to communicate with his family in their South Asian language which made things more difficult. As a result of this trip, Paul said that “It made me realize, I just didn’t know where I did belong” (Paul, First Interview, line 168).

At university, Paul got a degree in English Literature and later finished the post-degree education program to teach elementary school. When asked what it was like to be a teacher, Paul relayed that teaching changed him as a person. He expressed “I’ve been in a job where you can fake it but you can’t fake being a teacher, you have to love it because you’re always reflecting on who you are and what you stand for” (Paul, First Interview, lines 335-337). Also as a teacher, he used narratives as a way to build relationships with his students and to help his students connect with each other. He expressed that he did this deliberately because when he was growing up, “you never talked about who you are, where you were from, what celebrations you had” (Paul, First Interview, line 356). But as Paul described, “classrooms are much more multicultural today, so I tried to get my students sharing things about themselves...” Unlike when he was growing up and going to school, “I was the only visible minority in the room. I was never encouraged to talk about me. I grew up not knowing my cultural holidays. I wanted my students to feel pride in their backgrounds and ...to feel safe at school to share them” (Paul, First Interview, lines 363-367).

Originally Paul had no desire to go into administration but after completing his Masters of Education in Administration, he changed his mind. Prior to the program, he had made the assumption that being in administration was about “...budgeting, financial

management only, punching numbers and matching budgets...” (Paul, First Interview, line 403). But he discovered it was more about relationships and building capacity in others and being a change agent to make a difference beyond the classroom.

Paul has now been vice-principal for over four years. Paul loves the environment he is in because he feels he has something to offer through his leadership. The current school he works in has a population of 85% South Asian students. He described the school and its surrounding community as being in a “bubble” (Paul, Second Interview, line 418). When I probed as to what he meant by that, Paul shared that the kids at his school “have such a different narrative than [his] from growing up as the only visible minority in the class. But at this school there is less pressure for the kids here to conform because they are the majority” (Paul, Second Interview, lines 419-420).

An issue that Paul is struggling with at his school is how to acknowledge the traditional holidays of the majority South Asian students. He described that the topic of cultural holidays is contentious at his school. Christmas is the only holiday recognized yet the majority of the students are South Asian. Paul expressed, “Holidays like Diwali [and] Vaisahki are really important holidays [more so] than Christmas in this community, [yet] they are not even brought-up in class” (Paul, First Interview, lines 478-480).

Paul sees his work as a leader grounded in his moral purpose which is to make decisions based on doing the right thing for the students. He also believes having a hybrid background, meaning someone who walks in both the dominant mainstream culture and in a minority culture as an advantage in his leadership capacity. He feels strongly that his cultural background allows him to be approachable within the community he is currently

working in. In addition, he sees himself as a cultural guide for the teachers to help them connect better to their diverse students. As a visible minority person, Paul said that his identity continues to evolve and if asked 20 years ago, he "... [would] have said it meant nothing...it was what it was. But now as I unpack my own identity issues I realize it means a sense of loss...a real loss of culture. I don't know where I belong" (Paul, First Interview, lines 667-670). Ultimately, this feeling and his experiences drive him to create an environment where the students at his school do not lack their cultural identity but feels safe to live it.

### **Aarti : Principal of an Elementary School**

Aarti was born in South Asia when her parents were on a trip to visit extended family. Her parents grew up and attended school in the South Pacific but are of South Asian descent. Both her parents were teachers and on her mother's side teaching goes back 3 generations. Aarti spoke with great pride of her family and their commitment to teaching. In the 1920s, her grandfather established the first 'girls only' school in the South Pacific.

Aarti described her parents as being adventurous. While seeking better opportunities for their family decided to take teaching positions in rural south east BC in the 1960s. Aarti was eighteen-months old when the family moved to BC. She is the youngest of three.

The early days, months and years in rural southeast BC was labelled as a time of conformity by Aarti. She explained that they were the only visible minority family in this small town and her parents wanted them all to become part of the community and to be

Canadians. So the kids went to church every Sunday, stopped speaking their first language and dressed just like other kids. Aarti said that growing up in this small community and adapting to life as it was there felt normal and that she was not aware of any difference. In fact she said, "...we didn't know we were different" (Aarti, First Interview, line 46). In later years, her parent expressed some regret about the loss of cultural identity for their children. But Aarti understands now why this was the case as she put it "...imagine what it was like to be the only brown people in town" (Aarti, First Interview, line 200).

After a few years in south eastern BC, the family relocated for a short time to central BC. Later the family relocated to an urban centre in south western BC where Aarti went to kindergarten. Aarti said it was "...a really happy-go-lucky time" (Aarti, First Interview, line 88) in her life and a time that she still did not know that she was ethnically different from other children. It was not until she was eight and moved to a more affluent and homogenous neighbourhood did Aarti start to realize that she was different from her peers and local community. She described an incident in class where she started to feel like an outsider when her teacher asked her to indicate on a map where she was from. Aarti pointed to the rural south eastern BC town that her family lived in when they first immigrated. For her that was home. The teacher also put her on the spot and asked her to explain about South Asia but she had no idea about South Asia. She explained, "...I very honestly said that we were from [rural town in BC]". She added, "I perceived myself to be Canadian and I thought that when people looked at me, they would see a Canadian" (Aarti, First Interview, lines 128-130).

Another example of a time that she felt like an outsider happened at the age of nine when she was having dinner at a friend's place. Aarti described eating a chicken leg at a friend's house. But being so used to eating South Asian food with her hands, it was second nature for her to pick up the chicken, only to get a negative reaction from her friend, "...she freaked out, you know, she's nine years old and she freaked out saying, 'you're not supposed to pick up your chicken.' I was, mortified... That lesson stayed with me" (Aarti, First Interview, lines 316-317). In fact, from that time forward, Aarti mentioned that she became hyper observant to watch the customs and practices to avoid feeling shame again.

Another incident that stood out for Aarti as being instrumental in her development was the time her parents sent her and her sibling to a South Asian boarding school. This was a very difficult experience for her and she described it as "culture shock" (Aarti, Second Interview, line 260) because she did not identify herself as being South Asian. Aarti failed all her classes but in hindsight, she was grateful for the experience and for what it taught her about her identity. She recalled:

...I just remember sitting in the assembly and I was eleven and there were all these black heads, right, like all, little black braids and in the mix there were these two very blonde girls and I identified with them. To me, I gravitated, right to them because I felt they were my people... The interesting thing was they were German. They weren't even North American. So [I] tried talking to them but they had nothing to do with me and in their eyes, I'm just like the sea of black heads (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 38-44).

After this experience, Aarti returned to BC and attended a local high school. But things were not improving in terms of Aarti's academic focus and she had a reputation for being insolent to her teachers. Her parents were concerned as one of the main reasons they came to Canada was to give their children better access to education. Since this was not happening for Aarti at her high school, they intervened and enrolled her in a Catholic boarding school in England.

At this boarding school, Aarti met who she calls her "greatest mentor," (Aarti, Second Interview, line 207) Sister Margaret Johnson (pseudonym). Sister Margaret was the headmistress at the boarding school and Aarti described her as the first person who saw potential in her as a school leader and she helped Aarti embrace that role. She explained "...she saw something in me that other people had not seen. And not only did she see it but she was able to harness it" (Aarti, Second Interview lines 218-219).

After the boarding school, Aarti went to a Jewish University in the US. Aarti mentioned that overall these experiences of studying abroad in different contexts and within rich diverse environments had impacted her leadership style and how she views the world. As a result, she believes she has a broader world view which has influenced the way she teaches and now leads. She explained:

...that was the beginning of the time when I would understand that the world was different and then when I started teaching I had a whole new understanding about what happens in kids' lives and how we need to accept children who are coming from very, very different experiences (Aarti, First Interview, lines 297-301)

Following in her family's tradition, Aarti chose teaching as a career. But teaching was not her first passion. Rather Aarti dreamed of being in the movies or on TV. But she realized this was not meant for her and explained, "I remember having an epiphany when I was a little girl ...that I couldn't be on TV...in the movies...because I was not white" (Aarti, First Interview, lines 332-333). But fortunately for teaching, she said "I loved it. I loved every minute of it. I could not believe I was getting paid to do it" (Aarti, First Interview, line 346). Her first teaching job was in a remote, northern BC town. The school was predominantly white with a few visible minority students. Aarti mentioned that the setting was similar to the town where she grew up. She described seeing kids that reminded her of herself: those who were trying hard to fit in and were not comfortable in drawing attention to their ethnic diversity. It was to these students that she paid particular attention as she understood their discomfort.

Later, Aarti took a teaching job in a part of BC with a large South Asian population. It was here that she realized she was a role model to South Asian children as she was one of the few visible minorities teaching in the district during the late 1990s. This became clear to her again when she attended her first union meeting as a BC Teachers Federation representative: "I remember going to the [local] arena for a union meeting and I just kinda peeked my head around and I would look out and there would be maybe three [South Asian] faces and the rest were white" (Aarti, First Interview, lines 351-353).

Aarti is currently a school principal in Southern BC. She was not originally interested in administration, but was strongly encouraged by another visible minority principal from elsewhere in the province to take on an administrative role. She said he

was a mentor like Sister Margaret, someone who saw a potential in her that she was not aware of. The school she leads today has a predominantly South Asian student population. In this context, Aarti mentioned that the role is much bigger than she thought, not in terms of the actual work, but in terms of what it means to the community.

Aarti described that she has had a lot of successes at her current school and she attributes much of the success to the varied experiences she has had throughout her life and to her leadership philosophy. When asked to discuss some of the successes in her leadership, Aarti mentioned that the school community was originally criticized for not engaging with the school. She mentioned, “When I came to this school three years ago, people said ‘oh, parents don’t do anything. They don’t want to participate. They don’t get involved with school. They just keep [at] arm’s length” (Aarti, First Interview, lines 393-395). But now they have standing room only events regularly. Aarti expressed that she managed to turn things around within the community by first engaging with them rather than expecting them to engage with her and the school. She mentioned that South Asian culture has a practice of not “interfering with the school” (Aarti, First Interview, line 397). Aarti has no judgement about this but just recognizes the difference, and sees it as her responsibility to connect with the families to show them that they too have a role in their children’s education. One way in which she fostered such engagement with South Asian families was to have translators at Parent Advisory Council meetings. Also recognizing that South Asian cultures include multi-generational units living at home, Aarti started a program called “Tea Time” (Aarti, First Interview, line 400) where grandparents learn to speak English and feel more comfortable at the school and within their community.

I asked Aarti to reflect on those past experiences and indicate which ones came to mind as being most influential to her philosophy and practice of leadership. Aarti mentioned that without a doubt her time at the UK boarding school with Sister Margaret had a profound impact on her development. It was Sister Margaret's willingness to give Aarti leadership responsibilities that helped her see beyond herself. Thus her leadership philosophy is to embed a leadership approach for students. At her school, she has created a Community Builders program where Grade 7 students are trained to be leaders within their school and within their local community.

For most of her life, she was raised to conform to Western society and mainstream cultural norms and traditions, so it came as a surprise to Aarti's close friends and even to herself when she asked her parents to arrange a marriage partner for her. Through her marriage, Aarti learned the nuances of South Asian culture whereas before she felt like an outsider within her own heritage. Over time, these experiences have taught her how to operate in both cultures; she has learned the language of her heritage and she feels this has given her an advantage in her leadership role. She is able to adapt as well as recognize issues from various perspectives.

Being inclusive and building an inclusive culture at her school is second nature to Aarti. Although 90% of the school population is South Asian, Aarti mentioned there is diversity within that which includes Punjabi, Hindu and Muslim students. As a collaborator and through community engagement, Aarti has reached out to her community asking them to teach her and the school how to best acknowledge diverse traditions and celebrations. Also Aarti has come up with a different way to celebrate multiculturalism. She explained, "We haven't had a multicultural day here. I feel like it's

tokenism but we have multicultural lunches and I believe in it” (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 316-317). By multicultural lunch she means everyone is invited to bring their favourite dish and if you are Indian you do not have to bring roti. But rather she said the focus is on community building and “...celebrating the multicultural nature of our society and whatever food you feel comfortable in sharing, you bring that” (Aarti, Second Interview, line 321). Through this approach, Aarti said “...my goal is to kill assumptions. Even I can bring lasagna [be]cause that’s what I’m good at making...” (Aarti, Second Interview, line 322).

Aarti shared her reflections on being a visible minority leader, she said:

...more so now than before. I think it gives me a bit of a higher responsibility when children see me or when families see me in my role. It’s important, it’s important that they see people like me doing this job and that [if] I can do it then they can too. I think it’s ground breaking and humbling to be the first South Asian female principal. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 517-519)

She sees being a leader and leading for inclusion “...as a way of life, it’s a calling. I’m a passionate leader, and it’s [an] innate part of me just to want to make a difference...” (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 570-571). Yet when asked if she saw herself as a change agent, Aarti expressed that that was too lofty a term. Rather she said “I’m the chair...I really think that... it’s an important analogy or visual because a chair offers support and lifts others up” (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 573-574).

In this chapter, I have provided a profile on each research participant as a way to convey their formative life experiences and to provide context and a narrative to ground

the themes that emerged from the data. The profiles also attempted to give the reader a connection into the life-histories of the participants and the unique aspects of their lives which help to bring the findings to life. In the following chapter, the findings from the data are presented.

## Chapter Five

### Findings: Summary of Emergent Themes

This chapter presents the findings organized by themes that emerged from the data using qualitative content analysis approaches including reflections and notes from my memoing and journaling. Given the unique stories of each participant the themes do not necessarily apply to all participants but the majority of them do. Six broad, major themes were determined; some also include sub-themes. The findings are presented in this chapter and I include a figure below that outlines an example of my coding. In chapter six, a discussion and analysis of the findings are presented and how they connect with existing data in academic literature.

#### Figure 5. 1 Initial Coding Sample

Nureen – First Interview:

“Being at my grandparent’s house at such a young age definitely impacted my development. Then moving to [rural BC] coming from a city where it was multicultural with immigrants from all over the place to a small town with about three thousand where I was the only minority definitely had an impact on me because it was just so different, where you know when I was in [Manitoba city], it was ok to celebrate the differences but when I came to [rural BC] it wasn’t ok. So my parents wanted us to be as normal as possible, so weren’t allowed to speak our language, weren’t allowed to wear, you know, the traditional clothes (I-GI; Suppression), which in [Manitoba city] we were in direct contact with the Muslim community and the Pakistani community as well. The emphasis now was being as normal as possible (I-GI; Normalcy), but deep down I know that I was different.”

Codes applied to this section:

Raised by grandparents (inter-generational influence)	Suppressing cultural manifestations in small town
Shows versatility, adaptability	Trying to be “normal” - mainstream

**Figure 5.2 Sample of Collapsed Codes for Theme Fitting-in**

Lack of integration	Pressure to conform
Pressure to integrate	Sense of belonging
Challenges with integration	Marginalized
Social isolation	Trying to be normal - mainstream
Discrimination	Trying to fit in

These terms, synonyms and related concepts, were constantly compared as transcriptions were read and re-read. Then the terms were grouped under *trying to integrate* which later became **fitting-in** based on the data and my reading of the literature.

The broad themes are:

- Fitting In: Either through the pressure to integrate or to assimilate into mainstream society
- Identity: confusion and tensions around personal and cultural ways of being
- Mentorship: the value of role models in the lives of the research participants and now being a role model especially to minority students and families
- Connectedness: strong relational bonds with minority students and families
- Promoting Diversity: through supporting inclusive practices and trying to find a fit with multiculturalism
- Change Agent: empowering others, building capacity and relationships to create positive change

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the major findings as themes. The themes will be illustrated using participants' words.

### **Fitting In (Inside/Outside Tensions)**

Several participants talked at length about the pressures they felt to fit in with mainstream Canadian society and often this pressure was described as a tension of trying to be accepted within or “inside” the mainstream culture but still feeling as an “outsider” given their visible ethnic differences from the dominant cultural mainstream society. As mentioned in chapter one, integration is defined when a minority group maintains their

ethnic identity in terms of their language, customs and traditions while adapting aspects of mainstream society (Hall, 2012; Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). Assimilation differs from integration in that immigrant groups who no longer practice their cultural norms, traditions and drop their language and fully adopt the cultural traits of the dominant society (Hall, 2012; van Oudenhoven & Eisses, 1998; Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). The literature on integration and assimilation points out that European immigrants have had fewer struggles with fitting-in with mainstream cultures because their ethnic visibility is not overtly obvious (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Paul, 2008). Scholars have also mentioned that European immigrants, in particular northern and western Europeans, unlike visible minority immigrants have the optional luxury to display their ethnicity thus increasing the ease and sense of belonging with the host country and culture (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Chiswick & Miller, 2008). Although historically, eastern European immigrants like Ukrainians and Italians also faced discrimination because of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, in time they became accepted as part of the dominant, mainstream society (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Finding acceptance or fitting in to a host culture can be more challenging for visible minority groups because of the more visibly identifiable differences like race and ethnicity (Bolaffi, Bracalenti, Braham & Gindro, 2012).

Although much of the pressure to fit in came during the participants' youth, they did express that the pressure to conform has impacted them as adults. The experiences of trying to fit in varied among participants in terms of attempting to integrate with mainstream. Sanjay and Nureen worked at fitting in through integration, in that they maintained their first language and connection with their cultural traditions and customs,

whereas Paul, Aarti and Min-Jun either lost their first language or were not taught their first language by their families in the hope of ensuring their acceptance within mainstream society. Thus the focus in their upbringing was on assimilation. In addition, some participants like Aarti, Nureen and Min-Jun described no longer wearing traditional clothing or celebrating traditional holidays or customs. In the case of Paul his ethnic name was changed to a more mainstream name as part of the process to fit in.

By fitting in as part of mainstream society and not overtly displaying their ethnicity, participants hoped to experience less marginalization, isolation or discrimination based on their visible cultural and ethnic differences. This process of integration and assimilation is discussed in the literature as the way that many immigrants believe will hasten their success socially and economically in their host country (Bolaffi, Bracalenti, Braham & Gindro, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2007).

However, in spite of these attempts, they continued to feel like outsiders within the dominant culture and at times even as outsiders from their own ethnic backgrounds or heritage culture resulting in feelings of not knowing where they belonged, socially and culturally. The pressure to integrate or assimilate with the goal to fit in came from the participants themselves as well as from their families. For example, Paul spoke of the pressures to conform and assimilate because of the racism his parents faced as new immigrants in a small rural coastal BC town:

My mom told me some stories about work and being discriminated against. When I was born, my legal name [was Jaipreet – pseudonym]...but they called me

[Paul] right away. My first language was English. They did everything they could to try and assimilate. (Paul, First Interview, lines 100-102 and lines 117-118)

It is not uncommon for immigrant families to change the names of their children as way to demonstrate fitting-in or assimilating (Alba & Nee, 2003; Foner, 1997; Souto-Manning, 2007). This familial pressure to fit-in did have a negative impact for Paul. He said,

I knew little about my culture. My parents really didn't teach us much at all about the culture, around celebrations or ceremonies. They just wanted [us] to be Canadian and...to fit in. (Paul, First Interview, lines 122-124)

It also did not seem to make a difference if the participant was an immigrant or a child of immigrant parents; this need to conform and fit in to be accepted was equally felt. Aarti, Nureen and Paul all spoke about their experience of attempting to fit in to varying degrees of success but also spoke about the tensions and stress of still feeling like an outsider because of their visible ethnicity even if insider status was achieved. Insider status meant that they felt accepted as part of mainstream Canadian society in terms of their language, customs, behaviours and manners. Although trying to fit in with mainstream culture was seen as challenging, overall the efforts to fit in – either through integrating or assimilating – does, in a way, speak to their ability to adapt and be versatile. And observant!

Overdoing certain manners was mentioned by both Paul and Aarti. Paul discussed how this pressure to integrate led him to emphasize behaviours as though he was putting on an act and performing to be a member of mainstream society. “I probably overdid

things, like overdid manners but...almost over compensated in some ways trying so hard to not only to fit in but to be white...” (Paul, First Interview, lines 222-224). Paul’s impulse to overdo behaviours came from a place of overcompensating because he was aware that the colour of his skin kept him from truly being accepted and fitting-in with the mainstream culture. He also made the conscious decision not to invite friends to his home so that they would not see the cultural differences in his home life compared to the role he put on outside of his home, thus further emphasizing the need be viewed as an accepted member of mainstream society.

Aarti also discussed the need to overdo mannerisms and behaviours to appear just like the dominant culture as part of her approach to fitting in: “I was trying so hard to fit in ...trying to be whiter than white...I just wanted to be that person who’s just as Canadian as you are...I was very sensitive about... fitting in...” (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 68-69). Trying to be “whiter” than white and overdoing behaviours, meant that Aarti felt she needed to put on an act of being mainstream like changing her accent, dress wear, and using more appropriate mainstream body language in how she carried herself. She became hyperconscious that her accent, behaviours, clothing and customs needed to strictly conform to mainstream society. Both she and Paul mentioned becoming keen observers of their environment so they could learn to develop the skills and ways of being “white.” They mentioned watching TV or observing friends not in a passive way but in a more active matter to learn the behaviours and nuances of mainstream culture so they could adopt similar ways of being in the hopes to not only be more accepted into the dominant culture but to be seen as part of it. Paul mentioned,

...growing up I was this observer and I would carefully watch others, how they do things, how they present and try to figure out what was going on, probably not in the same way as others because I was trying to fit in and to do what I had to so to learn what others were doing....I think that was the key thing in trying to fit in and not be different at all. I overdid manners to over compensate in some way from being different. (Paul, First Interview, lines 212-216; 218-220)

This approach to fitting in or assimilating in this case had some success for Aarti who said: "I did not know I was different. When you look out of your own eyes, you don't see that you are the brown kid in the room. You don't see that you are different" (Aarti, First Interview, lines 217-218).

But being placed in the position of an outsider happened to Aarti in spite of her attempts to fit in. She described a time standing next to a visiting colleague from Poland, only to have others think she was the visitor because of her ethnicity. She said, "This colour, this ethnicity stays with you. For me I didn't see that I was different, [but for] other people looking around [they] quickly pick out the "Oh, there's a brown [person] in the room" (Aarti, First Interview, lines 131-133).

Aarti and Paul both commented that they tried so hard to fit in, yet never felt they quite belonged and still dealt with isolation. Aarti said, "My school years were me trying to fit in but fitting in by not being myself. I hung around with lots of people but I was never really part of any group" (Aarti, First Interview, lines 239-240).

Although Paul overcompensated in his behaviours to be seen as Canadian, he also tried not to draw attention to his ethnic differences. Within that balance resided tension.

Some participants (Aarti and Sanjay) like Paul had some success with integrating to the point of assimilating. Paul said he was socially accepted by his peer group. But this also meant hiding his ethnicity and traditions. As mentioned Paul did not invite friends to his home because he did not want his friends to see the South Asian traditional markers of his heritage. But in spite of this feeling of being socially accepted, Paul still mentioned feeling like an outsider not only because of the colour of his skin and ethnicity but also because "...you don't share the same narratives as other[s]" (Paul, Second Interview, line 172). Thus for Paul not having similar life experiences as others, at school or other areas of his life, has created a feeling of isolation.

Sanjay described that working hard to fit in to a new culture as an immigrant has meant working at relationships and building relationships in his youth. This early focus on relationship building has transferred over well to his work as a leader. He said, "I think moving to a different country, you work hard at trying to fit and being part of a group, you work at relationships. That has served me well because today I am good at building relationships and teams." (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 264-266).

In addition, Aarti mentioned that in order for the family to fit in they routinely participated in activities associated with the broader majority culture like piano lessons, camping, and attending symphonies:

...the social norms, were our norms. We felt like we were part of the dominant culture. I had such an in-depth understanding of what it's like to be a white Canadian and we celebrated all the mainstream holidays. (Aarti, First Interview, line 140-142)

Nureen also spoke about the pressures to fit in and to integrate, especially after her family relocated from a more multicultural centre to a rural town in BC where they were the only visible minorities:

... my parents wanted us to be as normal as possible. So we weren't allowed to speak our language, weren't allowed to wear, you know, our traditional clothes. In [the city] we were invited to parties within our [Muslim] community to [suddenly] being totally isolated in [the small BC town]. We were never invited to parties... I think we were just basically trained not to make waves just to be an average kid.

(Nureen, First Interview, lines 168-172)

So being “normal” and “average” for Nureen’s family meant not showing their culture or speaking their language but trying hard “not to make waves” but to fit in and integrate. Making waves was viewed as displaying one’s culture too much. Although this was not an easy approach for her parents, they saw it as being necessary for the family’s acceptance in a small predominantly white community. Nureen commented about the tension her parents faced:

When we had people over like at a birthday party or sleepovers, we'd have western food...my parents would allow us to go on play dates, sleepovers, school dances, even though they were nervous about it and really hated it, they'd allow us to go...I knew it was hard for them to, to let us do those things, but they knew they had to, to make us normal. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 487-491)

Thus, conforming took her parents and family out of their comfort zone and it worked to a degree. But when Nureen’s younger sister drew too much attention to herself through

competing in sports, participating in pageants and auditioning for plays, things did not go well for the family:

But my sister...she is a leader, she did not try to hide, she was out there... And because of that, then I noticed more racism towards our family. So you know, I'd hear underhanded comments, you know, things like well, the only reason [Sunita - pseudonym] got that position or role was because she was brown and the teachers didn't wanna be accused of racism. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 497-502)

Like Nureen, Aarti's family lived in a small rural BC town. It was not lost on Aarti how hard it must have been for her family to have settled in such a remote area and to be the only visible minority family in the town:

When we came here, we were the first [visible minority] family in [rural BC town], so they felt they wanted to become part of the community. They even sent us to Sunday school. They really believed that we should be brought up as Canadian... (Aarti, First Interview, lines 41-43)

Although Min-Jun did not describe assimilation or the need to conform in the same way as other participants who felt compelled to do so for acceptance, she certainly felt the pressure to assimilate when it came to learning English. She described, "We stopped speaking [SE Asian language] and we stopped learning about [SE Asian country], it was all about Canada and English." (Min-Jun, Interview, lines 56-57)

The pressure to integrate was not as explicit for Sanjay and Gurmeet. Both discussed comfort that came through making connections and being accepted, but neither mentioned an internal nor external pressure to "fit-in" or conform. Perhaps this is the case

because Sanjay moved to a more urban centre in BC early in his families' immigration whereas Nureen, Paul and Aarti relocated to small, rural areas and they were the only visible minorities in town. Sanjay found comfort and acceptance within a group of culturally diverse school mates and friends. As a result Sanjay did not describe pressure to conform, but he did mention that his fellow students acted as guides on how to behave at school. So although there might not have been overt pressure to fit in, he still modelled himself on what he saw around him:

I was fortunate enough to be always in settings that were multiethnic or multicultural. So it was never really an issue for me and ...as a student I was not discriminated against because of my ethnicity. (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 85-87)

Gurmeet mentioned struggling with learning English and experiencing social isolation, but he did not feel the same pressure to fit in or integrate, in fact, he resisted it saying, "I really wanted to be myself...and I made some friends, [but] I never wanted to be like them. I learned to value myself" (Gurmeet, First Interview, 75-77). Perhaps this resistance to conform to mainstream culture was the case for Gurmeet because he immigrated in his teen years and had developed a more personal sense of self. But overall, fitting in became a way for participants to feel included and accepted as visible minority youth growing up in a dominant, mainstream culture different from their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. This emphasis on fitting in does have an impact on the participants' identity development which is discussed below.

## **Identity**

Foundational in the participants' stories were references to identity and influences on identity formation especially in terms of cultural identity development. Cultural identity was seen by the participants to embody one's race, skin colour or ethnicity (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). Also in this theme, many participants spoke about the challenges of growing up and forming an identity as a visible minority within a culture different from one's ethnicity and heritage that was more on display in their home lives. Yet they also expressed some detachment to their cultural heritage which has impacted their identity development. Thus through this discussion a sub-theme of regret around identity formation emerged as there were numerous points of discussion regarding a loss of identity, hiding one's identity or development of a hybrid identity meaning combining aspects of both their ethnic heritage and mainstream culture as a way to adapt to being a visible minority in a white dominant society. This feeling of loss and regret is well researched in the social science literature regarding immigrant children (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2002; Urdan & Munoz, 2012). Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco commented that immigrant children and children of immigrants "...must construct identities that will enable them to thrive in profoundly different setting such as home, schools, the world of peers and the world of work" (2002, p. 92).

Embedded in this discussion around regret as it related to cultural identity and the construction of self through culture were elements that highlighted the complexities of growing up in two-worlds: the mainstream world of the host country and one's ethnic heritage. The need to walk in both worlds led to confusion and conflict of identities and even a sense of disorientation as well as confusion regarding social or cultural belonging.

This was especially prevalent in the early formative years of many of the participants but has persisted into adulthood as they try to establish a more concrete sense of personal self and cultural identity. Paul expressed this feeling, saying “Now that I am getting older and I have my own young children I really [am] feeling that I kind of lost my identity or I’m in between two worlds. Like I am always straddling two worlds...but I don’t know where I belong” (Paul, First Interview, lines 126 – 130). However in spite of these personal conflicts over cultural identity, participants did discuss that later in life, especially in their professional capacities, they recognized a professional advantage as leaders to having adapted to mainstream culture and identifying as visible minorities and this became another sub-theme. Many participants used the term hybrid identity to describe the ability to shift between the mainstream dominant culture and minority culture. Being between two worlds or walking between two worlds is often referenced by visible minorities and has been discussed in terms of visible minority leaders (Benham, Maenette, & Cooper, 1998; Fitzgerald, 2010) but often from a perspective of the negative impacts in doing so. But overall identity is seen as ever evolving and not fixed by the participants. Hall noted that identity was a production or creation “...which is never complete, always in process” (2003, p. 234). Gee (2000) also emphasized that identity is socially influenced and that identity exists first with a social context. Thus identity is socially constructed and that experiences also influence such construction. Gee also discussed an affinity identity which is relevant to this study commenting that identities are constructed by being affiliated with a particular group. In this case, the participants are affiliated at times with the dominant culture and other times with their ethnic culture. Both affinities created their

identities. As Gee (1989) points out a type of identity can be placed on a spectrum or continuum that is fluid over a lifetime.

Aarti's family adapted to life in Canada by assimilating and taking on the cultural norms and practices of Canada in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This early adaptation to the dominant culture led her to identify as Canadian. But she also mentioned

... those early years really were confusing. We just felt totally Canadian, totally immersed with the cultural events and holidays. I did not grow-up knowing my culture. I thought my culture was being white Canadian...I think that those early years in Canada influenced my identity as Canadian and it's really hard for me to not be that person. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 110-113)

Aarti's strong connection with the dominant culture of Canada had an impact on her time at a boarding school in South Asia, where she described identifying with the only two non South Asian students at the school. She explained, "I saw those two blonde kids in the assembly and I just remember the backs of their heads and thinking to myself 'those people are me.'" But integrating and strongly identifying with the dominant culture also had an impact on Aarti:

The company that I feel most ill at ease in is a crowd of [brown] people. Yet people expect me in a crowd of [brown] people, people expect me to be a lot more [South Asian] than I am by nature. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 166-168)

It was not until returning to Canada after being at a boarding school in England and at a university in the US, that Aarti truly grasped the frustration around her cultural identity.

She mentioned while in England being referred to as American as in “North American” and as a Canadian in the US.

Nobody ever thought I was the [South Asian] until I came back home. And I resented it so much to be perceived that I’m the [South Asian]. Why can’t I just be Canadian? Why can’t I not just be Canadian? Why do I have to be the hyphen?  
(Aarti, Second Interview, lines 294-296)

Aarti also added, “I’m just trying to be who I am and if that’s a confused person with a mixed background of a motley assortment of experiences, so be it.” (Aarti, Second Interview, line 69)

Whatever knowledge or experience with South Asian culture Aarti today has come later in life and from her husband, whom she had married through a traditional arranged marriage. She expressed that her identity changed after her marriage and that she has learned a great deal about South Asian culture and how to speak South Asian languages but she has learned it as an outsider:

But it’s like somebody from another culture, learning this culture. It’s really interesting because it’s like my life took this really weird sideways turn where we had lived this really white, you know, very mainstream culture life and then all of a sudden, I lived a... [South Asian] life... (Aarti, First Interview, lines 620-623)

But there are feelings of regret regarding her loss of ethnic identity. She talked about at times feeling like she needs to apologize for not being Indian enough. Aarti described a time when her relatives were judging her for her inability to make Indian food. She said,

I remember my aunts saying ‘what are you talking about; you can’t even make dahl or roti.’ You know like you’re not quite up to snuff. (Aarti, Second Interview, line 132-133)

But Aarti believes coming to know her heritage later in life is an advantage in her role because now she feels she has a hybrid identity that allows her to relate to a much wider and more diverse community.

Paul also talked about confusion around his identity. He linked much of that confusion to the pressures to assimilate because of the discrimination his family faced during their early years in BC.

My family was discriminated against...and I think it had a huge impact. It’s interesting [be]cause I think the older I’m getting the more I kinda unpack identity issues...My parents wanted us to be Canadians....we needed to be Canadian. I get that, but now, you know, I think, now that I’m getting older and I have my own young children, I’m really feeling that I kinda lost my identity or am in between two worlds....straddling two worlds... (Paul, First Interview, lines 100-112; lines 122-126)

This identity confusion was only further exacerbated when Paul visited his extended family in South Asia for the first time. He described the visit as going home and hoped that some of his identity issues would be resolved.

So I got to [South Asia] and said “I’m home” only to be told by my aunt and uncle “no, this isn’t home. This isn’t where you belong.” So as you get older, you

start to really analyze well, who, who are you and where do you fit in. (Paul, First Interview, lines 150-153)

Paul's struggles with identity caused him such intense confusion in his teen years that he experimented with drugs and alcohol and eventually dropped out of school. This loss of identity has created feelings of regret as well as some isolation, even as an adult. Paul described:

I think there's quite a bit of shame that goes along...you again realize all the shame that existed when you were a kid...Going to [South Asia] kind of verified that I don't actually belong there and I don't belong here, you know...You start to really analyze well, who you are and where you fit in. I feel a sense of loss. I always feel I don't know where I belong...I don't have the same narratives as others...(Paul, First Interview, lines 678-680; 693-695)

Nureen described her identity as something she tried to protect. She was keenly aware, even at a young age of her need to protect her identity and not become immersed in mainstream society, yet not completely resisting mainstream as well. Although she found some comfort in those early days, in being a diverse student among a number of visible minorities at her school yet feeling like an outsider still as a result of being raised by her grandparents and being of a Muslim background. Nureen thus saw her situation as being unusual. She mentioned that most of her friends were being raised by their parents and that her multicultural friends were Filipino Christians, Chinese Christians, Hindus and Sikhs:

...all the multicultural kids stuck together...we supported each other in that we were all different and we all celebrated each other's cultures. We shared food, we talked about things we did at home. But at the same time, I knew even though I was in there, I knew my situation was a little different... [be]cause of my grandparents and we were Muslims. So we did stick together, but I felt isolated still. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 154-158)

Nureen's identity development was also impacted by her birth order in her family. Being the eldest of five, living with grandparents in a multi-generational home, she said she "grew up fast" (Nureen, Second Interview, line 111). She identified with being an adult from such a young age as she was required to navigate life in a city and to be a negotiator between her family and all external organizations. The adult roles Nureen took on in her youth have led to a degree of perfectionism as well as maturity and independence. She recognizes now that she finds it difficult to ask for help and tends to take on too much responsibility.

Sanjay talked about his sense of hybrid identity, in that he learned to walk in both the dominant culture in school and in the community while maintaining his cultural identity in his home life. He did not seem to be frustrated or confused about managing a hybrid identity, rather it was simply an understanding that this was his reality and what was expected of him.

There's a need to manage the cultural expectations at home and then the cultural expectations outside of home. Maintaining a balance and maintaining your ability

to function in both cultures...it becomes routine...and has helped to create a fluid identity for me. (Sanjay, Second Interview, lines 36-39)

For Sanjay a fluid identity means this ability to transition from the mainstream culture to more ethnically diverse cultures in a way that is seamless. Like Aarti he sees this ability to transition as an advantage in his professional capacity because he related to student and family needs from the dominant mainstream culture and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Min-Jun appears not to have struggled with the types of identity issues which other participants faced; however, she regrets the loss of her ethnic cultural identity as do Paul and Aarti. However in the case of Min-Jun the cultural and ethnic heritage losses have meant a distance was created between her and her parents when she lost the ability to communicate in her first language. She did not however describe these issues as affecting her sense of self or identity. Rather she explained that she always had a strong sense of self thanks to the influence of her parents, "...I have this belief, this grounded belief that I got from my parents about being accepting and comfortable in who I am and what makes me who I am" (Min-Jun, Interview, lines 362-363). As a result of her upbringing, Min-Jin felt comfortable in her own skin and did not feel to need to take on other identities. Although she regrets losing major aspects of her cultural identity, she has come to terms with it. As part of her leadership role, she takes great pride in learning from her loss to now help visible minority students preserve their cultural identities and languages.

Participants like Paul and Aarti talked about feeling alone with their identity issues thinking no one else would understand what they have experienced in terms of identity confusion. Aarti mentioned finding another administrator who had a similar background to her and thus had similar identity issues to her. She said, “We’ve both been able to explore some of those issues around identity, conforming, trying so hard to fit in” (Aarti, First Interview, line 638). By “getting it”, she meant understanding the struggles one goes through growing up as a minority during a time when there were far fewer minorities in BC and greater pressures to assimilate.

Although issues of identity are prominent in the findings from the participants, especially as it relates to identity confusion, their own experiences with such confusion does not impact their deep connectedness with visible minority students and families. Ultimately their experiences have shaped their identities and one of the more prominent experiences that helped to shape participant identities has been mentors in their lives and now how they identify as mentors.

### **Mentorship**

Mentorship figured prominently in many of the participants’ lives. Often a mentor or mentors helped set a course for participants that led to teaching and administration. In the educational literature there is a recognized connection between teachers who were seen as mentors or role models, inspiring students to become teachers in later life (Hull & Keim, 2007; Jones, 2002; Tillman, 2007). But even more importantly, in the case of the participants in this study, a mentor gave them structure and a chance to see and fulfill their potential. As a result of having been mentored, many participants also saw the

importance of being mentors and role models themselves (Darling-Hammond, 2006b; Kochan & Pascarelli, 2003; Martin, 2008). Studies indicate that when one has been mentored at some point, they are more likely to mentor someone later in life because of the positive impact that was made on them (Darling, Hamilton, Toyokawa, & Matsuda, 2002). In addition, some participants also realized that they were role models given their presence as visible minority leaders within their communities. Through this recognition, several participants felt the formal leadership roles were symbols of aspiration to the visible minority community. This perspective is shared in the literature especially among ethnically diverse leaders who recognize that there are few role models for their communities. Brown (2005), Fuller (2013) and Reed (2012) discussed the symbol of hope that a visible minority leader signifies to a culturally and ethnically diverse community where few role models exist.

Some participants mentioned the importance of a mentor, often a teacher, who engaged with them in a way that helped them through times of frustration and confusion in their lives. For Nureen, her grade six teacher had a significant impact on her not just in terms of inspiring her to go into teaching but also influenced the way in which she has chosen to teach and now lead. Nureen said:

I was in grade six; I think that was a big, big time for me when I had a teacher who was interested in my background and my culture. He would not bow down to what my parents wanted but he'd question, respectfully. You know, my parents loved him. He was interested in our culture... (Nureen, First Interview, lines 191-194)

She described how challenging and difficult her time was moving from an urban centre on the prairies to a rural setting in BC, essentially going from a diverse multicultural setting to a mono-culture where conformity to this new culture was the order of the day. Yet there were still traditional expectations from her parents. She went on to say that she admired what her teacher did for her and how he did it. Nureen described her grade six teacher as a great listener and someone who was genuinely interested in her stories. As a result of feeling listened to, as a student, she felt empowered. Now in a leadership position, she models the qualities and attributes she saw in her teacher. Nureen said:

Listening to someone's story and influencing them to listen to other people's stor[ies] and finding out where they're from, helps our society [to] be better...

(Nureen, Second Interview, line 288)

Although Gurmeet spoke about the appreciation he has for the support he received from his whole family, when it came to his education and finding his way in Canada, he also spoke specifically about a coach and his uncle whom he saw as mentors. Gurmeet said:

...there was encouragement from everywhere, everywhere, everyone, all my family members and my uncle in [another province]. He helped me out a lot [and] he convince[d] me to go into teaching. He was a teacher in [that province]. He saw something in me that connected with teaching and he encouraged me and helped me when I had to go to practicums and plan lessons...[M]y coach for soccer, I really appreciated him and he...always respected me and helped to give me confidence. Then my confidence grew from soccer to helping me in dealing

with other situations in life especially at university. When I wasn't able to understand some of the lectures and stuff, I would now go back and talk to teachers where before I didn't have the confidence to speak up about my problems. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 181-193)

The encouragement and help Gurmeet received inspired him to offer the same to others especially his students when he was a teacher and now as a principal.

Mentorship was also important in Aarti's life. She talked with heartfelt affection about Sister Margaret (pseudonym), the head teacher at the boarding school she attended in England. Aarti said:

She was a great leader...she was so thoughtful and she was also a very inspired English literature teacher. And she saw something in me that other people had not seen. And not only did she see it but she was able to harness it. As soon as she saw me she said "...if you're 17 that means you're going to be 18 in January and you can be a school leader. You have all the rights and responsibilities of an adult, so I wan[t] to see what you can do with leadership..." (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 206-211)

Aarti embraced the leadership role and all the responsibilities that came along with it. For example, Aarti mentioned teaching younger students how to bake on the weekends which was not part of the school curriculum but an extra-curricular she came up with and took on the responsibility to organize and deliver. Although the time at the boarding school was extremely positive for Aarti, she did not pass her A level exams, which are equal to grade 12 graduation. But that did not matter to her because she gained

much more from her time with Sister Margaret. She said: “That lady Sister [Margaret] changed my life. That’s why I get emotional” (Aarti, Second Interview, line 232).

In addition Aarti credits another South Asian male principal from her former district for encouraging her to pursue a position in administration. As she said:

[He] really, really was the sole reason why I ever became an administrator. He noticed my capability to get people on staff to join up, to be joiners and not to sit back... [but] to create things. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 404-406)

Paul credited his music teacher in high school with inspiring him to become a teacher, and more importantly, for never giving up on him during his difficult times. As mentioned earlier, Paul struggled with identity issues during his teen years which impacted his engagement with school and led him to experiment with drugs and alcohol. He talked about going to school only for band and sports and then skipping his academic classes. Paul said:

I just had this one music teacher who never kinda gave up on me. So he would actually drive up to the Whitespot where we’d be and he would pick me up and drive me and put me in class...He never gave up on me. He always stuck with me...that teacher played a huge important role in my life because he got me kinda focused again and I remember him saying to me “you know, you should become a teacher one day.” (Paul, First Interview, lines 293-300)

Although not all participants mentioned a mentor or role model who had a significant impact on their development and decision to go into education, they all did realize that they were now role models and how important this was for their students and

their communities. Research has shown that black and visible minority principals and visible minority principals are compelled to be mentors and role models to visible minority students because of the scarcity of visible minorities in formal school leadership roles (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). For many they connected being a role model as a way to encourage visible minority students to see opportunities and potential for themselves.

As Manuel said:

I believe to my very core...that I'm living proof of what one can accomplish in this country with support and determination....It means a lot to me to be in a service role and be able to give back and give opportunities like the ones I had.  
(Manuel, Interview, lines 232-235)

Min-Jun realized that she was a role model given the very nature of a senior leadership role that she holds at an elementary school in a rural area of BC. But she insisted that her status be acknowledged for her skills not her gender. Min-Jun said:

...I get really frustrated when...things like affirmative action come-up and how people talk about it, and I guess my thing is I want people to see me as a role model in this job because of my abilities and expertise not because I'm a woman...(Min-Jun, Interview, lines 231-235)

As a role model, Min-Jun did not view her cultural background as being relevant. For her it had more to do with her actions, she said, "As a principal, I see the significance of the role within the school and community and I try to my best to model practices I hope to see especially around inclusive practices" (Min-Jun, Interview, line 186-187)

As the only principal in this study, leading a school with predominantly white students, Gurmeet was deeply aware of the significance of the mentorship position he was in. He commented that the students and adults of the community do not have a lot of opportunities to experience people from different cultural backgrounds, so he sees his role as one that helps to change attitudes and perceptions. Gurmeet said:

Sometimes people judge me, mostly adults, I don't come across them regularly [but] I see them once in [a]while. They don't know how long I've been here and they don't know what I know and can do. So I model by being an example. I don't get upset; I stay calm and let my actions speak for me...(Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 220-223)

This was clearly important to Gurmeet, as he mentioned a few times how he shapes his behaviour to dispel stereotypical perceptions others have about him based on this ethnicity. Gurmeet said:

People think they see who you are and they make a snap decision about you in their head and then you have to crack that perception through your action. So my action is to be inclusive, to accommodate, to listen, and to be accepting. Slowly attitudes will change. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 253-256)

But Gurmeet also realized that he has a great opportunity to model for his students what a visible minority and immigrant can offer and do. He said:

Teaching is... probably the best for that because you can help expose children to differences and they learn to accept differences, then they grow up to be

responsible and understanding adults. Now they see that someone of this nationality, skin colour can do this job. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 259-261)

In his former positions where there was more diversity of students, Gurmeet certainly was drawn to visible minority students and felt he was a role model. Gurmeet said:

I would look at these students, it didn't matter if they were born here or elsewhere, I try to tell my students, hey, you know, you can all get there. You can all get there. Some of you gonna take a little longer than others, but then I give them examples of myself, you know, starting out here, from the basics, how hard it was to adjust, learn English. But I keep encouraging them and showing them they can do this, like I did this I want to help build their confidence the way I have built my confidence with the support of my family and my uncle...Confidence is so important in us. It can help us achieve our goals. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 270-278)

As mentioned before, Sanjay did not realize that he was seen as a role model in his community until he was approached by a South Asian gentleman with numerous family members who had attended the school. When this gentleman expressed his pride to see Sanjay, a South Asian male as the principal, Sanjay then realized the significance and he said:

...it's those kinda moments that we don't get too many of, opportunities in our careers where you know the work that you do gets recognized formally. That was something that just happened recently that really sticks with me, you know; what I do is valued and makes a difference...because he was proud to see a [South

Asian] male in the role... So for me it doesn't really matter what type of student you deal with or what ethnicity, but that it is my role as an adult to actively do [my] part in giving students good information, good opportunities ... to make good decisions and that also includes role modeling. (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 237-244)

For Sanjay being a visible minority is not something he reflects on and he certainly did not consider himself as a role model to the South Asia community until this interaction. He claimed he does not often consider the impact of his ethnicity on the perceptions of others. Sanjay said:

...unless you're really hit with... explicit racism, you don't really pay attention to the fact that you're of a different race. I don't pay attention to the fact that I'm also a role model to the South Asian community let alone a role model in general too, you know, to all students. But there it was, take hi[s] example, there was a deeper meaning and a connection to that role model piece and that's what I thought, you know, so it was important for me to stop and really reflect on [this] because for me I don't think about it. (Sanjay, Second Interview, lines 102-108)

So that interaction was quite an eye opening one for Sanjay that generated some personal reflection on his role and what he symbolizes to the community.

Nureen described being a role model in terms of reflecting back a style and approach that she experienced from her grade six teacher. She said:

I modelled what he modelled with me and my family and that is the importance of listening to kids' stories and to the stories of their parents. It's through the stories

and their narratives that I learn what is important to them and how to support them. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 288-290)

Nureen also recognized that not only is she a role model to her students and community, but for her family as well. With her students, Nureen models the need to learn and respect each other's stories. She said:

We build more respect for each other when we know each other's stories. So the kids that get sent to my office get from me that I want to learn your story and understand you so I can help you. Then I encourage them to do the same through my modelling. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 326-328)

Nureen also realized that her own past experience with the tension between her school environment and parental expectation took a toll on her. But as a result, she feels compelled to be there for kids like her, immigrant students. She said:

I wanted [to] have an influence on kids who were having trouble with their parents, especially immigrant children...I felt my experience could help other kids...I could see how my grade 6 teacher totally changed my life for me...I could see how he was influencing my parents...I wanted to be a teacher...to help kids so they don't feel like I did. (Nureen, First Interview, lines, 287-290 and 303-307)

Nureen acknowledged that being a role model was something she learned early. It also comes with drawbacks. Nureen said:

Growing up I was modelling that everything had to be perfect and I was responsible for everything. Like everything had to be 100%...so I have developed some anxious feelings because I often feel I can't ask anyone for help and that feeling continues today. Like so much depends on me. I especially felt this way in my early years as an administrator. It has taken a long time for me to realize especially as an administrator...to ask for help, you can't do this all alone.

(Nureen, Second Interview, lines 406-413)

When asked to elaborate on this feeling of being depended upon, Nureen added that it is important to her to connect with her students and families who are from diverse backgrounds but this can take a toll. There are not many teachers and administrators who are role models for the ethnically diverse community who can connect and relate as she can. Therefore, although she appreciates having the connection with the community and being sought out for help and support, she recognizes that there might be potential for burnout. She explained: "I reflect a lot about what I say and what I do and how I present in front of the kids...I wanna be there for people. I don't wanna end up in a situation where I end up, you know, pulling away from everybody" (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 427-430)

To help her with these feelings of pressure as a role model, having to do it all on her own and needing to be perfect, Nureen did disclose that she has sought help through a counsellor. She mentioned: "I finally decided to see someone to help me... It was good. She gave me some wonderful strategies and helped me sit back and think about how my habits and patterns could eventually lead to, you know, bad situations..." (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 421-423)

Although Paul recognized that responsibilities as a role model are inherent to the position as vice-principal, he did express some lack of comfort with being seen as a role model for visible minority students because of this loss of cultural identity. Paul's feelings of shame and guilt make it more challenging for him to be seen as a role model from a certain perspective. He is very grateful for his time with his mentor, his high school music teacher. Paul tries to model what his music teacher did. He said:

One of the greatest lessons I learned from him was that everybody has a role...That everybody's an equal member...and I learned that belief that everybody's important...and to not see people from a deficit perspective. (Paul, Second Interview, lines 126-130)

Of all the participants, Aarti not only identified with being a role model right from the time she started teaching, but later as a principal she also identified as a symbol to visible minority communities. She said:

I loved coming to teach in [Southern BC] because of the large population of [South Asian] kids...it was the first time that I realized that they were looking at me and could think they could become teachers. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 350-352)

Aarti sees herself as a symbol to South Asian community especially to the women who are marginalized group within the culture. Thus she recognizes that for some, she is more than just a principal but represents potential. She said:

...at this school, my role is bigger than itself. Because I'm a symbol... I was the first South Asian female principal in [name of city]. And I'm still the only female South Asian principal. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 389-392)

She went on to add:

...I really feel given the symbol [that] I am in this community; I feel I have the capability to make children believe in themselves...and make something of themselves and to understand that they can do anything and be anything. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 518-521)

Aarti further explained the significance of what she feels she symbolizes to her community as a way to break down barriers which limit potential. Growing up in the 1970s and 80s, she noticed that only people of the dominant culture held certain jobs. She said:

...I just remembering watching...Rodger and Hammerstein's version of Cinderella...and thinking "I wanna do that, I wanna be in that." But everyone was white, in the movies and on TV...I just assumed that it wasn't even something that I might do...I couldn't be an entertainer. So I grew up with that limitation of my race. Now I symbolize to the kids and families the potential in everyone. I symbolize women. I symbolize brown people. I symbolize Canadians. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 328-340)

Aarti felt quite strongly about a visible minority women being seen in leadership positions. "...So many of the moms in the local South Asian community are

marginalized and hold very traditional roles...it is important for our boys and girls to see what our women can achieve” (Aarti, First Interview, lines 523-524)

Furthermore, much of Aarti’s identity as a role model comes from her family upbringing and the fact that her family had been involved in education for generations. She explained:

My grandfather built the first all girls’ school in [the South Pacific]. I have been raised to have a bigger sense of self and knowing our role in society and having a strong need to give back and modeling those principles is more than being an educational leader, it’s really a way of life. It’s like we have a calling. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 552-555)

Although networking was not explicitly discussed, the participant data did raise the potential benefit that could come from visible minority principals and vice-principals having the opportunity to network with each other. Several commented on feeling alone and isolated at times for not having the same narratives as others meaning not having the same backgrounds. Aarti mentioned this feeling of loneliness until she met another administrator who is also a visible minority who grew up with a similar background to hers. She said:

It’s really hard to find people in my age group that have the same experiences that I did, that get it...I always felt like I was alone, like nobody has lived my life. I felt less alone when I met up with Nav Gill [pseudonym]. He is a vice-principal who [has] had some similar experiences as me. He grew up in a community that was really similar to mine...He had similar expectations growing up as I did and

trying so hard to fit in. It's funny, because, I just get him... We just get it, we get who we are and how we got to be like who we are. It helps not to feel so alone in who you are. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 624-630)

Paul also mentioned connecting with another administrator in another district with a similar background to him. He said:

It has been actually nice to connect with someone I really feel wow; we've had some very similar experiences growing up here in Canada as visible minorities. It just makes you feel less alone... As I get older and started reaching out and getting to know other visible minority colleagues, you realize... and feel[ing] less alone helps, like you're not the only one out there. (Paul, First Interview, lines 702-708)

For both Aarti and Paul finding someone they can relate to and share experiences with has helped with the feelings of being alone. Both described the bonding and easy connection that happened sharing with someone else who has struggled with cultural identity and conformity issues. Although they did not realize the need for this type of connection, they both expressed gratitude for such a meaningful connection with a colleague.

### **Connectedness**

From their life experiences and cultural identities, the participants all felt a greater sense of connectedness with visible minority students and families. They spoke about their empathy and understanding of the issues faced by new immigrants as well as visible minority students in general. This feeling of connection with those of similar backgrounds who may have shared experiences and life-stories has been referenced in the

academic literature (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lomotey, 1987; Vinzant, 2009). Many claimed that their cultural identities interacted with their personal and professional identities to create a greater awareness of how they communicate and how they are perceived in terms of their approachability, especially by visible minority groups (Echols, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). Also related to this theme on how they bridged connections with visible minority students and families were discussions of a sub-theme about connecting through sharing personal stories of their experiences growing up in BC.

Nureen credits her ethnicity and personal experiences as contributing to her ability to empathize and have difficult conversations. In other words she is not afraid to “rock the boat” (Nureen, First Interview, line 619), especially with Muslim families. She mentioned using personal stories to build relationships and establish trust. This approach has helped her to foster a deep connection with minority students and their families. To illustrate this point, she described an incident with a Muslim student whose family did not want their daughter participating in singing and dancing in a kindergarten class. So Nureen told the mom that:

“your child’s not going to learn if she’s not singing and dancing”...I said “well what would you like her to do’ and she said ‘well, she could sit out in the hallway and read”. I thought and I thought about it for a while and often I think...most administrators, white administrators don’t like rocking the boat too much, so they accept it. And I’ve seen it so many times where the poor Muslim girl is sitting out in the corridor reading a book while her class is in music. I’ve seen it so many times. And I thought “ok, not, this time I’m going to push it.”I told them “well

you know if you want your child to grow up as a true Muslim and you want her to be indoctrinated with that culture, then the best route is to put her in a Muslim school which is an available option in this town". (Nureen, First Interview, lines 624-632)

Although she was not able to change the family's views, Nureen credits her boldness and frankness in this situation as coming from her own experiences and background, ultimately giving her the courage to say what most administrators would fear saying. Also, because of her background, the family was not offended by her boldness and she ended up becoming an on-going resource to the family for support around cultural issues.

Nureen also talked about being approachable to visible minority groups other than Muslims. Her understanding of multiple languages including Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi made her a resource to many families at her current school as well as being a resource to teachers who would consult her on cultural matters. She said,

Language can be a huge barrier. I hear often "oh my goodness, we're so glad you can communicate with me because I have no idea how my child is doing and if I have concerns, I have no idea how to express my concerns". So often these parents come to me for advice...I have been at this school for four years. I had this kid in Kindergarten and the dad still comes to me and asks for help. "Ask his teacher this for me I don't know what is wrong. He had a problem at lunch."

(Nureen, Second Interview, lines 791-803)

In addition, she mentioned that there are some positive trends among white administrators who are making attempts to learn additional languages, but recognizes that

building a connection is more than speaking a common language - it's about relatable narratives and experiences.

I know some white administrators that are actually taking language classes so that they can communicate which is brilliant but they don't have the personal stories of rising-up you know dealing with the white culture [as a minority] and how do you move through this Canadian society...Like I said I can be empathetic and talk...about commonalities. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 810-814)

Another area in which she feels she can strongly relate with visible minority students and their families is in their involvement with schools. Having grown up with grandparents who could not engage with her school because of language and cultural barriers, Nureen is highly conscious of not positioning minority students as go-betweens to negotiate a connection between their family and the school. She felt some teachers make an inaccurate assumption that parents who do not participate in their children's education do not care.

I know teachers that are, they are always telling the kids "get your parents to come here" or "why don't you ask your parents, beg them to come..."...it isn't the kid's responsibility. It's too much pressure for these kids. Like they just need to be accepted for the way they are and maybe there's other ways we can get them involved in their education. But not to constantly point out the inadequacy of those parents...I don't need teachers to come and tell me that my parents don't care about my education because they don't show up, like, the stress that I have had to deal with at home...like my parents value education, my parents love me,

my parents care about me, but just because they are too uncomfortable to come to school because they don't know how to relate to you, doesn't mean that they don't care about my education. So I see it as my job to take the pressure off those kids in that same situation. I like helping those kids out and making them feel like it's okay and I like seeing the relief [on] their faces when the pressure comes off. You can see it in their faces. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 250-265)

Thus, Nureen's own pressure to assume adult responsibility in her youth has created a desire to alleviate stress that other visible minority students may feel as negotiators between their school and their homes.

She also spoke about a general overall comfort she has working in what she called "the brown culture" of the district she currently works in. Being part of this culture has reconnected her with an ethnically diverse community which continues to inspire her.

Coming back to [regional district] got me hooked into the, you know, the brown culture again...I like the idea of dealing with those students and it felt like home again...I just love how [district] is just so inclusive, you know, just so many cultures, in this district...it is great being with so many multicultural students and students from mixed marriages...I feel I can support them and connect with them. I get it. My husband is also white and my kids are mixed. (Nureen, First Interview, lines 423-427)

Manuel believed that being of mixed heritage was advantageous for how he connects with visible minority students.

Students who are immigrants are near and dear to my heart. I get their challenges and their families' challenges...I relate to them in so many different ways. I understand very much how they feel in this school system and I feel empathy very much with them and it is my intention to help them in whatever way I can. Families and students know they can come to me. I'm not here to judge, just to learn, understand and help. (Manuel, Interview, lines 253-257)

Min-Jun also spoke about a connection with minority students especially in terms of issues to do with learning English. Given her own difficulties with learning English and being put in a position that caused her to lose her first language, she understands the challenges that can exist for visible minority students and their families.

I feel very connected to minority students especially to ones learning English. So...when I [was] doing ESL, I was very cognizant and encouraged that [the students] continue with the first language and culture. I encouraged that they maintain and learn more about their background. (Min-Jun, Interview, lines 84-86)

Gurmeet felt the same way as Min-Jun given similar struggles with learning English. When it came to teaching ESL students, he felt a strong connection with his learners.

I paid special attention to them. I would volunteer; I would offer to help them out after school, before school...I understood them and I really enjoyed it. It was a really positive experience for me to have that connection. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 99-101)

Sanjay talked about how important it is for administrators to ethnically and culturally reflect the community they serve because he feels it helps with the overall connection to the community understanding their needs better. Given his ethnic background, he feels deeply connected to visible minority students and families. As a South Asian, he leads a school that is predominantly South Asian situated in a South Asian community. Given this environment, he said:

The connection that I have with them gives people that sense of comfort that [they] can actually...communicate and not be fearful of the fact that [they] will not be able to get [their] point across...or I will not understand where they are coming from. I understand their fears and pressures. Having effective communication allows us to build effective relationships which will ultimately benefit the student. (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 251-254)

Paul and Aarti both talked about how their cultural knowledge allows them to better connect and understand the pressures felt by South Asian families. They both referenced their understanding of the isolation South Asian mothers experience and the roles grandparents play in South Asian families. This knowledge and cultural background allowed them to have meaningful connections with minority students and families. Paul mentioned that he uses stories to help engage and connect more with immigrant families and students, because the stories have helped to establish commonality and thus understanding and connection.

... in this school and my old school, we have immigrants from so many other countries I understand their experience a bit better...and like what they're going

through, you know...I always hear my parents' stories of what it was like to move and it's different now to immigrate then it was...forty, fifty years ago, but there's still the same fears and the same sense of loneliness. I understand what that is like; I get it and can connect with them on those issues. (Paul, Second Interview, lines 147-152)

Paul went on to give some examples of how he has been able to connect and build bridges because of his own background. For example, one time a kindergarten teacher was having difficulties with a South Asian boy who had repeated behavioural issues.

And the teacher was saying to me "you know I keep talking to the mom about this, he's disrespectful, he's defiant, and [I] keep telling the mom about this but she keeps telling me she understands but she doesn't do anything about it." I said to her "Let me have the mom come in. I'll talk with her." So the mom came in and, we were chatting and we started talking and she said "I understand that he's doing wrong." And that's where she ended. I said "do you live with your in-laws?" and she said "yeah." And I said "and is all your family in [South Asia]" and she said "yeah." And then, it was kind of funny, at that point she didn't realize I was [South Asian]. So she asked me "are you [South Asian]?" and I said "yeah." And she flipped right into speaking [South Asian language] and told me the whole story. She said "Look, I get it and I want to discipline him but any time I try to discipline him, my in-laws get mad at me. They say he is just a boy, leave him alone. Let him do what he wants. My husband's a long haul trucker, so he's not home a lot." I totally got her experience and it all made sense. She has no voice. (Paul, First Interview, lines 570-587)

Paul was able to listen to the situation the mother was describing without judgement. His connection to South Asian culture, customs and norms helped him relate to the mom in the example above and to understand her experience. Paul went on to work out a solution to support the young boy by meeting with the grandparents and the mother together to problem-solve and to get the grandparents on board in terms of encouraging more appropriate behaviours for the boy at school. This approach worked well as the grandparents were much more receptive to receiving feedback and direction from an authority figure like Paul.

Paul also talked about supporting the teachers at the school to connect with minority students because he sees it as a social justice issue:

It is our job not to judge but our job [is] to understand. And that is my point with teachers, not to judge cultural differences, but to understand why those differences may exist. Teachers need to have understandings of cultural norms and customs, and...that to me is a social justice issue. But so many teachers say they don't really have time to. Well that's doing a huge disservice to our kids.

(Paul, First Interview, lines 600-604)

For Paul social justice is about building connection and understanding with students and in his example with visible minority students regarding their cultural practices. His view on connection with visible minority students as a social justice issue is aligned with the predominant definitions and interpretations of social justice in the educational literature. According to educational scholars, social justice leaders recognize the inequities in

school policy and practices which perpetuate marginalization of minority groups and are compelled to be proactive about the issues (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Furman, 2012).

Paul is also concerned about disconnect that can result between teachers of the dominant culture and their minority students as it can impact the relationship between the students and the school, as well as impede learning. But he also acknowledges that his role is to help build that bridge. In the case of the kindergarten student above, Paul did mention:

I think things are better for him and the teacher has a better understanding of the mom and the boy. That gap has been bridged a bit and the behaviour has improved not necessarily fixed but really now there is some understanding of each other's perspective and that is enduring. (Paul, First Interview, lines 607-610)

Building that bridge and connection between the student, in the example above, with his teacher in the long run helps to undo some of the misunderstandings that can exist when there is a lack of cultural familiarity.

Nureen also expressed a similar concern about how teachers from the dominant culture sometimes relate to minority students. At times, it appears that they are forcing integration or wanting to see more mixing of students so that visible minority students do not just hang out with visible minority students. She felt although this was done with a positive intention in mind it often lacked the understanding of why integration was not happening in the first place and that came from a lack of personal experience to be able to connect with the visible minority students.

My colleagues think that white kids and brown kids need to hang out together.

But they should be trying to understand why it's not happening, you know, in the first place. Why are all the brown kids hanging out with each other? Why are all the white kids hanging out with each other? Why isn't there any integration?

(Nureen, Second Interview, lines 174-178)

Nureen believed that these critical questions are not often asked by her colleagues from the dominant culture, whereas she thinks about and asks these critical questions.

So I think as a leader having that experience makes me think about what is in the setting that I am creating in my school to encourage that safety for integration and I do this by sharing stories with each other and helping kids to feel safe first so that they don't have to be only attracted to their people...But at the same time respecting that sometimes kids do need that too, especially when they're brand new. So there's that balance...slowly..., allowing for more integration but at the same time not making it a bad thing...to not integrate. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 186-192)

Sharing personal stories about one's experiences as Nureen described as well as Aarti and Paul are well known ways that visible minority leaders bridge a connection and foster relationships with the visible minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Calmore, 1995, Fitzgerald, 2010). This also links to critical race theories which highlight that in the stories of marginalized minorities lay the power to unlock them from their oppressive and isolated situations (Calmore, 1995; Landson-Billings, 1994). Again these personal

narratives are seen as a key way to build a shared understanding that teacher and leaders from the dominant culture are not able to do.

Nureen also expressed that her colleagues from the dominant culture often claim the need for more integration is to ensure English language acquisition. She explained that her colleagues believe integration is very important for minority children, “I hear my colleagues saying, ”they’re not going to learn or they’re not going to learn how to integrate into the culture properly if they stick with their own kind” (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 198-199). Nureen felt that these views and beliefs are a result of educators’ lack of understanding what it is like to feel the pressure to integrate and the struggles that can emerge as a result thus a disconnect can occur.

Aarti also talked about her connectedness with visible minority students and how being able to recognize certain behaviours in students reminded her of herself in her youth. She talked about a time when a young student would hide his traditional lunch and begged his parents for sandwiches.

So I started to bring Indian food on purpose...I just said “I love roti’s. Do you think you could bring me a roti?” “Do you think we could share a roti?” You know, I just have that affinity for understanding and recognizing what it’s like to be uncomfortable... (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 460-465)

She further described this closeness with minority communities:

My background allows for me to be able to better connect with my community and be able to better serve them because there’s that strong connection that allows

for a stronger relationship and a stronger understanding of what the needs are.  
(Aarti, Second Interview, lines 95-97)

This ability to serve minority communities better was important to Aarti as she worries that marginalized ethnic communities are underserved for their educational and social needs which can impact student success. Researchers also point out that community connection is one of the central factors in improving academic success for minority students (Echols & Graham, 2013; Lomotey, 1987; 1989; 1990).

In another example, she mentioned a student who started to wear a head scarf as part of her Muslim faith. Aarti mentioned that although she was not Muslim she understood this young student and her desire to display her religion.

So I asked her “why are you wearing your scarf?” and she said “I’m just trying it out.” And I told her “That’s a great idea. Good for you.” I may not have the same affinity, but I understood what she was trying to do here. She was trying on her religion in a really obvious way. That needs to be encouraged and supported. Let it be safe for her to do so. I understand her need. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 473-478)

But she also recognizes that, as part of her connectedness with visible minority students, she also has some fears and concerns regarding certain types of visible differences.

One of my early memories is going into a school in Burnaby. It was my cousin’s school and there was one kid hitting another kid’s head against the wall and that kid had a pre-turban on and I just remember feeling horrified right? But I couldn’t make myself stop it but it really stuck with me, that image. So I think I kind of

always felt kids wearing turbans were a target. It's [a] very obvious sign of religion...So a lot of times, I'd just be tempted to say "why don't you just cut your hair and fit in". And you, you intellectually realize that that's super inappropriate and how dare you...And now after working with a large Sikh population mixed in with Muslims and Hindus,...I don't feel that way at all. My job is to make it safe, not to judge. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 476-486)

Nureen also expressed a similar thought of concern with respect to showing too much of one's diversity. By this she meant:

...I struggle with that issue, you know, being too proud of your culture [as] there can be problems...How much is too much and how much do I need? Too much scares people off as well. It can create a barrier. Like those visible forms of diversity, you know, wearing one's religion like the pre-turban for Sikh boys. I think as people in minority cultures, like because we're minorities, we're more critical of that. But really I think we are trying to protect each other, like we fear how others might respond to such diversity...It's not an easy life that's for sure. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 860-872)

Gurmeet spoke about his connectedness with visible minority students from his former schools. Having been raised in a village without electricity or running water, Gurmeet feels he can relate to his immigrant and refugee students who can find the transition to Canada to be overwhelming. He explained:

I can talk to them at their level and I try to tell them, some of the things I did when I was young here...I see them wanting to be just like other kids and I

encourage them to be themselves...[and] remind them they are an individual and “be yourself”. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 257-260)

Sanjay’s connection to the community of his visible minority students is of great importance to him. He feels that given his background, he is deeply connected to his community and, he feels he is better able to serve them. Thus for all participants they felt a strong connection with visible minority students and their families as a result of their cultural identities and experiences (Dillard, 1995; Echols, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). As a result of this deep connection, participants also felt a need to promote diversity.

### **Promoting Diversity**

Within this theme of promoting diversity, three main patterns emerged which interconnect. Firstly, all participants discussed a higher need to promote all forms of diversity to create more inclusive cultures in their schools. Secondly part of this discussion included comments and thoughts regarding multicultural education. Although all participants saw the value of understanding multicultural activities as part of promoting diversity, they expressed concerns on how multicultural education is delivered in their schools. In some cases participants had modified the delivery of multicultural activities to better suit the diverse needs of their student population. Thirdly, several participants felt strongly that students needed to be exposed to multiple ethnicities and cultures at their schools as a way of promoting diversity and that a more diverse staff, administration, and teachers would benefit the students.

For Gurmeet who is the only visible minority at his school, he recognizes that although there is no cultural diversity beyond him, he tries to promote diversity and inclusion. He said:

I'm the only non-white person here...but we have other types of diversity like issues of poverty. We have students [whose] families are need[ing] a lot of support. So we try to create equity and inclusion by supporting the student so they're able to... participate in all events in the school. This is also social justice to me, to ensure everyone can fully participate...it doesn't matter which background you come from...(Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 191-196)

In a school that Gurmeet described as a “mono-culture,” (Gurmeet, First Interview, line 190) he felt compelled to integrate relevant multicultural education that is more than just superficial add-ons which tends to be the more typical approach in schools. Multicultural education scholars explain two such superficial approaches to multicultural education as the contributions approach and additive approach (Banks, 1999; Fleras & Elliott, 2002). The contributions approach is when a diverse culture is studied from the perspective of holidays, heroes, and traditional customs but these perspectives are not integrated into the curriculum (Banks, 1999; Fleras & Elliott, 2002). The additive approach goes marginally further than the contributions approach by adding diverse concepts, themes and perspectives to the curriculum but without changing its basic structure (Banks, 1999; Fleras & Elliott, 2002). The concern with the additive approach is that it does not necessarily transform thinking to be more accepting of diversity and multiculturalism. Culturally relevant pedagogy would be another approach

to create more diversity in the curriculum. This approach allows for a student's life experience to be part of the learning environment (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Since the community that Gurmeet's school is located in has a large Indigenous population and although the Indigenous students attend a separate school specifically for Indigenous students and education, Gurmeet has incorporated the local Indigenous language education into his school. He said, "We bring in elders and we teach the language [Indigenous language] here and in every single class...at least once a week" (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 227-228). This approach is how Gurmeet makes multicultural education more relevant and meaningful within the school's community and taking it beyond being an add-on. He said:

I don't really think having [a] multicultural day, like one day that [there] is a point. You know like a food day, but it has to be done, because it is included in the curriculum but multicultural education has to be done every day...across the board and regularly instead of just a special day here and there...that's not very effective. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 230-237)

Gurmeet also expressed a concern about the lack of exposure to ethnic diversity for not only the students at his school but for the broader community. Research suggests that having an ethnically, culturally, racially and linguistically diverse school and environment can benefit all students, not just minority students and without having such diversity there can be detrimental effects to student growth and development (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Brown, 2004, Delpit, 1995; Fitzgerald, 2003a). Gurmeet

also views this lack of diversity as potentially keeping the students and community back from changing attitudes towards difference.

Because a community like this...is still quite isolated from places like the lower mainland and it is pretty strictly a mostly white community and they don't even think of it, they just don't have that experience, the children or adults don't have experience in dealing with different cultures. So we try to do whatever we can...to promote exposure to other cultures. For example, when I went back to India, I took lots of photos and I gave a one hour presentation to the community. I also visited each class and talked about my travels. I encourage other teachers, staff and families to share about their travels and cultures they have seen. This way there is some understanding of differences and you know how to deal with that difference, you're respectful to someone who is different. This is the only way to change attitudes and accept diversity. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 240-250)

For Sanjay promoting diversity and inclusion was just second nature to him. He said:

It is just what we do and it is just the culture of the school. I think because me as a leader have just incorporated those principles when I work in a school, those types of initiatives just become institutionalized. (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 191-194)

He also advocates that the staff and teachers are involved in promoting diversity, "so that people feel that there's a sense of value here and belonging. I think we work very hard at

validating everyone” (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 205-206). But ultimately Sanjay is most proud of instilling within the student population the importance of accepting diversity and creating a more inclusive environment at the school. He said:

The students know that they need greater awareness around differences...they recognize that understanding as a need and come to us and say “here’s an idea that we wanna institute around diversity.” And then our job becomes “how can we support you on this.” But they have taken ownership of this. (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 232-236)

With student-led initiatives, Sanjay’s school has promoted diversity beyond celebrations of cultural customs and has had guest speaker series on diverse topics around race, culture, and sexual orientation as well as teacher and student humanitarian efforts. But he does recognize that multicultural events that focus on food, clothing and customs are a necessary first step on a longer path to more profound levels of understanding.

As Nureen described her thoughts about diversity, she expressed a concern that although “promoting” diversity was important to her, it was not quite enough. She felt the need to protect diversity and difference. She explained further: “...diversity means protecting your differences and acknowledging the differences of...children and helping them to move forward in this world.” (Nureen, First Interview, lines 561-656). When probed further into her response, Nureen explained that her views on diversity came directly from her experiences. She expressed, “...I had to protect...my culture and not let it...get away from me too much” (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 583-584). Thus, to her, diversity is something that not only needs to be promoted but rather protected so that

what makes an individual unique is maintained. She talked about the pressures she felt to let go of her cultural background and how she is now a strong advocate for helping minority students feel comfortable and supported in holding on to their diverse background. She said:

I believe in protecting your difference and acknowledging the differences of these children to help them move forward in this world. When we accept diversity, it allows kids to move forward. I had to hide parts of my difference when I was young. I don't want our students to feel that way. They need to hang on to their diversity and not lose it. I want to make it safe for them. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 586-590)

Nureen further explained how she makes it safer in her school environment for students to feel open and accepted about their diversity. She believes if they are safe, they are more likely to display their cultural diversity. She said:

I make it safe by telling stories and sharing stories with each other and encouraging kids to feel safe first so that they don't have to hide [their culture]. It is empowering to see people proud of their cultures and it empowers me and it helps us to connect to have such a strong alliance with people with similar cultures. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 612-615).

Like Nureen, Aarti also believed in using stories to promote acceptance of diversity and to create inclusion. She said:

I'm curious about others and their stories. I don't judge. I want to know how I can help. I think maybe I am this way, I've had this hyper awareness because...of

growing up in a very...mono-cultural environment. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 468-472)

**Storytelling as a way to promote diversity:** So within this discussion on promoting diversity, a sub-theme of telling stories and being curious about others stories emerged. Leaders like Nureen and Aarti tell stories of their experiences when they highlighted their personal challenges and issues with their ethnic diversity growing up within a white mainstream culture. Telling these personal stories is away that they have promoted their diversity as well as the diversity of their students. Parker and Villalpando (2007) discussed how sharing and hearing stories of black students and other marginalized minority students has helped to empower them and to accept their diversity of experience compared to those in mainstream society.

Some participants stated they believe in hiring diverse staff where possible. Although this is not always possible because of selection criteria and labour hiring agreements, participants did feel that the school environment benefits from having some ethnic diversity among the staff and teacher complement as well as at the administrative level. Aarti spoke about the increase in new teachers who are visible minorities. She was pleased to see this change in demographics compared to when she had started in the teaching profession, but she still referred to it as novelty. She said:

When I first started teaching up north, they did not know what to make of me. “What? Who are you?” Then I came to work in [this district] in 1998, I was only one of three [South Asians] and the rest were white and now, in this generation, like nearly every other teacher or student teachers that comes in is [South Asian]. It is important in this community to see more teachers and administrators who

reflect the community. We have four teachers here who are [South Asian]. It's great because the kids can really relate to them. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 414-420)

Nureen talked about the value of having diverse staff complements to help break down barriers and to ensure everyone in the community has someone they can seek out for help.

We've got...an Aboriginal [educational assistant] worker who sometimes the parents feel more comfortable talking with. This last weekend, one of our grade four boys tried to kill himself. Grade four, he tried to kill himself! And the parent would not talk to us... but did talk to the Aboriginal [educational assistant]... If she wasn't there, we wouldn't have know[n] about this incident and the family may not have asked for help. (Nureen, First Interview, lines 535-541)

Participants also mentioned the need for more diversity at the senior administrator level. This was seen as an important factor for decision-making that reflected the needs of the community, but also to break down stereotyping in particular roles. Sanjay indicated that there is a need for more visibly diverse leaders in schools that have predominantly white student populations. In addition, there needs to be more visibly diverse leaders in schools that have more of a mixed demographic. He said:

...if you surveyed the general community [in that area], they would tell you that they are not being reflected or represented at all levels within the education system....I would say there is merit in that statement, because we do have a number of [South Asian] teachers...but the senior management structure still is

predominantly Anglo-Saxon. There is still more work to be done there...But if you find visible minority administrators often they are in diverse schools. This is good for building relationships with the community; however placing a minority leader in another school with a different demographic helps to change attitudes or impressions of a role. (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 280-290)

The academic literature also highlights that when a visible minority is hired in a principal role, often they are placed in schools that have high minority student populations rather than in schools that are populated predominantly with white majority students or at the very least balanced in diversity (Brown, 2005; Jones, 2002; McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007; Tillman, 2007). Although it is good to see the placement of visible minorities in positions of leadership, there are critical questions asked about where they tend to be placed and opportunities that are lost when not placed in schools with majority white students.

Nureen also shared the view around the need to promote more visible minorities into positions of leadership. She said:

...because I am brown because I'm a minority, I have a different perspective on things...an ease to be able to deal with various situations like involving cultural conflict than say white administrators. And knowing [lower mainland district] and how big it is and how diverse it is, I am shocked that in a hundred and nine elementary schools we only have four [South Asian] principals....Of course, you've gotta hire the best people. I know a lot of really good administrators that are out there and we have...really good teachers that are out there who are trying

to become administrators, but aren't given a chance. I think we need to examine that a bit more. And even worse, I think, [is] the aboriginal leadership situation and need...I'm realizing more, the barriers that are put against us, people of colour, people you know of different ethnicities to become administrators. It would be different if there aren't as many of you as us but there is now. [Unlike] when I first started as a teacher I was the only one of a few brown people in my [teacher preparation] program...I see a lot more people of colour that are going into teaching and who are great teachers and want to be administrators but it's not happening to the extent that I hoped that it would. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 738-768)

When asked what the barriers might be to promoting more diversity in senior roles, Nureen said:

I think there's a barrier that people don't want to be labelled as I got this job because I'm brown. It's a catch twenty-two. Like we don't wanna say that you hired, you know, people of colour because you don't want that reaction from people saying 'well, they just got hired because they're brown. It's just that idea again...[Lower mainland district] is such a gong show. I can't even begin to figure out what's going on. I really don't understand it. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 773-780)

Like Nureen, Aarti and Paul expressed similar concerns around perception of one's ethnicity versus competence for the job is discussed in the literature. This concern is most prevalent in the literature regarding perceptions of Black principals as filling a quota as a

result of affirmative action but this certainly extends to all visible minorities (Dillard, 1995; Hines & Byrnes, 1980; Reed, 2012). Hines and Byrnes comment that "...black principals are looked upon with suspicion and distrust, as having acquired their positions because of colour rather than competence" (p. 67) echoing the concern mentioned by research participants.

Also part of Nureen's frustration at this time was based on her own experiences with applying for a couple of principalship positions but not being shortlisted. This clearly puzzled her and her colleagues who thought she would at least be offered an interview for the job. During Nureen's second interview with me, I sensed a distinct feeling of hurt and of not being valued by her district. In addition, she was deeply frustrated by the lack of feedback as to why she was not shortlisted. She said:

So three weeks ago I asked for some feedback. I got nothing back. Kind of frustrating. It's really, really got me jaded. I understand that sometimes they have [a] bigger picture in mind and who to place where and what schools are opening up and that sort of stuff but to not even get an email back... you know like "yeah, sure I'll meet with you" or "here are some of the reasons why" or just say "we have a bigger plan and there wasn't any school that really fit your personality." But to get nothing, that's what bugs me even more... just the fact that I am not respected enough to even respond to me as to why. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 27-37)

Nureen feels that more diverse senior staff was the one of the best ways for the BC education system to make some significant change. She said:

It's so important, it's so important. And if we wanna make systemic change, for students and parents, especially the parents, to be quote unquote "involved in education" we need some representatives in the higher levels. It's a scary thing for... a normal parent, like white parents to go and talk to a principal or administrator about things, how do you think it feels for an immigrant parent who doesn't know the language and who feels like they're not important. (Nureen, Second Interview, lines 800-806)

Promoting more diversity in terms of cultural holidays also arose during interviews with participants. Although several participants mentioned that this was not an easy thing to incorporate, it was important to many of them to find ways to be respectful of their community and to incorporate important multicultural holidays into the school environment as a way to promote diversity and create inclusion. Aarti mentioned some learning around incorporating cultural holidays in a more respectful way. She said:

We had a Diwali slash Eid celebration one year and [we] tried to put like green and white decorations and just to honour that... holiday [Eid]...but we didn't really know what we were doing and then no Muslims attended. So now we encourage Muslim families to show us to do Eid properly, we welcome that... (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 74-79)

As part of this discussion, almost all participants mentioned the tensions that arise with celebrating Christmas without acknowledging other cultural holidays. This certainly came up at schools with large minority student populations. But there was tension not only between the students and their families with the schools, but within the school itself,

sometimes creating conflicts between teachers and administrators. This was acute in Paul's school where 85% of the student body is South Asian. She said:

We celebrate Christmas, that is non-negotiable, you know, participating in a Christmas concert yet, you know, Diwali is kind of like if you have time you can teach about it.... Most of these kids are participating in the parade, yet we don't even talk about it and so where is the cultural diversity? For me this is a social justice issue and we need to reframe how we're doing what we do...like there's a huge cultural relativity piece there for those kids, yet we're not acknowledging their background. And we're not placing as much emphasis on who they are and what their narratives are. Even bigger than Diwali is the Vaisakhi Festival for them and they won't even have a chance to talk about it at school. (Aarti, First Interview, lines 469-479)

With the support of his principal, Paul has tried to raise these issues with the teachers. He said:

As a leader, I think we have to ask questions that are uncomfortable sometimes and sometimes, they're purposefully uncomfortable. So we're having the Christmas conversation and we're asking really uncomfortable questions because you know Christmas is "sacred" I say that in quotes. It's sacred for people, you know? Like it's the tradition and I think that's great. We should absolutely have a Christmas concert but then why are we not discussing other [holidays], right? (Paul, First Interview, lines 568-574)

For Paul adding diverse holidays to celebrations at schools is a social justice issue because it acknowledges the experience, values, and traditions of ethnically diverse students. Thus for Paul expanding school practices to be more inclusive of diverse holidays is about creating equity and fairness so that his students can see their culture and their lives being reflected at school.

Paul expressed some strong opinions about the current methods used for enhancing multicultural education at his school. He said:

A few months back we had a multicultural lunch. It is done all the time. Given the demographic of the school it was all South Asian food with a pasta salad and pizza thrown in. It's just tokenistic....and often that all it is in terms of multicultural education. So I think it's just kind of a waste defining a culture by their food....There needs to be a more meaningful connection to what we do and why we do it. It's the same each year around Chinese New Year and we have the kids running around the school and danc[ing] and making noise. It was great but if they could tell me what the meaning of the dragon was that would be way more meaningful and what do the colours symbolize...I am sometimes hesitant to push ... I think people do it for the right reason but the result, I don't necessarily think is worthwhile, right? Kind of superficial. So I'm always of two minds. I think if it's done in a thoughtful manner then, and there's...learning behind it, then great. But if it's just a token "we're doing this for one day" then I don't, I would actually say "no, I'd rather not do it." (Paul, Second Interview, lines 453-481)

He also went on to express that a multicultural lunch or dressing up in traditional clothing are at the same level of tolerating a culture versus acceptance. Thus Paul is concerned with multicultural education approaches that focus on the contribution approach (Banks, 2009). In this approach, ethnically diverse cultural aspects are represented in a superficial or trivialized manner and have the potential to reinforce stereotypes. Banks (2013) expands on this concern saying "...when the focus is on the contributions and unique aspects of ethnic cultures, students are not helped to view them as complete and dynamic wholes" (p. 186).

Aarti has some similar challenges at her school with diversifying approaches to holiday celebrations. Although her experiences growing up in Canada were based on cultural conformity, and she is very familiar and comfortable with mainstream holidays, she does recognize that at her school celebrating mainstream holidays is not necessarily everyone's comfort zone. She said:

You can ask me anything about Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, any of the majority celebrations and I can tell you inside out why we have them, what they're about, where they stem from, the bigger and smaller picture... But here the community is different and the big holidays are Diwali, Holi and Vaisaki and we don't even do them. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 8 - 12)

She also mentioned that there were some historical issues at the school around diversifying holiday celebrations left from the previous administration. Apparently the former principal attempted to incorporate more culturally diverse holidays but this was

met with teacher resistance that has lasted to the present day. As a result, Aarti struggles with creating some openness to include multicultural holidays. She said:

The teachers had met to discuss the issue of holidays and brought in an outside consultant but me and the vice-principal were not included. A totally separate meeting. Why is there such a visceral reaction to it? I'm not certain; there are some past hurts and uncomfortableness around different holidays. So it is something we are still working through. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 7-13)

But this troubled dynamic has not stopped Aarti from trying different approaches to be more inclusive. She mentioned being approached by two elderly Sikh gentlemen who helped inspire an idea for Aarti. "They both said 'we love Christmas. Why not celebrate it, celebrate it all? We don't want to shut people down. We want to include everyone.'" (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 15-16)

These discussions have inspired her to try different things to be more inclusive around holidays. Aarti said:

...so I have decided to start slowly. I have asked the two Sikh gentlemen if I can videotape them talking about their holidays and how they celebrate at home. I am thinking I will expand this to include other families and other holiday traditions. Then we can share the stories with the school. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 18-21)

Even with Christmas, Aarti has gone beyond the "winter celebrations" and had a Christmas concert at her former school. She said:

I believe it is important for children to know what you are celebrating and it's not just about Santa Claus. We not only celebrated Christmas, we also had two presentations that honoured Hanukkah to highlight another religion that also celebrates around Christmas time. And at the end of that particular concert, I had a family who [had] been associated with the school for thirteen years and not once had anybody ever recognized Judaism at the school. It was very powerful for them. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 30-35)

Aarti emphasized: "There is this conflict with holidays but there shouldn't be....we want everyone to have the freedom to celebrate in the way that they want to celebrate...If our kids who are born here of white heritage want to do Vaisakhi with our [South Asian] kids and want to put henna on themselves, go ahead". (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 24-27)

When it came to promoting diversity and multiculturalism at the school Gurmeet leads, which is 99% students from the dominant culture, he still felt strongly about engaging his school population in meaningful multicultural education. He especially feels this way with respect to aboriginal education as mentioned earlier the broader community at Gurmeet's school is situated in has a large Indigenous population. Although Christmas is the big holiday focus at his school, he talked about engaging every class in First Nations curriculum as part of his commitment to multicultural education. Gurmeet said:

So like the First Nations teacher works in every class...even though there are few First Nations students. The method has to go to every student regardless of First Nations or non-First Nation...and has to be taught in the classroom, you have to teach it...I know there [is] a time to celebrate but you first have to make sure that

[you] make it part of the curriculum where the kids are getting tested on it, ok not literally but...student needs to know that it's valuable, because they have to study it and they will be marked on it...We just had a team of students participate just last week...ten of them, we had nine white students, one aboriginal student on [a] team who [competed at] a [traditional indigenous] language competition. They did very well and I was very, very proud. (Gurmeet, Second Interview, lines 154-164)

Many of the participants in this study attempted to promote diversity to create more inclusion and to broaden the viewpoints and understanding of their students regarding diversity. They felt it was important for the visible minority students to feel that they could be open about their cultural diversity at school rather than having to hide their diversity like many of the participants felt they had to do when they were growing up. Since many of the participants were in school at a time when the curriculum was not diverse or inclusive and lacked culturally responsive pedagogy principals, several commented that they did not see themselves reflected in their educations. In addition, participants felt it that part of promoting diversity was to have more diverse staff in the school system, especially in the more senior leadership positions. That with more diversity in these roles, stereotypical perceptions could change about visible minorities.

The participants also expressed the hope to create more meaningful multicultural educational opportunities for their students. Several were concerned with the lack of diverse cultural holidays as part of multicultural events at school. But several also commented about their struggles to approach these issues in a way that was respectful and meaningful for their communities. In addition, some participants mentioned internal

struggles at their respective schools when they have attempted to diversify holiday celebrations.

### **Change Agent**

Participants saw being a change agent as equalling being a leader. In other words they identified being a leader as being synonymous with change agent. Research participants expressed that their enactment as leaders was an opportunity to create positive social change and they consistently identified as change agents or enablers of change as a way to deal with inequities as leaders. Fullan (2001) defines a change agent as a leader who moves people and organizations forward under difficult conditions by empowering others, building capacity and focusing on relationships. In addition, change agents are seen as a person who is self-conscious about the nature of change and the change process, and in pursuit of ideas and competencies for coping with and influencing aspects of change (Fullan, 1993). The change agent creates a readiness for change, manages resistance, and fosters a vision for the future that mobilizes commitment to change (Tierney, 1989).

For Sanjay being a change agent was part and parcel of being a formal leader. Identifying strongly with that aspect of the role, he indicated that "...being a change agent is synonymous with being a leader" (Sanjay, First Interview, line 135). He went on to add that fostering and creating a climate to help students, staff and teachers to embrace change is the aspect of his job he enjoys the most. He manages to do this by being flexible, collaborating, spending time building positive professional relationships and building trust through empowering others. He said:

In a leadership role flexibility is a trait one must have to be successful, particularly when trying to institute...change in a system wide perspective...there [are] a number of factors that you need to be aware of and some at times...come at you when you're least expecting them and so to be able to adjust to that is definitely helpful. And having learned that and being able to function in different settings, I think is, was an asset for me to have. (Sanjay, First Interview, lines 44-52)

To Manuel, much like Sanjay, being in a position of leadership is all about creating change and fostering an environment of change to create equity. He said:

...the opportunity to enact positive social change as a change agent is about dealing with inequities. And now I am in a role that allows me to live by my moral code to give back and to serve others and to enact significant positive social change... (Manuel, Interview, lines 327-330)

But he also recognizes that being a change agent does not necessarily mean rapid changes:

[But] to be a change agent...to get it done ... I'm quickly realizing what is necessary is patience and time to develop those relationships...to build trust and working as a community to support our students and leading by example...(Manuel, Interview, lines 346-350)

Although Aarti acknowledged that as a leader she has made a difference to her school and community, she was resistant to being seen as a change agent because she felt

the term “change agent” was too lofty, rather she sees herself as an “enabler for change.”

She explained the difference:

Whereas if you're just like taking people just a little bit further or just getting them to kind of shift in their thinking...maybe it's a change agent, but I just think it's more like how I picture myself...being like a chair that lifts others up and gives support...more like facilitating or enabling the change. (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 571-575)

Gurmeet also identified his leadership role as one of making a difference, for being responsible for all aspects of the school and being available to anyone that needs his support. He has a strong sense of ownership and accountability to set goals and implement change as a change agent. Currently he felt his role as a change agent was focused on advocating for equal access for technology at his school. Many of the students at Gurmeet's school are living in poverty; he is quite concerned about equity of access to technology for all his students. He said:

...students at my school have limited access to technology certainly in their homes but also at our school. Our school is not well equipped with technology...so that's where I think ...our children are missing out compared to some other schools...That is not equity. (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 211-214)

Gurmeet also provided another example of being a change agent. He mentioned the adversity he faced trying to secure an administration position and then subsequent challenges he faced with parents in his community as a result of his ethnicity. But he managed these interactions by showing his competence and skill to the job. His main

focus he said was “I allow my actions to speak for me. People see what I do and how I conduct myself and minds change over time” (Gurmeet, First Interview, lines 221). In this example Gurmeet is a change agent for stereotypical attitudes that can exist about what a visible minority can do or not do in terms of formal leadership positions.

Min-Jun mentioned that for her being change agent meant building capacity in others. She regards everyone on her team, staff and teachers to be highly capable of fulfilling their roles and she sees her role as one “...to further develop capacity in people and empower them to see themselves as positive contributors to goals of the school” (Min-Jun, Interview, line 303). In her mind, there is no room for “...deficit thinking for the students, staff, teachers and parents” (Min-Jun, Interview, line 305). Rather Min-Jun expressed “...everyone has strengths and it is my job to nurture those strengths and support any areas for development” (Min-Jun, Interview, line 306). Furthermore she added:

...rather than me dictating what needs to be done....I like enable everyone to have a voice...or just express an opinion and making it possible for them to do things they thought they could not do...(Min-Jun, Interview, lines 309-312)

It was important for Min-Jun to make this change at her current school, as the former leadership was top down and controlling. She has slowly changed the culture so that staff, teachers, and parents are no longer nervous to share an opinion and this approach has been instrumental in creating positive change in her school.

Of all the participants Paul was most open about his resistance to moving into a formal leadership role especially given his perceptions about administration. He said:

I never wanted to be an administrator. I really didn't understand leadership and what it was about. I thought it was punching numbers and matching budgets and I knew I could do that but didn't think that was for me. But I realized through the master's program that people was a huge part of it and creating an environment for change, which really was everything to me...I figured out it was about relationships, building capacity and change management within people and really just allowing people to grow and empowering people so change is easier to manage. (Paul, First Interview, lines 373-379)

Paul also mentioned that he sees his role as a change agent. He said:

...we have a pretty good idea how to deliver curriculum but why are we delivering the curriculum we are delivering and why in the way we do it...I truly feel my role as VP is asking questions and helping move people forward, like to grow as educators but also help them grow personally. I'm trying to critically engage teachers in discussing this powerful question around why do what you do. It's a really hard question and I think I can ask in a way that's not threatening. (Paul, First Interview, lines 420-426)

When asked why this approach was so important to Paul, he mentioned again:

...I'm here because the education system didn't work for me. Now I have a chance to help teachers engage with students who are coming from so many different backgrounds and diverse ways of learning. We have to make this more relevant to them, to engage them in the learning process and to feel included in the learning process. (Paul, First Interview, lines 438-441)

Nureen strongly believes that her leadership role is about creating change. She said:

I originally saw my leadership identity as one to advocate for students. But now I realize it is about creating a change in practice so we have the best situation for children and that has meant helping teachers with change...I really like to see myself as a person who likes to push the limits of teachers into thinking about changing their practice... I feel I really have a role in that whole change and being a change agent around how we teach a more diverse student population. (Nureen, First Interview, lines 494-500)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the themes of fitting-in, identity, connectedness, promoting diversity, mentorship, and change agent to highlight the experiences and issues of value to the participants. Related sub-themes such as regret regarding loss of cultural identity as well as advantages to being able to walk into two cultural worlds were discussed along with the sub-theme of using stories to create connections with minority students and promoting diversity. In the following chapter, the data findings will be discussed and analyzed within the context of existing academic literature to identify what implications, if any the findings data has on the larger educational leadership field regarding visible minority formal school leaders.

## Chapter Six

### Analysis of Findings

The purpose of this life history study is to highlight the voices of visible minority principals and vice-principals of BC. Visible minority principals and vice-principals of BC who are immigrants or children of immigrants were asked to share their experiences of growing up and living in a dominant mainstream culture different from their cultural and ethnic heritage and how those experiences have shaped them as leaders. I was interested in exploring how their diverse identities have developed and how their experiences inform their practice of leadership. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

**What are the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians?**

**Do visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians feel that their life histories and experiences have influenced their leadership praxis, philosophy, and identity as leaders? If so, how?**

**Theme 1- Fitting In:** Either through the pressure to integrate or to assimilate into mainstream society

A major finding in this study is the pressure visible minority principals and vice-principals who are immigrants or children of immigrants felt to integrate or to assimilate into mainstream culture. Not only did they feel the pressure to fit in but the pressure also came from their families. Several participants referenced needing to be “normal” or “average” as a way their families described fitting in with Canadian mainstream society.

Also part of the fitting in process, participants claimed not only adopting English as their main language as well as customs, holidays and traditions but also adopting behaviours and mannerisms that were more acceptable to mainstream Canadian society.

All of the participants were immigrants or children of immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s to BC or other Western provinces in Canada during a time of unprecedented growth in immigration from Asian countries (Hawkins, 2004; Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). Up until the 1960s, Canada had in place discriminatory immigration policies in which mainly European and Americans and their relatives were allowed to immigrate to Canada with a small quota coming from parts of Asia (Hawkins, 1998, 2004; Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). With new immigration regulations introduced in 1962 and 1967, Canada became more open to immigration beyond Europe and the United States (Hawkins, 1998, 2004). By 1969, Canada accepted 161,531 immigrants with 23% from Asia (Hawkins, 2004).

When examining this particular theme on fitting in, I had to look beyond the educational literature to place it in a scholarly context. Literature from other social science fields like sociology, psychology and political science were consulted. According to this literature, it is not uncommon for immigrants (first generation) and children of immigrants (second generation) to feel powerful pressure to integrate or to become as indistinguishable as possible from the larger, dominant, mainstream society (Paat & Pellebon, 2012). As several research participants described, integrating or assimilating was a necessary part of their transition or upbringing during their early days in Canada to avoid discrimination and isolation.

Although Canada was accepting more immigrants from countries other than Europe and the United States, immigrants from Asian countries were very much in the minority during the late 60s and early 70s. The intense feelings of being minorities were described by participants like Aarti, Paul and Nureen who all mentioned living in small

rural towns where their families were the only visible minorities in town. They also mentioned the feelings of isolation and the pressures to conform. Given the context of the early to late 1970s, the time in which their families were locating in small BC communities, and the relative newness of a more open immigration policy to individuals outside of European countries and the United States, it is not a surprise that visible minority families would attempt to not only integrate but assimilate as much as possible. The weight of this feeling is well captured in Aarti's comment "...imagine being the only brown family in town."

Participants described mixed feelings around their success with fitting in. Some felt that they achieved a level of integration or assimilation if they did not experience discrimination. While other participants mentioned that no matter how hard they tried to adapt acceptable manners, behaviours and customs from mainstream society, they still struggled with truly fitting in because of the visibility of their ethnicity and culture. Thus many expressed challenges with belonging or fitting in whether through assimilation attempts or integration because of distinguishable differences of race and ethnicity that continued to frame them as "other" compared to the dominant, white, mainstream Canadians. In other words, it almost did not matter how quickly or efficiently some participants adapted mainstream norms, behaviours and practices, the feeling of being an outsider because of their ethnicities and perceptions of their culture, ethnicity and race, persisted. Scholars also point out that even if first and second generation immigrants achieve mainstream norms and linguistic fluency and educational attainment, discrimination may also materialize because now visible minority immigrants can also be viewed as a competitive threat for economic and social advancement (Reitz &

Sommerville, 2004; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). As mentioned in the last chapter, Nureen described a similar phenomenon when her sister was acknowledged for talent and abilities in high school. The results for her high achievements were excused away by community members in that her accomplishments were a result of her colour and ethnicity and the fear teachers had in being labeled racists had they not showcased her talent. So in that example Nureen provided, conforming to social norms like auditioning for plays and competing in pageants still prompted negative reaction because her family was seen as a threat. This example also demonstrates the type of racism and discrimination faced by people of colour in that their skills and competence are not attributed to their abilities.

Classic assimilation theory proposed that assimilation was a necessary part of the process for immigrants to be accepted into the dominant culture of a host country and most certainly critical for upward socioeconomic mobility for immigrants (Warner & Srole, 1945; Greenman & Xie, 2008). However contemporary sociological scholars do argue that classic assimilation theory does not easily apply to immigrants who are of colour (Alba & Nee, 2003; Gans, 1992; Harris, 1999). After the world wars, immigration by Europeans who were not Anglo-Saxons, such as the Irish, Italians, Jews and Ukrainians struggled for acceptance in the United States and Canada (Hawkins, 1988; Lupul, 1983). But by the second generation and third generations, racial and ethnic boundaries for white immigrants became more fluid in mainstream society (Greenman & Xie, 2008). However for visible minority immigrants the ethnic and racial boundary is less fluid (Alba & Waters, 2011; Platt, 2014; Xie & Greenman, 2011).

Jung (2009) undertook a detailed critique of the treatment of race in classic assimilation theory and concluded that assimilation theory scholars "...often miss and misrepresent how race structures what they refer to as 'assimilation'" (p. 389). He pointed out that classic assimilation theory applies more to European immigrants who had a more seamless or straight-line process of incorporation into a core white Anglo mainstream society which was aided by being white and having similar cultural norms to the host society. However for visible minorities who are ethnically and racially different from the Anglo mainstream, conformity and assimilation is not easily achieved. Romero (2008) is equally critical of assimilation theory for its lack of understanding and critical thought between the intersection of immigration, assimilation and race. Contemporary scholars argue that the visible minority status of racially and ethnically diverse immigrants hinders their integration let alone assimilation into white, dominant society (Abramitzky, Platt, & Eriksson; 2014; Alba & Nee, 1997; Hawkins, 1988; 2004; Lupul, 1983; Portes and Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Zhou, 1993). Scholars like Portes, Rumbaut, and Zhou developed alternative theories to classical assimilation theory which claim that for ethnically and racially diverse immigrants, their assimilation path is segmented. Segmented assimilation theory is often applied to understanding visible minority experiences in assimilating to a host society. This theory claims that often minorities who are racially, culturally, or ethnically different from the host society, only adopt certain aspects of the host society but not all because they continue to identify with their cultural, racial or ethnic groups (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). This segmentation also occurs because visible minorities are not accepted into all privileged aspects of the host society and thus the assimilation process for visible minorities is not

as simple or straight as it might be for an immigrant who fits with the host society in terms of race and ethnicity. Paat and Pellebon (2012) add that for visible minorities, "... the journey to become an integrated resident is not always smooth. Skin colour and other racial physical markers can become a hindrance for successful integration" (p. 128). The rationale for their conclusions stem from the phenomenon that assimilation is about "nation-building" and determining who belongs and who does not and belonging is more often than not defined by race, ethnicity and colour of skin (Jung, 2009; Paat & Peelebon, 2012). This rationale may help to explain some of the feelings expressed by participants regarding their challenges with truly fitting in to Canadian mainstream society.

To further frame this theme on fitting in and the discussion of challenges for some participants to fit in with mainstream culture, Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers some concepts worth exploring. CRT proposes that although concepts of race are socially constructed, race and racism is a normalized part of life in pluralistic societies like Canada and the United States (Delgado, 2001; Ladson-Billing, 1998). As such race acts as an influencing factor in acceptance and belonging within society. Although some participants in this study, such as Aarti, Nureen and Gurmeet, recognized that their visible difference, in terms of skin colour, kept them from completely fitting in, Paul also felt that he did not truly fit in with the mainstream, dominant society because his personal narrative and life experiences were so different. Thus, his sense of not fitting in also created an additional separation and added to his feelings of not knowing where he belonged. CRT also supports this feeling described by Paul. CRT explains that the stories and narratives of racial minorities over time become displaced and marginalized due to the dominance of cultural or social meta-narratives of dominant, mainstream society

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Despite Paul's success in adopting manners and behaviours that resembled mainstream culture - to the point that he downplayed and even at times rejected his ethnic traditions - he continued to feel challenged with where he fit in because of the differing narratives between himself and his white peers.

Stanley's (2011) work on racism in Canada, in particular within BC, also helps to shed light on this theme about fitting in. Stanley's work has focused on the construction of Chinese racialized identity through the examination of personal stories and historical events. Stanley shed light on the invisible process of racialization that took place in historical contexts to allow for race-based discrimination which essentially created a category for identifying Canadian identity that excluded Chinese immigrants. Stanley proposes that "enduring racism and racialized meanings are constantly being invented...and reinvented" (2011, p. 148). He explains that the construction of racism is not often stable because "...the processes of power fix them" or bend them for the benefit of the dominant culture (p. 149). Thus racialized minorities' attempts to fit in can be extremely difficult because the "norm" set by the dominant culture is always shifting to create and perpetuate exclusion.

**Theme 2** - Identity: confusion and tensions around personal and cultural ways of being

Within this theme on identity, Research participants commented on the difficulties of growing up as a visible minority within a culture different from their own ethnicity and heritage. Through these experiences, they developed what scholars have termed a hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994 & 2004; Joseph, 1999; Kapchan & Strong, 1999), meaning identities that combine their traditional ethnic backgrounds with identities that conformed to mainstream norms. The movement between the two cultural identities was

described as being fluid and allowed the participants to move between the two worlds, their home world and the mainstream world (Bhabha, 1994 & 2004). But there was also an emphasis on hiding one's cultural identity, especially during the participants' school years. In addition, hiding their cultural identity led to feelings of regret in later years. Thus regret emerged as a sub-theme within the theme of identity. The feeling of regret relates to a loss of cultural identity or giving up too much of their ethnic culture to adopt a more mainstream identity. Although this feeling of regret was prominent, many research participants commented that now as principals and vice-principals they recognize a professional advantage to their work given their development of a hybrid identity. Their hybrid identity that draws elements from both mainstream society and their ethnic heritage allows them to relate and understand the needs of mainstream students and their families as well as the needs of visible minority students and their families. Aarti's comment below discusses this ability to understand needs and perspectives of the culturally diverse communities represented in her school. She said:

My life went from being very mainstream to now a combination of mainstream and South Asian. I now have a deeper appreciation and understanding of more than one culture. It makes it easier for me to transition and relate to the needs of many within my school community...I think I have a sense of how people live and the diversity that exists... (Aarti, Second Interview, lines 304-07 and 311)

Another major finding from the research data relates to issues of identity, in particular cultural identity development. Cultural identity as defined by the participants, focused primarily on skin colour, race and ethnicity. As part of this theme participants spoke about the challenges they faced in creating their identities as visible minorities and

learning to adapt cultural expectations from their peers at school. But through this process of forming one's identity, several participants commented about a feeling of regret in losing a sense of their cultural and ethnic identities. Ironically, in spite of the loss of cultural identities, research participants also recognized a professional advantage to having adopted identities that work well within the mainstream culture and yet allow them to identify with visible minority groups. Thus, both feelings of regret and professional advantage were identified as sub-themes within the theme of identity.

Erikson (1963, 1968, & 1982), one of the early researchers of identity formation approached identity theory from an objectivist and positivist stance. Although my study and research orientation is from an interpretivist and subjectivist view, Erikson's work does provide a foundation to understanding identity theory and to later theories that are relevant to my study. Erikson proposed that developing an identity is a life-long process, yet much of one's identity is solidified during adolescence and early adulthood (1968). Thus his theory is useful to my study which looks at the life histories of research participants and much attention is given to participants' formative years. For Erikson the construction of identity is tied mainly to biological and psychological developments and that identity comes from one's personal core that gives one a "conscious sense of individual uniqueness..." (1968, p. 216). He added that our main goal in identity development is to create a sense of continuity of self. The lack of sensing a self-continuity can create issues of identity and identity conflict. Erikson's conclusions on the need for creating a sense of continuity of self as a critical factor in identity development and avoiding identity conflict seems to apply to my findings in that participants felt a sense of identity conflict and confusion from not knowing where they belonged in terms

of the dominant culture and their heritage culture. I however disagree that identity is solely constructed through biological and psychological developments.

For me Erikson misses the social construction aspects of identity formation. Thus I turned to Stuart Hall (1990, 1996, & 2003) to challenge some of the positivist notions set by Erikson. According to Hall identity is a product of social construction and influenced by social and historical conditions and thus subjective which aligns more with my research approach and understandings. He points out:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact...we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside... (Hall, 1990, p.222)

Other identity theorists have extended Erikson's work by adding that one's environment also shapes their identity (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Josselson (1994) adds that identity formation involves the integration of a number of relational contexts. For example the feeling of inclusion or embeddedness especially during adolescence can impact identity construction. In this context, individuals construct their identity in relation to others and, in particular, within groups (Josselson, 1994). Markstrom-Adams (1992) also points out that ethnic group membership is one of the social contextual environments that influence identity. In the case of my study, one such group would be the dominant, white mainstream group or the participants' ethnic group.

But also according to Gee (2001), identity is defined as viewing oneself as "...a certain 'kind of person,' in a general context" (p. 99). He also argues that identity as a

certain kind of person is open "...to multiple identities connected not to [one's] 'internal states' but to [one's] performances in society" (p.99). This definition offered by Gee connects well to what the research participants described in terms of creating and re-creating their identities as part of expectations depending on the societal context of which they were part. For example, when at school as youths, participants recalled identifying with the mainstream culture and following the lead of their peers and at home taking on another identity that met more traditional expectations.

Sociological, psychological and cultural studies literature discusses in more detail the challenges faced by visible minorities in identity formation, especially for immigrant youth and second generation youth (Berry, 2001, 2006; Paat & Pellebon, 2012; Phinney, 2003; Rahim, 2014; Xie & Greenman, 2011). Studies from these social science fields have shown that cultural and ethnic identity formation can be particularly problematic for visible minorities as a result of traditional family pressures and peer influences. This difficulty in identity formation can lead to confusion of identity and understanding of one's self. But what also emerges is the ability to negotiate one's identity depending on the context. Given what is known about identity formation as articulated by some psychologists and sociologists (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1982; Marcia, 1966; Kaplan & Flum, 2010) identity construction is a life-long pursuit for the goal of creating an optimal self in one's social context. Yet, Erikson argued that identity formation is most critical during someone's youth (1982). I would agree with his claim in that the participants spoke at great length regarding their experiences and challenges with identity development during the early years of their lives growing up as a visible minority

immigrant or child of immigrant parents in a dominant culture different from their ethnic heritage.

In the case of the research participants in my study, many negotiated a hybrid or bicultural identity. This aspect of identity development, as a continuous process of change and negotiation, is supported by cultural studies theorists like Hall and Du Gay (1996) and Bhabha (1994, 2004). These scholars do not define cultural identity as simply a singular trait shared by a collective group of people that share a particular ancestry; rather it is constantly evolving being negotiated and renegotiated (Bhabha, 1994, 2004; Hall & Du Gay, 1996). I would agree with their claim and find the evidence from this study supports cultural identity as negotiated, fluid and differentiated based on life experiences. Bhabha (1994; 2004) also argues that culture and identity development for immigrants does not have to involve a static decision of picking one culture over the other but rather recognizing that minorities tend to position themselves “in-between” both cultural paradigms. Bhabha challenges the notion that hybrid cultural identities are binary (2004). He also claims that a “third-space” is created at the place of intersection between hybrid identities. In this third space there is no assumed hierarchy of identities. This is important because there is no rigidity in ways of being especially at the intersection of multiple identities (Bhabha, 2004). Bhabha goes on to challenge the notions of identity being fixed especially in terms of constructing a fixed idea of otherness (1994a). He says, “fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference... is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy, and demonic repetition” (p.66). For Bhabha (1994a) hybridity allows for

movement, deconstruction and reconstruction of identity that is constantly negotiated. He goes to say:

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the necessity of thinking beyond initial categories and initiatory subjects and focusing on those interstitial moments or processes that are produced in the articulations of “differences.” These spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of self-hood and communal representations that generate new signs of cultural difference and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation. It is at the level of the interstices that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. (p. 269)

Thus it is at the intersections that identity formation is negotiated to develop new identities. This means there are no pre-conceived identities, rather ownership and control is taken in the forming and reforming of identities at the point of intersection.

In addition, Urdan and Munoz (2012) tell us that children of immigrants often find themselves in the complex and confusing position of developing a personal identity that straddles two cultural contexts: the mainstream culture of the host country and the native culture of the parents. Urdan and Munoz (2012) also add that as adolescents and emerging adults, they try to figure out which elements of each broad cultural context to incorporate into their personal identity. Therefore they must develop their own interpretation of what each culture means to them. (Urdan and Munoz, 2012)

Kumashiro (2002) also discusses identity development as a reflection of power, values and social practices. In the case of my study, the power of the dominant culture

over the minority culture created tension between values, traditions and cultural norms. But the participants' abilities to negotiate their identities allowed them to regain some power and control during a time of struggle for identity formation. That is not to say that there was not some loss of control over identity development that has led to feelings of regret over loss of one's traditional culture. As adults, several participants felt regret for having given up too much of their ethnic culture to the point that they struggle with identity today. This confusion is understandable when framed within the theory of identity construction outlined by Berzonsky (1992) and Marcia (1966) who highlighted that an individual who has a strong sense of self is considered to be well adjusted. But if they lack an understanding or awareness of their unique qualities, then they will inevitably have identity issues or identity conflicts. This sub-theme of regret is also of interest as it emerges as an outcome to the theme of fitting in. Thus the intense pressure to fit in and to conform resulted in identity issues and regret over loss and confused cultural identities.

Rahim (2014) argues that for visible minorities', immigrants and second generation youths, establishing a consolidated bicultural identity "...involves conscious reflection about and resolution of their attitudes toward both their own cultural group and the majority group..." (p.17). Thus it is a highly reflective and self-reflective process. Platt (2014) also describes this process of identity development for visible minorities "...who continue to find themselves located as a minority or a marginalized group..." as developing a "pan-ethnic identity" allowing them "...to mix and match different pieces of each cultural repertoire" (p.49). This mixing and matching of cultural identity allowed the research participants to create an intersection between two or more diverse cultural

identities that helped them navigate daily life in their youth. As adult professionals, several participants remarked on an advantage they now feel they have in their leadership positions as a result of creating an identity that bridged both the minority and majority cultures. Some saw this ability to transition between their hybrid cultural identities as a way of demonstrating an advantage through cultural competence in serving the needs of diverse students and students from the mainstream culture. This transition also demonstrates the participants' flexibility and adaptability, although none of them framed it in this way. Chin and Trimble (2015) also comment on this flexibility of visible minorities in leadership positions and refer to it as cognitive flexibility. The researchers indicate that "for those from marginalized or minority groups, their differences in social identities have contributed to a sense of cognitive flexibility – that is, being able to see different perspectives, to shift between groups, and translate between groups" (p. 103). They go on to say that "leaders with bicultural racial/ethnic/cultural identities are likely to demonstrate more cognitive flexibility" and that leaders with this flexibility in thinking are more able to respond to an ever changing world because of their own experiences with negotiating their identities as minorities in dominant, mainstream society (103). Portes (1996), in his empirical study on immigrant children, also noted that second generation youths have been described as "translation artists" as they struggle with and eventually learn to meet these disparate expectations throughout their childhoods (p. 45).

According to the research literature on visible minority formal school leaders, (primarily Black and Indigenous leaders) discussed in chapter 2, several researchers have grappled with issues regarding identity (Brown, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Fitzgerald 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2006, 2010, Lomotey, 1989, 1993;

McCray, Wright, & Beachum, 2007; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012; Tillman, 2004). But many described these issues as challenges that visible minorities faced in terms of being required to walk in two worlds. Fitzgerald's study of Indigenous principals concluded that the need to walk in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds created "...a sense of double identity" (2010, p. 100) that provoked internal conflict. Scholars who examined Black principal identity formation also found that research participants felt caught between two worlds and that trying to maintain their Black identity while conforming to white dominant mainstream society. Researchers drew from Dubois' (1903) concept of "double consciousness" referencing tensions felt by Black Americans who have to choose between their black identity and more mainstream American identity. But as some research has shown, Black principals have learned to alter or vacillate between communication styles and approaches that are acceptable in Black communities and mainstream society. In other words, they are able to adapt and switch approaches because their racial and cultural identities have helped them develop the ability to communicate and relate to various minority groups and the dominant, mainstream culture. Thus the findings on identity related to this study fits within existing studies on culturally, ethnically and racially diverse leaders from the educational leadership literature. But the findings from this study also vary from the discussions in the educational leadership literature in that the participants saw an advantage to negotiating aspects of their identity. This indicates that although there are challenges to managing multiple identities there is some control and power maintained by the participants in terms of how they negotiate and renegotiate their identities as leaders and as visible minorities in positions of leadership.

**Theme 3 – Mentorship:** the value of role models in the lives of the research participants and now being a role model especially to minority students and families

The research participants expressed the importance of mentorship in two ways: mentors who influenced them and their own roles as mentors to young people. Many talked about a mentor who had been instrumental in their own lives. Mentors appeared at different times in their lives. Sometimes a mentor inspired them in their youth to go into teaching as a career; others helped them navigate difficult times. Almost all participants talked about mentors as being instrumental in their development as teachers and as leaders and had it not been for such mentors, they may not have gone into education. In addition, several mentioned modeling similar teaching and/or leadership styles that they saw demonstrated by their mentors. Furthermore, many participants commented that their mentors helped them achieve self-acceptance especially regarding their cultural diversity and future potential.

Almost all participants mentioned a teacher, a coach or another administrator that supported them during a time of transition or helped inspire them to go into teaching and later into formal leadership positions. Their mentors and role models were diverse and not necessarily from the same cultural and ethnic background of the participants who were instrumental in inspiring and supporting the research participants. Also in most cases, the mentoring from a role model was informal and came from someone who took an interest in the lives of the participant and helped guide them with support to see their potential. In addition, the presence of a mentor or role model is found in the research literature as it relates to inspiring future teachers and aspiring administrators (Hull & Keim, 2007; Jones, 2008; Tillman, 2003). Evidence of the importance of role models is also found in the academic literature regarding visible minorities, specifically Black

teachers and administrators (Brown, 2005; Fuller, 2013; Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong, & Holtam, 2010; Reed, 2012; Strong, 2005). Reed's research on educational leaders found that a strong support system and mentoring can help to encourage minority teachers into formal leadership roles (2012). His study also reiterated "the importance of culturally based mentoring programs..." because they had a direct impact on the development and retention of leaders of colour (2012, p. 17). However, in the data from my study, mentors were not necessarily from the same cultural background. In fact, the instrumental mentors for Aarti, Nureen, Gurmeet and Paul were teachers and a coach from the dominant culture. But it was their mentor's persistent support and genuine interest in who they were that helped them get through some difficult times in their lives.

As a result of the mentoring they received, many participants felt strongly about being a role model to their students, staff and teachers. Certainly evidence does exist in the educational literature of principals identifying as mentors as part of their professional identity (Brown, 2009; Scribner & Crow, 2012). But in this study there was especially a focus on participants seeing themselves as mentors to visible minority students as a way of demonstrating that they could also become teachers and leaders someday. For the participants they expressed not seeing themselves reflected in the school system and as a result feel it is important to model the potential and opportunities open to their visible minority students. This finding is shared in both historical and contemporary literature on principals (Brown, 2000; Echols, 2005; Lomotey, 1987; Pang, 2001; Rousmainere, 2007; Tillman, 2004). In both Rousmainere's (2007) and Tillman's (2004) research on the historical importance of Black principals, they both pointed out that Black principals who were identified as role models and mentors to Black students and the local communities

prior to the desegregation of the American school system. But contemporary literature continues to show the value of a minority principal and/or vice-principal to the academic success and retention of racially, ethnically and culturally diverse students (Brown, 2000; Echols, 2005; Lomotey, 1987; Pang, 2001). However data from this research study did not indicate that minority principals and vice-principals should only lead schools with large populations of minority students. The data from this research study showed the importance of having a visible minority formal school leader at schools with populations predominantly representing the white mainstream, majority can serve as role models to breakdown stereotypical perceptions of visible minorities. Gurmeet believes his presence at a school that is 99% white was a way for him to actively dispel myths about what someone with his ethnic background can do. He had to deal with explicit racism as a visible minority school leader in his community but he approached these issues by demonstrating his competence and ability to the job. Thus he had to prove himself trustworthy and worthy of respect in his school.

As part of this finding, a concern was expressed about feeling isolated as a visible minority principal or vice-principal and a lack in connecting with others who are in similar positions and have similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Isolation for principals is discussed in the literature in terms of loneliness that can occur given the tasks associated with this position (Loder-Jackson, 2005, 2012; Reed, 2012). But added to isolation, culture, ethnicity and skin colour, feelings of isolation can be exacerbated. Fitzgerald (2010) talks about the isolation that can occur for visible minority leaders, she mentions

...attempts to recruit those who are identified as under-represented has frequently meant that there are single employees or employees from one or several identified under-represented groups scattered throughout an organization or across its numerous sites thereby reinforcing not only their differences from others, but their isolation” (p.97).

Participants also discussed the potential of burning out being one of the few visible minority leaders in their district and feeling like they needed to be accessible at all times especially for visible minority students and families. The literature on Black principals echoes a similar concern. Research has indicated that Black principals often feel burdened to fix structural problems like inequities in educational policy and as a result may face burnout issues due to the extra stress and pressures (Coleman & Campbell-Stevens, 2010; Jones, 2002). In a situation where participants did connect informally with other administrators who are visible minorities with similar cultural and ethnic backgrounds, there were feelings of shared narratives and experiences that resulted in fewer feelings of isolation and loneliness.

**Theme 4** - Connectedness: strong relational bonds with minority students and families

Research participants felt a strong connection with visible minority students and families as a result of their life experiences and cultural identities. They expressed a feeling of empathy and understanding toward immigrant and visible minority students. A sense of shared experience created ease of communication and relating to minority communities. All participants recognized that minority students and families found them perhaps more approachable - given their diverse ethnic backgrounds - than teachers and administrators from the dominant, mainstream culture. The ability to connect and relate

to minority students and families went beyond the fact of speaking a language other than English; it had more to do with understanding and accepting diverse cultural norms. Several participants commented on using personal stories as a way to build relationships and establish trust with minority students and families. The use of personal stories emerged as a sub-theme within connectedness. Also, at times, some participants felt their connectedness to diverse cultures allowed them to have greater courage to deal with culturally sensitive issues. As part of this discussion about connectedness, participants expressed concern about how teachers and administrators from the dominant culture react to visible minority students such as perceptions regarding integration, lack of integration or diverse family contexts. Some even expressed that the need for cultural understanding was part of larger social justice issues within education. Thus research data indicated that participants became resources to staff and teachers when managing various cultural issues with minority students and families. Ultimately, participants indicated that their ability to connect with diverse communities allowed them to better meet the needs of ethnically and culturally diverse students and families.

Research participants consistently spoke about the greater sense of connectedness with visible minority students and families. Many reference this connection as a result of their own life experiences as visible minority immigrants and children of immigrants. Participants spoke about their feelings of empathy, understanding and awareness of concerns that might be present for visible minority families and students. Some participants felt they could be bolder to have frank conversations with minority of similar backgrounds to their own and thus giving them the courage to say what mainstream administrators would fear saying.

This feeling of connectedness for administrators who have similar cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds with students and families within their school communities is discussed in the academic literature. For example researchers including Benham and Cooper (1998), Mack (2010), Lomotey (1989) and Haar and Robicheau (2009) who have examined, in particular, Black principals in their leadership role have found that Black principals identify with a deep connection towards Black students in the schools they lead. Lomotey (1989) points out that the Black principals in his study felt strong ties to their Black students and as a result were motivated to focus necessary attention on Black students to improve student engagement and academic achievement. As such the Black principals were more likely to engage families of Black students and the broader community to generate support for school initiatives and decision making. In addition, Lomotey concluded that Black principals from his study demonstrated a commitment to the education of Black children, a compassion for and understanding of their students and of the communities in which they work. In particular, they understood the societal pressures and tensions and had an overall confidence in the ability of all Black children to learn (p.131). Similar to Lotomey's findings, I too noticed that the visible minority principals and vice-principals in this study had a willingness to engage with families of minority students. Also, given their cultural backgrounds, they were able to understand the context that many visible minority students and families were dealing with. For example, Paul talked about dealing with a South Asian boy whose mother had challenges with disciplining him especially given her in-laws reactions against discipline and structure for a male child. He was able to recognize and empathize with the mother's lack of voice and power in her family situation.

In addition, participants felt having some knowledge of diverse languages allowed them to be more approachable and thus connected to the needs of visible minority students and families. Both Nureen and Sanjay commented on the relief parents feel when they realize that they can communicate with the administration and get their point across given a common language. However going beyond language, there were also feelings of connection and a sense of understanding of the family and personal narratives of visible minority students and families. Although some participants noted that white administrators were attempting to learn languages spoken by their diverse student populations they were critical of white administrators' abilities to understand the stories and backgrounds of their minority students and families. Research also indicates that individuals from the white majority mainstream cannot easily understand what it is like to be a visible minority (Delgado, 2001). As such, they have benefitted from the privilege of being part of the dominant culture and have no or limited experience of dealing with negative stereotypes and cultural images that disempowered minority groups. Therefore having a shared narrative was felt to be even more important than having language skills to communicate with visible minority families. In addition, several participants discussed how they used storytelling and sharing of their experiences to build a connection with visible minority students and families. Byrd and Stanley (2009) also comment that stories and shared narratives among marginalized individuals help to build trust and connection. In addition, CRT can be applied here as CRT helps to expose stories as counterstories to the meta-narratives of the dominant culture, which are shared by minorities (Calmore, 1995; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT proposes that societal - and in this case educational structures - are based on criteria associated with white, dominant,

mainstream society and that minorities sit as outsiders (Delgado, 1989). But a way for minorities to gain power, acceptance and understanding is to share their stories (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). In addition, Delgado and Stefancic (2001), suggest that the counterstory subverts mainstream reality by viewing it through the lens of minority culture and experience. Through storytelling and counterstory telling, some of the principals in this study helped to legitimize the experiences of their visible minority students and families which thus help to subvert feelings of marginalization. As Calmore (1995) suggests, “how voice is expressed, how voice is informed, [and] how our voice differs from the dominant voice” (p. 320) is respectful of experiences of minorities and allows those on the margins to build connection and community through shared experiences and understanding. The participants in this research study were able to make those connections with the sharing of their stories.

In addition to the literature on Black principals’ feelings of connection with Black students and their families, there are limited studies on Indigenous women principals that support similar findings. Fitzgerald (2010) studied the experiences of Indigenous women’s principals in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. One of her major findings was that Indigenous women leaders were deeply connected to their Indigenous communities and families. That deep connection allowed them to understand the challenges Indigenous students and families have with bureaucratic structures that educational systems can impose that are in opposition with Indigenous ways of learning and constructing knowledge (pp. 100-101). Fitzgerald noted that her participants felt that Indigenous cultural practices “...that are embedded in the importance of kin, family relationships, a strong sense of spirituality and connection with the past, present and

future, mutual obligations, collective action and preservation of cultural practices...” were in sharp contrast to current educational practices which focus on the individual in only the educational setting and do not acknowledge the community and history around individual learners (p.100). Fitzgerald further noted that Indigenous principals were better able to serve the diverse needs of Indigenous students and families given their own life experiences and connections to their communities.

As part of this theme, several research participants also noted the importance for administrators to ethnically and culturally reflect the community they serve. They felt being of a similar background to their diverse student communities allowed them to easily create connections and to understand the needs of visible minority students and families. In addition, several participants commented that connecting with ethnically and culturally diverse students and their families and serving their needs better was a social justice issue. This approach to them was a moral act of creating inclusion. As scholars point out, with social justice leadership there is a moral dimension of wanting to make a difference for those who have been underrepresented or marginalized in the system (Dantley and Tillman, 2009; Evans, 2007; Jean-Marie et al, 2009; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). One such way of demonstrating social justice is deeply caring and connecting with students and families from diverse backgrounds (Dantley and Tillman, 2009; Rivera-McCutchen, 2014). Finally research participants felt ensuring success for minority students stemmed from the belief that “... the best indicator of a good school may well be the extent to which its image reflects the needs and desires of its parents, teachers and students” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 15).

**Theme 5** – Promoting Diversity through supporting inclusive practices and trying to find a fit with multiculturalism

The theme of promoting diversity included comments on how participants felt a strong need to create an inclusive environment at their schools. Promoting diversity also involved discussions about current limitations to multicultural education and how to broaden it out to be more meaningful not only to diverse student populations but for the entire student population. The need for more meaningful multicultural education was also seen by some participants as a social justice issue and a way to create equity for culturally diverse learners. Some also felt that promoting diversity was a way to help visible minority students feel more comfortable in displaying their diverse, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, participants expressed the need for more diversity among staff, teachers, and administrators in education. They felt that greater exposure to diversity critical for students and families in the hopes that it might change attitudes towards difference and would help to break down cultural and racial stereotypes. But participants felt that it was even more critical to have more administrators from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds not only in communities with large visible minority populations but also at schools that have predominantly large mainstream student populations. As part of this discussion, some participants talked about their personal frustrations with competing for administrator positions. They believed that their challenges to secure such positions depended on their cultural backgrounds rather than their educational competence and skills. Many felt strongly about wanting to see more representation of visible minorities in formal leadership positions as a way to breakdown stereotypes.

In the academic literature several authors discuss the importance of having more culturally diverse leaders in formal positions of school administration echoing similar

findings expressed in this study (Brown, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Lomotey, 1987, 1989, 1990; Reed, 2012; Tillman, 2002, 2004). Most of these academic studies focus on Black principals, but many of the conclusions are the same indicating the need for more ethnically and racial diverse staff in school systems as way to engage diverse students and to breakdown stereotypical images of ethnic and racial minorities (Blackmore, Thomson, & Barty, 2006; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003 Brown, F., 2005, Brown, T., 2009).

Another major finding in this research study relates to participant interest and focus on promoting diversity as part of creating a more inclusive environment. As part of promoting diversity, participants discussed their thoughts regarding multicultural educational practices in BC. However, many expressed concerns about current multicultural educational practices and its limitations to address the needs of diverse student populations in a relevant and meaningful way. In addition, as an extension of promoting diversity, participants mentioned the need for more diversity among staff and teachers but most importantly at the principal and vice-principal levels.

According to several scholars (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Riehl, 2000), the predominant approach to dealing with diversity in the school system has been assimilation. The belief that homogeneity and acculturation approaches are appropriate for all learners, regardless of diversity, has become an out-dated paradigm especially given the heterogeneous populations of public schools (Rayner, 2009; Riehl, 2000). Participants echoed this same belief and concern that school environments have become far more diverse in population compared to when they were students, yet educational practices continue to favour assimilation approaches to diversity. Given this dynamic, many participants expressed that the school system did not quite work for them during

their youth because they did not see themselves reflected in the curriculum. Aarti and Paul talked about being the only “brown” kid in a class or school. In fact several participants commented that there were few to no culturally responsive pedagogical approaches in school when they were students during the 1970s (Epstein, Mayorga & Nelson, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Thus they grew up during a time when a diverse students language, heritage and cultural norm were not only absent from the curriculum but even highly discouraged. As a result of those early experiences, many believe promoting diversity through inclusive practices such as culturally responsive pedagogy an essential way to meet the diverse needs of their students. This was certainly reflected with respect to being inclusive of cultural diversity like encouraging the use of one’s home language, feeling more comfortable bringing traditional food to school and dressing in cultural or religious clothing.

Existing academic literature does examine the need diverse leaders have to promote diversity within their schools and how they go about it. But as mentioned, the majority of this discussion centres on the need for Black principals to promote diversity (Carter, 1995; Lomotey, 1987, 1989, 1993; Loder, 2005). For the most part the themes around promoting diversity for Black principals focuses on improving academic achievement for Black and other ethnic minority students and increasing the presence of Black teachers and administrators within the school system. Research indicates that schools led by an ethnically diverse principal and comprised of an ethnically diverse teaching staff complement diverse students academically and not having such diversity can be a hindrance (Lomotey, 1993; Brown, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1990; Pang, 2001) to their success, especially in situations where ethnically diverse students represent

the majority of a student population. In addition, another way in which Black principals argue to improve student academic achievement is to diversify the curriculum by embedding more multicultural approaches within the curriculum (Lomotey, 1987, 1989, 1993).

The principals and vice-principals in this study did not specifically speak about improving student academic achievement among visible minority students as part of this theme on promoting diversity. They did however speak in great detail around the challenges to do with multicultural education and broadening out multicultural practices to be more inclusive, culturally responsive as a way to promote diversity. Within their school contexts, it became clear that participants would like to see a more localized approach to multicultural education. Several also regretted typical approaches to multicultural education which tend to be more on the contribution and add-on approaches, meaning focusing on celebrations of various ethnic holidays, traditions, and customs (Banks, 1999; Fleras & Elliott, 2002). For example, Gurmeet talked about focusing on Indigenous education and language education even in his school that is 99% from the white, dominant, mainstream. Although the majority of Indigenous students within his community attended an Indigenous school, Gurmeet felt it was extremely important for the students of his school to understand and learn about the local Indigenous culture. For Gurmeet promoting diversity by teaching his students about the local Indigenous cultures was the best way to expose students to diversity and ultimately his goal was to change negative attitudes towards difference. This was relevant and important to him because his broader community is situated within a larger Indigenous community. He did not believe in simply adding it on as a one day event but integrating it

into classroom instruction on weekly bases by engaging Indigenous elders to teach in his school. In addition, Gurmeet was concerned that his students living in a mono-culture would be lacking the necessary skills and attitudes to live, learn and work in more diverse communities. Thus, Gurmeet's approach and goals to multicultural education extend beyond the additive approach (Banks, 1999) to embrace a more transformative approach with the hopes to create deeper meaning, understanding of another culture with the potential to reduce prejudice (Banks, 2013). Boyle-Baisse (1996) "...multicultural educators do not settle for cultural celebration... Rather, they seek to understand one's cultural development to grasp how it impacts education and to utilize this information to create equitable school and social environments" (p.22).

Also part of this theme, several participants commented about the difficulties they faced with broadening out multicultural education to meet the needs of their ethnically diverse student population. Paul, Nureen, Min-Jun, and Aarti spoke of this challenge and in some cases commented that they would rather not do anything related to multiculturalism if it was seen as tokenism (Fleras & Elliot, 2002). For some participants, they were struggling to make their holiday celebrations more diverse to reflect their student population. Given that in some cases, the school population could reflect 85% to 90% South Asian students, there still seemed to be resistance to include holiday celebrations beyond the traditional mainstream holidays. Some participants mentioned the struggles with teaching staff to add more culturally diverse holidays to the curriculum. Reasons given for the lack of diversity focused on limited teaching time. But several participants felt this was an excuse and even Aarti mentioned in her school a deep embedded resistance to diversity and meaningful multiculturalism that invoked a

“visceral response” from the teaching staff. This evidence from the data supports the view that the school system still reflects the majority, dominant mainstream society and there are subversive and overt ways in which assimilation and conformity are expected within the educational system. This also reflects structural racism that exists within schools. Thus, BC schools continue to promote the ideologies and ways of life of the white, Anglo-Saxon majority (Riehl, 2000; Villa and Thousand, 1995). Cultural hegemony constrains visible minority principals and vice-principals from making structural changes to promote diversity to reflect not only the diverse student population but also to meaningfully reduce stereotypes within their schools. Riehl points out the ongoing conservative nature of schooling where the myth of neutrality is played out and continues to lack critical reflection to be truly inclusive (2000).

In addition, CRT can apply here as well in that the resistance of teachers and staff to “accommodate” diverse holidays in spite of the large numbers of South Asian students indicates discrimination and intolerance to diversity. Also according to culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1994), “...a student’s life-experience is legitimized as they become part of the ‘official’ curriculum” (p.180). Without that integration, a visible minority student’s life-experience remains at the margins. Delpit (2006) also adds that culturally relevant multicultural approaches uses familiar experiences from children’s lives that they connect with at school; thus making the educational environment more inclusive. Some of the research participant’s attempts to include diverse holidays that represent the culture of a diverse student population at school would be one way to foster a sense of inclusion.

**Theme 6** - Change agents: empowering others, building capacity and relationships to create positive change

Participants identified professionally as change agents. For many, being a change agent and being a leader were one in the same; in other words, the terms were viewed as being synonymous. Being a change agent was the way research participants enacted their leadership to create positive social change in their schools and to deal with inequities. However the participants in this study saw being a change agent as not just someone who must implement changes but rather someone who actively seeks change that creates equity as part of a social justice approach. Part and parcel with being change agents, participants expressed how they empowered others and built capacity through focusing on relationships. Their success in creating change came from being flexible, collaborative, leading by example and being willing to ask critical questions about practice. Ultimately, the main goal in being a change agent expressed by the participants was to enact positive change in creating a better learning environment for diverse students and connected this goal with social justice approaches. Many commented that this desire to create change in the school system for the betterment of diverse students stemmed from their own prior experiences of challenges and difficulties as visible minority students.

As change agents, participants also expressed their focus on empowering their colleagues, staff, and students by building on their strengths in order to facilitate effective change. The participants also viewed building capacity and leading by example as critical aspects of how they modeled being a change agent and thus building trust with their teachers and staff. Being a change agent can be seen as part of the professional identity of the principals and vice-principals in this study.

The notion of leaders as change agents has been included in both contemporary (Chamley, Caprio, & Young, 1994; Fullman, 1991; Gresso & Robertson, 1992; Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong & Holtam, 2010) and historical educational leadership literature (Fleming, 2010; Johnson, 2006; Rousmaniere, 2007, 2009, Tillman, 2004; Wolcott, 1973). Most researchers are in agreement that principals, even historically, have been consistently required to manage change to a degree; however, Wolcott (1973) was one outlier who believed from his ethnographic study of Principal Bell, that principals were managers of the status quo. That being said, the majority of contemporary scholars agree that being an effective leader is tied to managing change as pointed out by Theoharis (2009) "...exemplary leadership helps create the necessity for change" (p.8). To further that statement, Fullan (2001) adds that exemplary leadership is instrumental in making change happen (p.15). Hall and Hord (1987) also stated that "...throughout our years of research and experience, we have never seen a situation in which the principal was not a significant factor in the efforts of schools to improve through change" (p.1). Finally, Cushman (2005) added that now principals are being asked to be a catalyst for change, fostering continuous school enhancement in a rapidly changing environment.

In the realm of education many argue that rapidly changing policies and ongoing educational reforms require school administrators to adjust to change and guide their teachers, staff and students through a change process (Chamley, Caprio, & Young, 1994; Fullman, 1991; Gresso & Robertson, 1992; Mogadime, Mentz, Armstrong & Holtam, 2010). According to the research literature, leaders who are concerned about social justice and equity connect their work with being a change agent (Brown, 2006; Shields, 2004, 2010; Theoharis, 2007). That claim in the literature is supported by the evidence

from this research as many of the participants in this study connected being a change agent with ensuring equitable and inclusive practices.

In addition, the literature also defines change agents as demonstrating transformational leadership (Foster & Tierney, 1989; Shields, 2004, 2010) in that these leaders create a readiness for change and are able to articulate a vision that is relevant and connected to the values of the school community. Thus transformational school leaders build a commitment to change, foster growth in the capacities of others, and collaboratively create conditions for change to be implemented effectively (Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996). Research participants like Sanjay, Gurmeet, Manuel, and Min-Jun built trust with their staff and teachers by modeling collaborative, inclusive practices, and leading by example. They also built on the capacity and strengths of others as a way to foster change. Through those approaches, principals and vice-principals were able to implement a more inclusive approach to diversity.

## **Conclusion**

The 6 themes and 3 sub-themes identified in the data indicate the ways in which the research participants for this study conceptualize their leadership and the events that have influenced who they are as leaders. Their enactment of school leadership is thus informed by their experiences with: trying to fit in with mainstream culture; identity issues and cultural identity development; connecting with minority students and families; needing to promote diversity; being mentored and now being mentors; and influencing change. The concluding chapter discusses the research findings in relationship to the original research questions and summarizes my overall learning from this research study.

I also discuss unexpected findings, review the limitations of this study, and suggest potential areas for further study.

## Chapter Seven

### Implications and Conclusion

This final chapter discusses the implications of the data gathered and analyzed for this study which also includes how the data relate to the original research questions. As part of this discussion unexpected findings are discussed along with areas for further research.

When considering the main research question participants did identify a link between their experiences growing up as visible minority immigrants or children of immigrants with how they chose to lead. Several times during the interviews, participants would link their present views, beliefs, and approaches to leadership relating to events, experiences of issues from their past. Therefore, a connection was made between who they are as leaders and how their experiences have influenced them. Sanjay put it best when he said,

I think, you know, that it is meaningful to go back and look at our own experiences and those help shape who we are as leaders...and the factors that sometimes, positive or negative have influenced us and it is important for us to make sure that you address them in who you are and the way you behave now.

(Sanjay, First Interview, lines 337-339)

The findings related to this first research question also supports existing knowledge on assimilation theory with respect to how participants relayed their experiences with trying to fit in with the dominant culture. Participants described a challenge with fitting in with the dominant, mainstream white society in spite of their efforts to adapt to cultural norms. Their experiences highlight their difficulties to

completely being accepted by the dominant culture because of their visible difference. Also the participants' experiences of being immigrants or children of immigrants, in other words, first and second generation visible minorities linked with the existing literature on critical race theory which proposes that racial structures are systemic in society and often these invisible structures can explain the exclusion felt by visible minorities.

Participants' experiences with identity formation also support some of the existing literature on the topic and challenged others. Erikson proposed that one's adolescence or youth experiences are instrumental to the development of one's identity (1963, 1968 & 1982). In the case of the research participants, I would agree with Erikson. Participants repeatedly described their experiences from their youth and how much they still carry with them the learning that happened at that time. Many still live with the identity confusion that resulted from their experiences of growing up as a visible minority during a time when there were fewer visible minorities and less diversity of students in BC. Identity theorists (Marcia, 1966; Berzonsky, 1992) also suggest that an individual must have a fully integrated and coherent identity structure in order to be well adjusted. I would say that the research from this study would challenge that suggestion. However, in spite of the challenges many participants described, especially around a regret to losing elements of their culturally identity in order to conform to the dominant culture of their host society, many created a hybrid identity that they now see as an advantage to their leadership. As a result, research participants feel they can relate better to the issues faced by visible minority students and families. This finding adds to the educational literature

pertaining to the experiences of visible minority leaders and what diverse leaders can bring to their leadership roles.

### **Unexpected Findings**

The data revealed the formation of multiple identities for research participants. Identity focused primarily on cultural identity issues that related to a feeling of loss for having given up too much of one's cultural and ethnicity identities in order to adopt a mainstream stream identity that fit in with the dominant society. Also as part of the discussion on identity, some participants recognized, as adults, the development of a hybrid identity that combined elements of both mainstream societies with their cultural and ethnic roots that has given them an advantage in their professional capacity to relate to the needs of their wider school communities. The literature discussed from the broader social sciences (Berzonsky 1989 & 1994; Bhabha, 1994 & 2004; Gee, 2000) context supports that identity and identity formation is multifaceted and socially constructed. Thus identity is seen as something that is fluid and can be negotiated and renegotiated at various stages in one's life depending on the context and situation. This was different from the discussions of identity especially around culturally, ethnic and racially identity discussed in the education literature (Brown, 2009; Cote & Levine, 2002; Johnson, 2006) which seems to continue to discuss the identities of racially, culturally and ethnically diverse leaders as needing to walk in two worlds. In that discussion the need for diverse leaders to work in both the dominant mainstream world and their minorities' worlds seems to see this movement between two worlds as being potentially an ongoing issue rather than a place of negotiation and even opportunity.

In addition, professional identity as it related to being a change agent also emerged from the data. In spite of these multiple identities, issues of gender were not a prominent theme or sub-theme from the data but gender only arose in a minor way as part of the overall discussions of identity. I was surprised by this as I was fortunate to have had three female participants in this study. Min-Jun referenced a concern that she did not want her community to think she became the principal because of being a female. She wanted to be acknowledged that her placement in the position was a result of her competence and abilities rather than a gender equity or affirmative action initiative. Also, Aarti mentioned briefly that she recognized that her identity as the first South Asian woman to hold a principalship in her district was revolutionary. She saw herself as a symbol of potential as a South Asian woman leader working within a district that is composed primarily of a South Asian community. Aarti recognized who she was and that in the role she was in represented inspiration of what women can achieve among a culture that has traditionally placed women in a marginalized and inferior capacity. Other than that reference by Aarti, little discussion arose about being female and what women bring to leadership.

The lack of data on gender and leadership is probably a result of my lack of questioning on this topic. Often in the literature, research that focuses on diverse leaders, gender identity issues do come up especially in terms of how sexism can be a barrier to a female leader's intelligence and ability to lead. For example, the research of Skrla (2000), Bloom & Erlandson (2003), Loder (2005), Cantor & Bernay (1992) and Fitzgerald (2010) indicated that women principals of colour face sexism in addition to racism in their formal positions of leadership. In studies that focus on Black female principals,

researchers have discussed that Black female principals are compelled to exhibit motherhood traits like caring, compassion, and personal concern for students, especially for students of colour (Loder, 2005; Skrla, 2000; Vinzant, ). Scholars have called this approach to leadership “othermothering.” Black female principals who embody “othermothering” traits see being nurturing and caring as salient qualities to how they understand, interpret, and identify with their roles as principals. Although Nureen, Min-Jun, and Aarti exhibit traits of concern and compassion for their students, they neither discussed motherly approaches to their leadership that would fall within the “othermothering” identification nor did they highlight sexism as an obstacle to their leadership.

Also, I was expecting to have found more in the data that related to concerns of the participants’ leadership as a result of their cultural, ethnic, and racial identities. Only Nureen expressed a concern that others may have perceived that she was in her position of leadership because of her colour versus competence to do the work. Nureen and Gurmeet briefly mentioned the need or pressure they felt to work harder than their White counterparts to prove their abilities to minimize any perceptions of limitations in their abilities based on their racial, cultural and ethnic background. Again, I would have expected more discussion on this topic with other participants but it did not arise. In the literature regarding principals of colour, especially Black principals, concerns regarding how race, culture and ethnic influence perceptions of their leadership is a consistent finding (Jones, 1983; Madsen & Mabokela, 2002). Perhaps this type of finding may be more common in the literature for Black principals in the US context because of the racial, cultural and ethnic conflicts that exist – and have existed in the past – in that

country. It is not to say that racial, cultural, and ethnic conflict and tensions do not exist in Canada or BC; perhaps it just is not as overt as in the US context but more covert and thus not a clear and obvious theme in this study. In addition, the US has had a history of affirmative action to deal with structural inequities that has caused a negative perception of advancement of people of colour to be associated with their race, ethnicity or culture versus abilities and competences (Hines & Bryne, 1980). Canadian employment equity policies attempt to create equity in hiring practices but are much more passive and superficial compared to the more active and direct stance of affirmative action.

I also found that the findings from this study did not include much mention of the management aspects of being a principal or vice-principal. There was limited discussion on the fundamental management or business side of leading schools. Only Sanjay and Gurmeet talked about managing a budget, financial accountability and strategic planning, the more quintessential management aspects of being a principal. For the most part the findings showed more content on personal identity issues and when professional identity data arose it fell more in the context of being a change agent focusing on relationship building, team building, empowering others, building capacity and allowing teachers and staff to grow.

In addition, I did not go into this research intending to explore transformative leadership but it arose as an unexpected finding. My main interest was to look at how the life histories of the research participants influenced their leadership and identities. But through this exploration it was clear that the principals and vice-principals were trying to create change and transform the existing structures in educational settings. This change they were trying to create linked with their deep connection with visible minority

students and families and their attempt to promote diversity for greater inclusion. From their own experiences, participants realized the identity issues that can arise for visible minority students and participants wanted to foster ways to engage visible minority students. Participants talked about wanting the educational process to be more open and accepting of diverse cultural backgrounds and that current structures still emphasize an exclusionary approach. Although they struggled with ways to create more cultural inclusion, especially with some of the resistance that arises with school environments and even with teachers, participants were actively trying to find ways to meaningfully add diverse content to the student learning experience.

Finally another unexpected finding relates to the lack of discussion regarding socio-economic segmentation as part of the theme on fitting in. The discussion on the theme of fitting in focused primarily on the pressures to assimilate and integrate on cultural norms to be accepted into mainstream society. Discussions in the literature regarding assimilation and integration often comment on socio-economic impacts for immigrants as part of the assimilation and integration process (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009; Portes, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). In that discussion, scholars point out that Canadian and American society not only has divisions and variations in terms of race and ethnicity, but also in socioeconomic divides. Issues related to socio-economic status as immigrants and children of immigrants did not come up in the research data with participants.

## **Research Boundaries and Delimitations**

This life history study of visible minority principals and vice-principals in BC who are immigrants or children of immigrants has some obvious delimitations as a result of boundaries I placed on this study. Embarking on this study, it was not my intent to generate data that could be generalized. Rather my intent was to focus on highly specific data that relates the life experience of a marginalized group to highlight their voices as to who they are as leaders. I limited this examination to first and second generation visible minorities to see how transitioning to a new culture as an immigrant or child of immigrant may have influenced a principal or vice-principals identity development and praxis as a leader. Thus third and fourth generation visible minorities were excluded from this study, further limiting the number of potential participants and as well as not including the unique experiences and potential learning from later generations of visible minority principals and vice-principals on this study. Also the scope of this study was limited to BC to keep the scope manageable but is missing the voices and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are immigrants or children of immigrants from other Canadian provinces. No doubt broadening out of the participant pool by including other provinces could have revealed new findings or simply added to the riches of existing findings.

The life history research design allows for the use of in-depth interviewing which was employed as the main method for data gathering but not limited to just interviews. Life history methodology allows for the consultation of participant journals, diaries, albums, and other personal ephemera. As mentioned earlier, I was only able to view such items with a limited number of participants and not granted permission to reproduce such

items. Of the participants who shared diary entries and photos, these items added a richness to their stories that lives within my memory of my discussions with them but are not translated as data into the overall research findings. Although, the findings are missing some of that richness that personal ephemera can provide, I am nonetheless grateful to have had the opportunity to share with participants in such a deep and meaningful way. Part of the explanation for lack of personal ephemera was that most participants had such items put away in storage places and it would have taken time to find. But I do wonder if trust issues were at play here as well. I was asking for participants who barely knew me to share such personal artefacts with me, a student researcher; thus as a novice researcher no doubt my limited research abilities has impacted this study.

Another factor that impacts this study is my reliance on literature from the US context. To find relevant academic research on diverse leaders in formal school leadership roles, I relied on publications that related to the experience of Black American principals. Although this literature provided valuable insights and allowed for parallels and differences to be drawn with participants in this study, some of the contextual issues are quite different between the two countries. Unfortunately there is little discussion in the Canadian context about racially, culturally, and ethnically diverse formal school leaders.

In hindsight, there are many lessons I have learned. Although I was initially worried about not having enough participants and I ended up accepting all that expressed an interest, I would next time add another layer of screening to bring the number of participants down. With a smaller sample, I would have had the funds to travel and

conduct interviews in person rather than undertaking the majority of interviews via teleconference. The data I received from the face-to-face interviews I was able to conduct is beyond a doubt more powerful and rich. Face-to-face contact affords that intimacy and trust building that can happen far more naturally than over the phone and not to forget the value of body language that adds emphasis and meaning. I might consider Skype but would worry about consistency and reliability of the technology during an in-depth interview. Also with fewer participants, I would have added a third interview. A life history approach aligns well with multiple interviews and I think would have led to even further trust built between myself and the participants. I also realize that my interview skills were extremely lacking during the first interviews. I failed to probe on numerous occasions and left responses from participants hanging where a well-placed probe to pursue an opening could have led to some invaluable insights. Although I tried to revisit some of those openings in second interviews, something was lost in terms of timing and relevancy that an in the moment probe would have satisfied.

### **Research Implications and Recommendations for Future Study**

There has been little research conducted on visible minority principals and vice-principals in BC and Canada. What little literature that exists on the leadership of diverse formal school leaders in Canada tends to examine Indigenous leaders, but again this is also scant and is worthy of much more study. Leaders with culturally, ethnically and racially diverse backgrounds have much to offer in terms of how leadership is enacted and the influences on their leadership praxis.

Although this study contributes to the sparse research on visible minority principals and vice-principals in the research literature, it does raise further areas of research inquiry. Further study is needed on how ethnic and cultural background influences one's leadership background. This could extend beyond immigrants and second generation visible minorities. Opportunities exist to broaden out the participant pool to include third and fourth generation visible minority principals and vice-principals to see if there is a difference in experiences and findings from first and second generations. In addition, this study focused on formal school leaders in administrative roles like principals and vice-principals, but broadening out the scope to include teacher leaders who are visible minorities to explore how they identify as minority leaders and what life experiences have influenced their praxis of leadership would be of value as well. Furthermore a more in-depth study on women of colour formal school leaders in Canada could be undertaken to explore the intersection of gender and ethnicity, race and culture with enactments of leadership and leadership identity.

Other possible areas of exploration could be a closer examination into the leadership of visible minority principals or vice-principals of schools that are predominantly representative of mainstream society. This type of study could look closer at issues of perceptions and possible attitude changes towards visible minority leaders. For example, does having a visible minority leader help to dispel myths about race, ethnicity and cultural background among staff, teachers, parents and students. Could this also help with racism and discrimination reduction? Finally, more in-depth study might be undertaken on what multicultural education, diversity and inclusion look like in a school with 85 to 90% visible minorities. I think in Canada, we still struggle to define and

enact multicultural and culturally relevant pedagogy that is inclusive of culturally, ethnically and racially diverse students. Further exploration is warranted as to what multicultural and culturally relevant pedagogy look like in contemporary Canadian schools and how schools are successfully creating more inclusive environments for their local contexts. Another potential area of study could be how diverse leaders influence teacher practices for culturally diverse students. Research participants commented about wanting to influence teacher practice to be more inclusive of cultural diversity and seeing that it was a significant part of their leadership role to influence such change.

The findings from this study do lend some insights to possible recommendations. For example:

1. Universities could consider creating more course content on minority and diversity issues in leadership in educational leadership/administration programs.

From this study, it is clear that research participants have much to offer discussions on educational leadership. Yet much of the scholarship on educational leadership represents the way mainstream leaders address issues of diversity using various leadership approaches including social justice and transformative leadership approaches. Missing from this discussion is how visible minority leaders lead in diverse school contexts and how their identities influence how they lead in such contexts. Course content that is more inclusive of minority leadership styles, issues and approaches could be added to educational leadership program offerings. Similar to culturally relevant pedagogy in the K to 12 school system, a more cultural relevant

approach to educational leadership courses may draw more culturally, ethnically and racially diverse, minority teachers to the program and into administration.

2. Administrative bodies could consider providing networking and mentoring for visible minority leaders

Several participants expressed feelings of isolation and need for professional connections and support from other visible minority principals and vice-principals. Both formal and informal opportunities for visible minority administrators to connect with colleagues through culturally-focused networking and mentorship opportunities would help with feelings of isolation. A suggestion could be made to the BCPVPA to include a chapter within the association for visible minority principals and vice-principals to connect, share experiences and build support. This suggestion does not mean to promote a separation between mentorship and networking that would be isolating for visible minority principals and vice-principals from the mainstream but a place where visible minority principals and vice-principals could share in a safe environment and with those who can relate to them because they have gone through similar experiences themselves.

3. Schools and districts should consider more meaningful approaches to multicultural education.

Multicultural education has been a topic of much discussion in the literature (Banks, Fleras & Elliot, Hesford, 1999). Findings from this study indicate that research participants struggle with ways to ensure more meaningful multicultural education that goes beyond token approaches. As Hesford mentioned, attempts to make curricula more multicultural and inclusive have ended up creating an “ethnic fast food franchises”

(Hesford, 1999, p. xxvii), where superficial acknowledgment of diverse cultures have entered the mainstream but foundational inequalities or meaningful inclusion go unaddressed. The real heart of the situation is focused on how to make multicultural education more meaningful and thus inclusive especially based on a school's own population. The one size fits all approach rolled out by most school districts continues to perpetuate a tokenism and temporary feel-good approach to inclusion of diversity. A recommendation on this would be for school districts that have large populations of diverse cultures, to have the opportunity to diversify and acknowledge special holidays that are culturally significant to communities in that district. Allowing for more local control would be a more social justice and inclusive approach. As Paul mentioned that for the 85% of students at his school that participated in the Vaisakhi parade but who did not have their major holiday at school acknowledged or even discussed. He believed that this is a social justice issue that needs a remedy.

Also part of this recommendation would be more coursework as part of teacher education programs and educational administration/leadership programs that focuses on diversity with specific attention to social justice issues and critical multicultural approaches. Teachers and administrators equally need further exposure to culturally relevant pedagogical approaches that are meaningful and respectful of diverse student populations.

## **Conclusion**

The research in this study has sought to highlight the voices and experiences of BC visible minority principals and vice-principals who are immigrants or children of

immigrants through a life-history exploration. Ultimately my goal was to examine their voices and experiences to understand how past experiences have shaped the research participants identities as principal and vice-principals and if such experiences have influenced their leadership praxis. Participants shared their experiences with trying to fit in with a culture different from their ethnicity and heritage. These attempts at trying to fit in through either integration or assimilation in their youth and formative years have created issues of ethnic and cultural identity confusion. However, these experiences have also led the participants to feelings of advantage in leadership. That is, they have developed “hybrid identities” that merge elements from both the dominant culture and their ethnic backgrounds. This blending of identity allows them to walk in both the mainstream world and minority worlds, thus shows their cognitive flexibility and their capabilities of leading a multitude of school settings. In addition, through their experiences of trying to fit as visible minorities, the research participants talked about their empathetic connections with diverse students and their families as well as the need to promote diversity within their schools through relevant and respectful multicultural practices. Furthermore, several research participants commented about the connections they had during their youth with mentors and role models that have deeply influenced who they are and how they choose to lead. Now in leadership roles, they recognize that they too are role models to larger community members who value seeing culturally and ethnically diverse individuals in positions of leadership. Also, within the roles they occupy, they recognize the need to be change agents to make a difference to the school leadership landscape in their communities.

Finally it must be emphasized that the educational leadership field is ripe for more diverse voices, stories and perspectives. As Gonzales, Moll, and Amanti (2005) stated, “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (p.x). Coming back to Riehl’s quote which launched me on this study: “if practice is connected to identity then it matters who administrators are” (200, p. 70), then I believe the experiences shared by the principals and vice-principals in this study about who they are, their identity issues and influences on their leadership have added further value and knowledge to understanding diverse ways of leading. Since leadership is socially constructed, then our understanding of who our leaders are takes on greater significance and leadership is then influenced by ethnicity, race, and culture and, thus, not neutral in this context (Astin & Leland, 1991; Cantor & Bernay, 1992; Eagly & Carli, 2004; Klenke, 1996).

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## Appendix



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Human Research Ethics Board  
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Victoria British Columbia V8W 2Y2 Canada  
Tel 250-472-4545 Fax 250-721-8960  
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Appendix A

## Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: <b>Shaloo Bedi</b>	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER <b>13-255</b>
UVic STATUS: <b>Ph.D. Student</b>	Minimal Risk - Delegated
UVic DEPARTMENT: <b>EDCI</b>	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: <b>06-Sep-13</b>
SUPERVISOR: <b>Dr. Helen Raptis</b>	APPROVED ON: <b>06-Sep-13</b>
	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: <b>05-Sep-14</b>
PROJECT TITLE: <b>Life Histories of Diverse Leaders: Perspectives from Visible Minority Principals &amp; Vice-Principals</b>	
RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER <b>None</b>	
DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING: <b>None</b>	
<b>CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL</b>	
This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.	
<p><b>Modifications</b> To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.</p> <p><b>Renewals</b> Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.</p> <p><b>Project Closures</b> When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.</p>	
<b>Certification</b>	
This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.	
<p>Dr. Rachael Scarth Associate Vice-President, Research</p>	

13-255 Bedi, Shaloo

Certificate Issued On: 06-Sep-13

Appendix B

# eNews

the BCPVPA's weekly electronic newsletter  
October 4, 2013



## In this issue ...

Research request  
Leadership Opportunities  
Positive Behaviour Supports  
Planning Ahead  
Shelley Green goes to Prince George

### Invitation to Participate

## The experiences and life histories of first generation, visible minority principals and vice-principals working in the BC school system.

A University of Victoria researcher would like to interview six to eight BCPVPA members with diverse backgrounds, especially those who have transitioned from another culture to Canada or are the first generation of a family to be born in Canada, and to discuss how their life experiences may have shaped their approach to leadership. Interviews will take place between late October and November, in person, over the phone or Skype. For study details and contact information [click](http://bit.ly/1fOp0Vl) or visit <http://bit.ly/1fOp0Vl> to read a letter about the project from the researcher.

### Leadership opportunities continues next page

**Coquitlam** invites applications for principal positions. Applications are due no later than 4 pm on Oct 10. [Click](http://bit.ly/183w6bV) for information or visit <http://bit.ly/183w6bV>

**Langley** is seeking applications for District Principal of Aboriginal Education. In this high-profile position, you will advocate for Aboriginal education throughout the District. With a mission of closing the achievement gap for Aboriginal children, you will encourage the re-emergence of Aboriginal culture, pride, language and traditions. Applications must be submitted by 12 pm, Oct 15. [Click](http://bit.ly/1dSC2g8) for information or visit <http://bit.ly/1dSC2g8>

**Langley** is seeking applications for an anticipated vacancy or vacancies as elementary vice-principal. Experience working with behaviour programs, Aboriginal programs, students with special educational needs, counseling or programs of choice is an asset. Applications must be submitted by 12 pm, Oct 15. [Click](http://bit.ly/18lvq7H) for information or visit <http://bit.ly/18lvq7H>

The BCPVPA offers  
**Leadership Opportunities**  
listings free of charge.

Districts are also able  
to place display ads.

For rates, email  
[rwilliams@bcvpva.bc.ca](mailto:rwilliams@bcvpva.bc.ca)

**Delta** is seeking applications for Secondary Vice-Principals (one immediately and one anticipated for September 2014). Applicants should possess proven educational leadership, teaching and community relations expertise as well as: a minimum of five years full time equivalent successful teaching experience; graduate level training in areas such as Supervision, Curriculum and/or Administration. Applications must be submitted by 4 pm, Oct 15. [See the ad on the next page.](#)

**North Vancouver** is seeking applications for potential vacancies as 1) principals and 2) vice-principals. Ideal candidates must possess exceptional organizational and leadership experience and fluency with the District's values and goals as contained in its 10-year strategic plan. Applications for either position must be submitted by 4 pm, Oct 15. [Click](http://bit.ly/18vPMzV) for information or visit <http://bit.ly/18vPMzV>

eNews/1



## Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

June 2013

Dear Principals and Vice-Principals,

My name is Shailoo Bedi and I am a PhD candidate with the Faculty of Education. I am embarking on a research study for my dissertation which focuses on the experiences and life histories of first generation (the first generation of a family to be born in a particular country or being a naturalized citizen of a particular country – *Oxford English Dictionary*), visible minority principals and vice-principals working in the BC public school system.

This research will focus on how one's experiences and life histories have influenced both one's identity as a leader and how one approaches diversity, social justice and inclusion. My formal research questions are:

What are the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians?

Do visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians feel that their life histories and experiences have influenced their leadership praxis, philosophy, and identity as leaders? If so, how?

In the academic educational literature, there is much discussion on how school leaders, including principals and vice-principals have addressed issues of diversity in schools through social justice and inclusionary approaches. But in this discussion peripheral attention is given to the voice and identities of diverse school leaders. It is my hope to add to the leadership discussion on diversity, inclusion and social justice in education through this life history examination. The process of developing a life history study for this research involves talking with individuals, who are first generation, visible minorities, who are working as principals or vice-principals in the BC public school system. I will be using open-ended interview questions and the interview process will take 1 ½ hour for the initial interview with a possible 30 to 60 minute follow-up interview. The interview questions will be given to participants in advance of the interviews so that they can make an informed decision on whether or not they wish to participate in this study. During the interview process, you are welcome to share any personal effects such as photos, letters, or journals which may provide further context to an experience or story you are relating. There is no requirement to share such personal effects and is completely voluntary to do so. If you do decide to share such items during the interview, I may request to make copies or scans of photographs, letters or journal entries for further data collection and for display in my final manuscript only with your signed consent. You have the right to decline such a request. As a life history

examination can be quite personal in nature, if a participant would like to consult with a counsellor who specializes in diversity and culture, a name and contact information will be provided.

I plan to conduct 6 to 8 interviews and highlight the learning and themes in a dissertation with a goal to highlight the voices of visible minority administrators in the academic education literature. Although I will ensure confidentiality by using pseudonyms and position and will not provide schools names or regional locations, I must let potential participants know that it will be difficult to provide complete anonymity with this particular study and participant focus as the sample population may be quite small. If there are any concerns about this, I am happy to discuss further. I expect the interviews to take place between October, 2013 and November, 2013. Interviews may take place in person, over the phone or Skype.

If you are interested in participating in this study and are willing to share your experiences and life journey, please consider contacting me at your earliest convenience. Or if you may know of someone who may be interested in participating in this study, please feel free to forward my contact information. Also, my supervisor is available to answer any questions regarding this study. Our contact information is:

Shailoo Bedi, PhD Candidate  
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250-721-7776; [hraptis@uvic.ca](mailto:hraptis@uvic.ca)

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Shailoo Bedi

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**Research Project: The Life Histories of Diverse Leaders: Perspectives from First Generation,  
Visible Minority Principals and Vice-Principals**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “The Life Histories of Diverse Leaders: Perspectives from First Generation, Visible Minority Principals and Vice-Principals” that I am undertaking as part of the requirements for a PhD in Social and Cultural Foundations Studies in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria. This project is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Helen Raptis. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-7776 or email [hraptis@uvic.ca](mailto:hraptis@uvic.ca)

Please review this consent letter prior to your participation in this study.

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this enquiry is to examine in-depth the experiences and life histories of visible minority, first-generation Canadian administrators in the public school system. The research will focus on how these experiences and life histories have influenced both their identity as administrators, and how they approach diversity, social justice and inclusion. Furthermore, I want to know if their identity as a minority informs their leadership praxis, and how their understanding of social justice, inclusion and diversity influences their ability to lead in a way that promotes these three areas. My formal research questions are:

What are the life histories and experiences of visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians?

Do visible minority principals and vice-principals who are first- or second-generation Canadians feel that their life histories and experiences have influenced their leadership praxis, philosophy, and identity as leaders? If so, how?

**Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because there is a lack of published data about visible minority, first generation Canadian public school administrators. Also, as school

environments become more and more heterogeneous (with an increased diversity in all areas of student attributes), there is an increased need to examine the leadership of administrators who have the capacity to be more inclusive based on their personal experiences and life histories as first-generation, visible minority Canadians.

In addition, the academic educational literature discusses how school leaders, including principals and vice-principals have been trying to address issues of diversity and education through social justice and inclusionary approaches. But in this discussion peripheral attention is given to the voice and identities of diverse school leaders. Those school leaders who themselves are from marginalized, non-dominant backgrounds, specifically visible minority leaders.

### **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have identified as a first generation, visible minority principle or vice-principal and you are willing to participate in this life history study.

### **What is involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

- Participating in an open-ended interview which will take about 1 ½ to 2 hours with a possible follow-up interview for 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the results from the first interview. The interviews will take place in person for participants working locally, while Skype or teleconference will be used to interview distance participants. Interview questions to be asked will help to explore your experiences transitioning to a new country and your work as a principal or vice-principal. I also hope that through the interview to develop insights on life experiences and journeys that have influenced your leadership identity and praxis.
- A review of personal artifacts such as photos, personal letter or journals that provide context to the life history study, but this is not a requirement. Personal objects may help to trigger memories or reflections about significant events in your life that may be relevant to this study. These artifacts can be discussed during the interview phase. If you agree, I will scan photographs, personal letters or journal entries for the dissertation. If there are others in the photos, I will not use them or I will crop out the images with Photoshop or blacken out the image. These scanned images will be stored in a password protected computer repository or print copies in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home office. I will immediately return any personal items that have been scanned or copied and all scanned or print images will be destroyed once the project is complete.

Written notes will be taken during the interviews, and the interviews will be audio recorded.

**Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, particularly in terms of the time required to participate in the interviews.

**Risks**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research. These may include a level of discomfort in discussing possible negative memories or reflections about your life journey and experiences. To prevent or to deal with these risks I will provide you with a copy of the interview questions ahead of time and during the interview will ask if you would like to take a break from the interview or continue another time if any discomfort arises. I will also ask if you would like to skip a specific interview questions or withdraw from the research process at anytime. I will strive to conduct the interview in a positive and supportive manner and I will protect the confidential nature of your comments. Also should you experience any emotional distress or discomfort and you would like to follow-up with a counselor who specializes in issues of diversity and culture, please feel free to consult with Ms. Grace Wong Sneddon (250-721-6143).

**Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an opportunity to reflect on your life experiences in an in-depth, reflective manner, and to note how these experiences have informed your leadership praxis and identity. This may lead to further awareness and personal and professional development. You will also be adding to the body of knowledge on leadership praxis and leadership for social justice, inclusion and equity especially from the perspective of a first generation, visible minority principal or vice-principal.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be integrated into the study and your audio recording and transcripts will be destroyed.

**On-going Consent**

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research over the initial and follow up interviews, I will email you a week before the follow-up interview, reminding you of the interview and asking if you still consent to participate. Your email reply confirming your consent for the second interview will be recorded and filed for future reference.

**Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity, I will use pseudonyms, position titles, and change any identifying information. I will not use the name of your school or identify location of your school.

Please note that anonymity is limited given the potential small pool of participants and the fact that you may have been referred to this study by another individual. Please note that if you provide photographs, diary entries or letters as part of this research, you will no longer be anonymous in the dissemination of results.

### **Confidentiality**

This research study will provide a description of the life histories and experiences provided by you and other research participants, based on transcripts from recorded interviews and information obtained from personal artifacts you may wish to share as background context. I will only use information in the dissertation that consent that I may use and anything that you indicate as “off the record” will be held in strict confidence. These recordings, transcripts, and any personal information that you provide will be treated as private and confidential, will be stored in a secure filing cabinet or password protected electronic files. Passwords and data coding keys will be stored separately. As principal investigator, I will be the primary person working with the data. Interview transcripts and documentation may be examined by members of my dissertation committee, and can also be shared exclusively with the subject of the interview, by request. For any artifacts that you have given permission for me to include in the dissertation, scanned, digital images will be stored in a password protected computer file or any print copies stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. If there are others in the photos, letters or journal entries, these identifiable images or references will be removed either via Photoshop or by blackening out.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following:

- The dissertation for my PhD will include chapters devoted to the learning that comes from the interviews. The final dissertation will be printed for limited circulation in the University and is available online through the University of Victoria Libraries.
- I will prepare conference presentations and journal articles that explore aspects of the finding from this study, subject to acceptance by the presenting agency.

### **Disposal of Data**

Interview group data will be stored in audio files, as well as an MS Word document (for transcripts); both types of files will be stored in a password-protected user account. During the study these data will be stored in UVic’s Enterprise Data Centre online storage and backed up at the investigator’s home office on a password protected computer. Paper data (e.g. consent forms, notes) will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in researcher’s home office. Copies from participant’s personal effects such as photographs, letters or diaries will be scanned or photographed and stored with the interview data on a password protected computer. The

personal effects will be returned immediately after copying. Copies of personal effects will be destroyed at the end of the study.

All data will be stored until August 30, 2016. At that point, it will be destroyed. Original interview recordings, transcripts, and scanned images will be disposed of by erasing electronic data and shredding paper transcripts, photos and associated notes.

### **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include:

Shailoo Bedi, PhD Candidate	Dr. Helen Raptis
University of Victoria	Department of Curriculum & Instruction
PO Box 1800 STN CSC	Faculty of Education
Victoria, BC V8W 3H5	University of Victoria
250-721-8226; <a href="mailto:Shailoo@uvic.ca">Shailoo@uvic.ca</a>	PO Box 1700, Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2
	250-721-7776; <a href="mailto:hraptis@uvic.ca">hraptis@uvic.ca</a>

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
----------------------------	------------------	-------------

I grant the interviewer permission to audio-tape our interview.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I grant the researcher permission to scan and use photographs, diary entries, or letters that I have provided with identifiable information removed.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I grant the research permission to use my image in the results of this study.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix E: Participant First Interview Questions

- Were you born in Canada or did you move to Canada?
- If you moved here, when did you move to Canada? And where were you moving from?
- What were some of your or your family's reasons for immigrating?
- How old were you when you made the transition to a new country and culture?
- Describe what your early days in a new country were like for you.
- Did you attend school in Canada? Tell me what it was like.
- Describe 2 to 3 key moments or experiences in your transition to a new country that you feel were instrumental in your development.
- How do your early days/months/years in Canada influence your identity today? If at all?
- If you were born in Canada? Where did you grow up?
- What were your school years like?
- Describe 2 to 3 key moments or experiences in your early years that you feel were instrumental in your development? How do these early years influence your identity today? If at all? In early years, I mean birth to teenage years.
- What made you decide to go into teaching?
- How would you describe your time as a teacher?
- What drew you to becoming a principal/vice-principal?
- How do you identify with your role as a principal/vice-principal?
- What are your philosophical approaches to being a leader in the school environment?
- How does your leadership philosophy influence your leadership practice?
- What does social justice in education mean to you?
- What does inclusion mean to you?
- What does equity mean to you?
- What does being a "social justice" or "inclusive" leader mean to you?
- Tell me about a time when you feel you exhibited the qualities of a social justice and/or inclusive leader.
- What does being a first-generation, visible minority mean to you?
- How have your experiences with transitioning to a new country influenced you as a leader?
- How has being born outside of Canada influenced your professional development as a leader?
- How have your experiences being a first generation, visible minority influenced you as a leader? And how has it influenced your professional development as a leader?

- **This next question is completely optional.** Do you have any photos, letters or journals (personal artifacts) that you might like share that highlight significant moments in your life? Any artifacts that might add context and background to your life history are of particular interest.

**Appendix F: Second Interview Questions for Paul**

1. What brought your family to Squamish rather than to a larger city centre as new immigrants?
2. You mention that your parents experienced some explicit racism. What was the impact of this experience for them and your family?
3. You mention needing to be Canadian – tell me more about the pressure to be Canadian.
4. You mention having lost your identity growing up and starting to unpack that now. You also mention straddling 2 worlds growing up – how has that experience influenced your leadership practice and philosophy today?
5. When you went back to India and were told that you didn't belong there – what was it like to be told that?
6. You mention that as you get older you have started to really analyze who you are where you fit in – How has this self-reflection and self-examination helped you as a leader?
7. You mention that it is different for your kids today compared to when we grew up. How is it different now? What have you noticed?
8. How was your sister's experience growing up – different from yours? What does this mean to you as a leader?
9. Follow-up from the 1<sup>st</sup> interview – looking back on your K to 12 experiences – what are 2 to 3 key moments that were instrumental in your identity development today?
10. You mention that pressure to fit in growing up. What was that pressure like? And what does that mean to you today when working with ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse kids and families as a leader?
11. You mention overdoing things like manners – what were you over compensating for?
12. How has losing your Punjabi impacted you?
13. Why is it surprising to you to be a VP at the school you are at?
14. You mention the influence of your music teacher – how has he impacted who you are today as a leader? In terms of your style, your philosophy?
15. You mention experimenting with drugs and alcohol because you were trying to figure out where you fit. How did you become aware that identity issues were related to how you were feeling?
16. What do you think has been the cost of trying so hard to fit it?
17. You mention teaching changing you, how did it change you?
18. How has your self-reflection and self-awareness impacted your leadership development?
19. You mention that classrooms today are much more multicultural. What are the benefits and challenges of this?

20. You mention that as a teacher you encouraged sharing each other's different narratives. What outcomes were you hoping for in this sharing? How did this impact your students? And what did it mean to you to share them?
21. Sounds like originally you had some resistance to go into leadership? Why?
22. You had another great experience of connection with a teacher – this time at university with Hartej Gill. Tell me more about this connection and what was inspiring about her and her work?
23. You mention that you see your role as helping, empowering and moving people forward. How have you done this in your role?
24. You mention feeling like you and your cousins growing up in North Vancouver were a weird group – in what ways did you think you were weird?
25. When you realized that others had a similar narrative to you – what was that impact of that realization?
26. You mention that tolerance is the lowest form of acceptance – how have you as a teacher, administrator, helped to promote your students, teachers, etc to move beyond tolerance?
27. You mention that your school is 85% South Asians – yet there is no time to celebrate Indian holidays and festivals – that you aren't placing as much emphasis on who they are and what their narrative are – other than not discussing holidays, etc. what are other issues of diversity would you like to discuss that you aren't? what would be the response if you raised this?
28. You mention the story of the kindergarten boy who was misbehaving and you unpacked the family situation – and the Punjabi mom who was so isolated and under pressure from her husband's family. You were able to understand the cultural issues there and empathize with the mom. As a leader, how have you promoted understanding of various cultural norms to other teachers/administrators?
29. You mention feelings of shame and guilt on the loss of your identity and lack of cultural identity. How has your experience influenced you as a leader? How do you try to reconcile those feelings of shame?
30. What qualities, traits and attributes do you bring to being a VP?

### Appendix G: Second Interview Questions for Arati

1. You mention that your family attended Sunday school. Why do you think that was?
2. On p. 4 you mention that “we didn’t know [we] were different” – Different from what? What contributed to you feeling that way? Looking back on that what are your thoughts?
3. What was it like for your parents being teachers in Nelson, a small BC community?
4. Why do you think your parents decide that your family would be “brought up as Canadians”? And how did they implement this and achieve this?
5. On p. 7, you mention moving to East Van from Nelson at 8 years old. You refer to East Van as inclusive. Tell me more about the inclusion you felt. What contributed to that?
6. On p. 8 and 9, you mention that you didn’t realize that you were different even if others had noticed. “. . .I didn’t realize that when people looked at me that they didn’t see me the same way as they saw my friends.” – What contributed to you not realizing this and when did you realize that it wasn’t that case?
7. You mention coming to Delta and it feeling like home and that people didn’t ask you questions like where is the best place to buy samosas, they just say you. – When did you experience this type of stereo-typing and what contributed to them just seeing you?
8. On p. 10 you mention that at your school you have been exploring identities. How have you done this at your school?
9. On p. 11, you mention that the early years were really confusing. Tell me more about that confusion.
10. You also mentioned that you feel most ill at ease in a crowd of Indians – because there are few in that group that have experience what you have growing up here. There are few who get it. What do you mean by “get it”? What feels missing to you?
11. On p. 12, you discuss that your identity has been changing since your marriage, that you are becoming more Indian. What does being more Indian mean to you? What does that look like to you?
12. Sounds like you have had a lot of critical conversations at your school, especially given the large Indo-Canadian population. That this has also prompted lots of critical questions regarding your upbringing. On p. 13, you mention celebrating Christmas with your family – “what were our parents thinking at the time?” This conversation is one that you are having at your school. What has those conversations been like –especially given the focus on Christmas but yet not on Diwali?

13. On p. 13, you mention that your parents wanted you to be Canadian and that they wanted you to identify with the broader culture – yet if they could go back, they would change that but at the time imagine being the only brown people in town. – Why do you think they changed their mind in hindsight on this approach?
14. On p. 14 – “when you look at me, I just want to be that person who’s just as Canadian as you are” – What was important to you about this? What has been the impact?
15. On p. 15, you mention having a wonderful teacher. Tell me more about this teacher. What made them wonderful?
16. When you transitioned to boarding school in England – what was that like? How did you adapt to your new environment? And again, when you transitioned to the US?
17. You talked a lot about your school years being focused on trying to fit in but fitting in meant not being yourself. What does that mean to you today and how does that experience influence how you choose to lead?
18. How have your experiences of going to school in India, Canada, the UK, the US – made you the leader you are today?
19. You mention that your time at the Indian boarding school was the “worst experience in my life.” What did that experience teach you? What did you get out of it?
20. On p. 22 you discuss a lot about being curious and having awareness of yourself and those around you. How has being curious and having a broader world view helped you in your leadership role?
21. You discussed the impact of seeing the original all white cast of Cinderella. That it made you feel that you could not be part of such a production because of your ethnicity. This made you place limitations on your career options. How do you in your leadership role try to get your students to see beyond race, cultural, ethnic limitations?
22. You mention some surprise in getting hired as a principal. “I can’t believe they hired me.” Why did that surprise exist? You also mention being encouraged to go into administration. Who encouraged you and how did they support you?
23. You reference that you have now been a principal for 2 schools and that you know that you make a difference. What differences have you made?
24. You mention that it is still a novelty to see so many Indo-Canadian teachers coming out of university. Why is that?
25. Tell me more about the leadership programs you have implemented at your school.
26. In our discussion about how you identify with your role, you mentioned that that role is bigger than you – that you are a symbol. Tell me more about being a

- symbol. What does that mean to you? Knowing that, how does it influence your practice as a leader?
27. On p. 31, you mention that your school originally had little to know parent involvement. Why do you think that existed? How did you change the school culture? What changes have you noticed as a result of more parent involvement?
  28. On p. 32 you talk about having grown up with there was no ethnic diversity. How did that experience influence what you choose to do around diversity?
  29. How do you feel you have prepared your students to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
  30. On p. 32 you mention that you feel that you have the capabilities to make children believe in themselves. Tell me about what these capabilities are?
  31. You also mentioned that social bullying existed at your school when you first came. How have you address the social bullying and changed that culture? What changes have you noticed?
  32. You mentioned your mother's work on creating inclusion. How did that inspire you?
  33. Tell me more about the principles that you stand by.
  34. The grandparent program sounds so interesting. What made you decide to do this program? What have been the benefits to the students; school and community in engaging the grandparents in this way?
  35. You talked about wanting to be perceived as more accessible and less too busy to be bothered by your teachers, staff, etc. You mentioned wanting to work on this perception. How has that gone for you since we last talked?
  36. You mention that being a visible minority means more to you now than before. Tell me more about why that it is.
  37. You discuss how valuable your life experiences have been to your understanding of cultures, diversity, etc. How has this been an advantage to you in your leadership role?
  38. You talk about your passion to make a difference to your school and community. What kind of difference have you made?
  39. You mention the connection you had when you meet other leaders that have had a similar experience to you – for example with JM. Tell me more about what it means to you to make such connections.
  40. On p. 62, we started to discuss a story about inclusion you were going to rely, but we got side tracked. Tell me about that story.

**Appendix H: Second Interview Questions for Gurmeet**

1. You describe quite a bit of family support in your early time in Canada. Looking back how instrumental was that family support to your success in transitioning to a new country.
2. You had a very responsible role for your family with working first and helping your siblings. How do you think that time has influenced your leadership development? You mention that it was a great experience for you. Tell me more about how it was a great experience.
3. On p. 4 of the transcript, you mention that you could manage yourself and thus could go to school. What do you mean by “manage myself”?
4. What did it feel like to have the encouragement from your family to go to university?
5. You mention that your early days at U of A were scary. What concerned you the most at that time? You mention being lost. How did that feel? And how did that experience influence your own leadership development?
6. Sounds like you had a very positive experience with your soccer friends. Other than learning English, what else did you learn from your friends?
7. You mention on p. 6 that life was so different coming from a small village. Tell me more about how life was different from your village to Vancouver. How did you learn to adapt?
8. On p. 7 as part of your early years in Canada and how that time influenced your identity today – you mention “...I guess maybe the way we grew up in a family, I really wanted to be myself and just again, I didn’t, I know I had, I made some friends, I never wanted to be like them.” What were they like and what way did you want to be like?
9. There seemed to be some concern of failure – p. 8 “I didn’t want to fail” – how might you have failed?
10. You mention making some friends “...but still it wasn’t like the way things were when I left India.” What was it like in India before you immigrated? How did it feel for you when your parents decided to immigrate?
11. You mention that you have a very determined personality and you don’t give up easily. Tell me more about how those early years in Canada have developed your personality, skills, traits, characteristics as a leader today.
12. You mention that your own experiences have helped you to be a better teacher especially when it came to differentiated instruction. You also paid special attention to students who were learning English. How did you do that, in what ways?
13. What were some of your reasons for resigning your position at Prince Rupert?
14. How was it to go back to India to visit?
15. How was your time in Campbell River isolating?

16. What was it like competing for so many VP positions and not getting them?
17. You mention that on hearing the experiences your friends were having in administration, that you were drawn to the work. What were those experiences you hear about that drew you to admin?
18. What types of support, issues, advice do students, parents, teachers and staff come to you for?
19. What are some examples of tough decisions you have had to make as a principal?
20. You mention supporting the staff and teachers so that they can support the students. How have you provided support to your staff and teachers?
21. On p. 17 you mention having had some difficult times with some parents while you have been principal. What were some of those difficult times? How did you get through them? What did you learn from them?
22. What changes have you noticed among the staff and teachers since you have been principal?
23. What has been the parent and community response since you have been principal of your school?
24. You mentioned including some language training around Hul-qumi'nun. How was this initiative received by the students and parents at your school?
25. You mentioned sharing a presentation to your school about your trip to India. What kinds of things did you share? How was it received?
26. Sounds like you try hard to incorporate diversity into everyday practice and that you go beyond the one-day multicultural day and to do more than the food sharing day. What changes have you noticed by broadening out this type of diversity in your school?
27. Tell me more about your observations on why the one day multicultural day at schools is limiting and not very effective.
28. The community you work in is still quite mono-cultural and that there is little exposure for the community to learn how to work with different cultures. What have been some of the initiatives you have implemented to change attitudes and to provide exposure?
29. P. 24 you mention "...there is still that attitude.." what attitude?
30. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a parent who had a stereotype of attitude that created a barrier for you? How did you respond? What has changed since?
31. You talk about having to prove yourself over and over again. Why do you feel you have to do that in your community and what impact or toll does this have on you?

## Appendix I: Second Interview Questions for Nureen

The questions for this interview are further probes to the 1<sup>st</sup> interview. I will draw from the transcript as well as ask broader questions based on themes from the 1<sup>st</sup> interview.

*On p. 3 of the transcript:*

1. you mention sucking it up? What do you mean by sucking it up?
2. you mention having to help your grandparents. What were you expected to help with?
3. You also say "...but I knew that for my friends, it wasn't like that." What do you mean it wasn't like that for your friends? How did you understand that there was a difference at that time between your friends and you back then? And now looking back, how do you make sense of it?
4. So now as a vice-principal, looking back what role did this play in your developed as a leader?

*On p. 4 of the transcript:*

1. You mention "So, as I got older,...identifying kids that were like that...trying to help them out as much as I could." Tell me more about kids "like that" – what do you mean? And why do you think you are drawn to these kids?
2. "I like being in that leadership kinda position...I feel comfortable in that position and that idea of helping other people." – What do you like about it?
3. You mention having a really good teacher. Tell me about that teacher or others – do you ever try to be like them? - In what way were your teachers caring? What connected you to them at the time?
4. You mention the "idea of protecting your culture" and having that sense since you were young. How did you protect your culture? What made you realise that you needed to do this?

*On p. 5:*

1. "I was interested in other people's cultures..." Why? Where do you think this interest? Was there something or someone that fostered it?
2. "we just kinda had to stick to gather." What were the pressures that brought you together?
3. "...had to figure things out on my own...I had nobody to talk... a lot of time in my own head." This sounds like a lot of pressure on someone so young. How did that make you feel at the time and now looking back on it what are your thoughts?

*On p. 6:*

1. How did your mother's situation influence you, shape you today? Being separated from her. Her own issues of isolation and depression.
2. You spent quite a bit of time being raised by your grandparents – tell me about how that has influenced you as a leader?
3. How did you feel to be the only minority family Logan lake?

*On p. 7:*

1. You mentioned have had to be normal – what did normal mean to you?
2. You went from a big town to a little down – describe that change and impact of that change.

*From p. 8 to end of transcript:*

1. Sounds like the teacher you met had a great influence on you – that he influenced you to help kids who are struggling. Tell me more about how he inspired you.
2. You describe the time when your parents withdrew their support because of university, what you wanted to study, you choice in relationships – how did this experience shape you today?
3. In what way did you want to be an influence to kids as a teacher?
4. Tell me more about how your teacher influenced your parents.
5. How do you think your experiences have helped you to help others? Especially the children you come into contact with?
6. You mention that you don't want kids to feel the way you did. Tell me more about the way you felt.
7. You mention that you want them to feel like there are ways out – like if they are trapped – did you feel trapped? If so, in what ways?
8. You mention wanting to work with parents to show them that they don't have to lose their kids. How have you been able to accomplish this?
9. What does it mean to you to be around immigrant children and the ethnic diversity you come into contact with at school? You mention that it has revitalized you – how has it done this?
10. How have you helped parents to deal with the cultural tensions?

11. How was your time teaching up north been instrumental in your development as a leader?
12. What were the similar problems that you noticed with aboriginal communities and your own experience?
13. You mention teaching adults was an eye opening experience – what did it open your eyes too?
14. You mention being happy to be back in the brown culture of Surrey? What fulfillment has it brought?
15. p. 17 you mention no longer being afraid – describe what you are no longer afraid of?
16. You describe some early resistance to going into administration. How do you feel about it now?
17. How have you pushed teachers to think about what's best for children? Especially when it comes to diversity and inclusion?
18. How does your leadership philosophy influence your leadership practice?
19. What do you see as some of the barriers to implementing a more social justice approach in schools?
20. What have you done to encourage inclusion at your school?
21. You mention that diversity means protecting your difference – how are differences under threat?
22. You mention that when we accept diversity, it allows kids to move forward. How do you promote this at your school?
23. You mention most administrators don't want to rock the boat – why do you think it might be easier for you to rock the boat?
24. Colleagues come to you for help when dealing with issues of diversity – why do they come to you for advice? What kind of advice do you give?
25. You describe it is an advantage to be brown – tell me more about this advantage and how this has served you as a leader?
26. What are the benefits of having a visible minority in a position of leadership?

**Appendix J: Second Interview Questions for Sanjay**

1. You mention not having been back to India as an adult other than for one quick trip – why do think that is?
2. In your early days in Canada, you mention being put into a grade lower than you should have been. Why do you think that happened?
3. Sounds like having had a good command of English was really helpful to you. Knowing this, how have you supported ESL learners at your school?
4. You talk about how lucky you were to have had 3 to 4 close friends from school that you hung out with after school as well. How do you think this helped you?
5. You also mention the value of having diverse friends from different nationalities was very helpful. So how have these early experiences shaped your leadership style today?
6. You mentioned that your personal characteristics lined up well with the teaching profession. Tell me more about these characteristics, traits, and attributes that aligned well with your chosen profession.
7. Sounds like you really enjoyed being a teacher and that you had a lot of success in connecting with the students. How did you build those relationships? What contributed to your success?
8. You mention that you are very active in your role as principal – that you are active, visible, and make a strong effort to connect with the students. How do you go about doing this? What motivates you and what differences do you see from this effort?
9. Tell me more about the skills, attributes, and characteristics you bring to your leadership role.
10. Describe some of the initiatives that demonstrate being an effective leader.
11. Why do you feel you have to be an effective change agent? What is so critical about being a change agent to the role of principal?
12. On p. 17 you mention that “we work actively at creating awareness around differences and then we look at integrating...” How have you done this?
13. On p. 18 you mention valuing everyone, ensuring they are not isolated and truly inclusive. Describe how you have managed to create this environment.
14. How have you and your school celebrated differences?
15. You mention working hard at validating all students. How have you done this?
16. On p. 19 you mention that “...it’s just part of practice to celebrate differences, to create inclusion...” How has your past experiences with being included and accepted influenced you in your leadership role?
17. You talk about creating awareness and bringing the school population together given the diversity. How did you do you this? What were the noticeable changes?

18. On p. 20 we discussed what it meant to you to be a first generation visible minority leader. You mentioned that sometimes you don't pay attention to that. Why do you think that you don't?
19. I enjoyed hearing the story about the grandfather who was happy to meet you and proud that you were in the role of principal. Why is it important for administration to reflect the community it serves?
20. On p. 23 you mentioned "I mean you got a large Indo-Canadian population and if you surveyed them, they would tell you that they are not being reflected or represented at all levels within the education system." Senior administration still reflects the dominant culture – Anglo Saxons. Tell me more about the concerns or limitations to this situation. How has having a diverse teaching staff, administration etc. been of benefit to the schools you have been principal at.