THROWING OUT THE CULTURALLY UNRESPONSIVE COOKIE CUTTER: COLLABORATIONS, CONCESSIONS, AND CURRICULA IN A RAMADAN MUSIC ACCOMMODATION

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ABSTRACT
In this paper, the author reflects on a personal experience he had while attempting to establish a Ramadan Music Accommodation to support four Muslim students who hoped to be exempted from their music lessons during the month preceding Eid-al-Fitr. While this paper outlines a context–and degree–of cultural responsiveness, it also details some of the challenges and concessions that can arise when one fails to foster robust inclusion. Following a reflective discussion that is organized into the four themes of curriculum, policy, dialogue, and inclusion, the author outlines a series of recommendations that can lead to richer culturally responsive pedagogy.

To what degree can cultural responsiveness be practiced in a meaningful way within a standardized curriculum? Further, how do policies around religious accommodations enhance and/or constrict culturally responsive practice in school communities? In considering these questions, this paper details an accommodation I established and co-facilitated to respect the perspectives of four students in a Grade 6 classroom I taught in a diverse school community with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Before delving into the context within which the Ramadan Music Accommodation was conceived – and before outlining the parameters of the accommodation itself – I provide some background information about diversity and two equity-oriented approaches to pedagogy and robust inclusion. After reflecting on core aspects of multicultural education and anti-racism education, I detail the origin and design of the Ramadan Music Accommodation. This paper
closes with a series of reflections on the successes and failures of the accommodation interspersed with recommendations for enhancing culturally responsive practice.

**DIVERSITY**

Difference and power are inexorably linked to the ways in which diversity is perceived and equity is practiced in education. In this segment, I examine difference as a social construct and constructor of inequitable power systems.

**Difference.** What Minow (1990) calls a *comparative term*, this represents a subjective process of social construction. According to Minow (1990): “Difference can be understood not as intrinsic but as a function of relationships, as a comparison drawn between an individual and a norm that can be stated or evaluated” (p. 80). More specifically, when perceiving difference: “We select the particular features to focus upon in building categories for the world, and then we attribute to the whole the consequences related to those selected features” (Minow, 1990, p. 233). Categories, such as ethno-race, ethno-culture, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, are used to identify and contrast individuals and communities in societies. While communities may share aspects of identity, such as an interpretation of a spiritual belief or a perceived shared history, differences exist within all communities. “One of the central tasks of the contemporary post-colonial observer,” according to Bramadat (2005), “is to perceive and articulate the heterogeneity within supposedly unified cultures, and to resist the elitist tendency to quickly and categorically define what is and is not an authentic depiction of a particular culture” (p. 15-16). Consequently, researchers, policy-makers, and educators alike must strive to understand and respond to not only a diversity of communities, but also the diverse nature of those communities themselves. In the following subsection I consider the connection between difference and systems of power.

**Power.** Socially constructed differences shape power systems within Canada and the United States, and these power systems lead to privileges and barriers for individuals and communities (see, for example, Zine, 2001; Raspa et al., 2010; Trainor, 2010). Minow (1990) recommends that people must scrutinize attributions of difference because they are often representations of prejudice and power. According to Ryan (2005), exclusion is magnified when perceived differences erect boundaries and when values are attached to differences.

There are numerous ways in which perceived differences and identities lead to power inequities in educational settings. Conducting an ethnographic analysis led Zine (2001) to observe that Muslim youth who commit themselves to upholding an Islamic lifestyle face multiple pressures, and struggle to: “negotiate their religious identities within the context of a secular school system, despite having to contend with peer pressure, racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia” (p. 418). Ultimately, because perceptions of difference contribute to social inequities, it is necessary to acknowledge and respond in a meaningful way to differences rather than dismiss them (Dei, 1996).

Dei (1996) reasons that schools should become communities of differences where individuals and groups are affirmed through negotiation. Countering a vision of diversity
with a false perception of uniformity, as Portelli and Vibert (2001) point out, could “be seen as a fear of dealing with differences, of losing power, of change, ambiguity, and uncertainty” (p. 73). Ultimately, in a dialogic process of collaboration, difference can become not only a *rationale for* equity but also a *strategy of* engagement and robust inclusion. In the following segment I consider multicultural education and anti-racism education, as two distinct but overlapping visions of pedagogy.

**Equity**
To provide a framework for equitable practice, I first describe multicultural education and then consider aspects of anti-racism education.

*Multicultural education.* The practice of multicultural education has not only changed over time but has also been interpreted and applied in different ways by policy makers, school administrators, and educators. In this segment, I examine key variations of multicultural education.

Martin (1993) described multicultural education as the manner in which cultural pluralism takes form and operates in an educational setting. According to Jones (2000), multicultural education aims to facilitate tolerance and mutual respect for diversity across the country by focusing on the diverse perspectives of youth. Early models of multicultural education could be grouped in the following five categories: (1) Education of the Culturally Different, or Benevolent Multiculturalism; (2) Education About Cultural Differences, or Cultural Understanding; (3) Education for Cultural Pluralism; (4) Bicultural Education, and (5) Multicultural Education as the Normal Human Experience (Martin, 1993; Rahim, 1990).

In summarizing these early variations of multicultural education Banks (1993) noted that: “Some teachers view it only as the inclusion of content about ethnic groups into the curriculum; others view it as an effort to reduce prejudice; still others view it as the celebration of ethnic holidays and events” (p. 25). While embryonic multicultural education strategies critiqued the ways in which perceived differences were identified, treated and understood – to one degree or another – they did not beckon educators to interrogate dimensions of systemic discrimination nor did they call for structural changes to education itself. Consequently, early forms of multicultural education have been identified as passive approaches to change (Edwards, 1992).

As time passed, the central framework of multicultural education has expanded beyond the passive premise of acknowledging and/or celebrating diversity. According to Abu-Laban and Stasiulis (1992) multiculturalism shifted during the 1980s “from an emphasis on ethnocultural artistic expression to incorporate greater support for non-official (heritage) languages, and anti-racist strategies” (p. 367). In surveying the landscape of multicultural education in the early 1990s, Banks (1993) envisioned a richer approach that would include the process of questioning knowledge foundations and pushing into transformative critical thought and social action. “A multicultural focus on knowledge construction”, according to Banks (1993), “includes discussion of the ways in which the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the
construction of knowledge” (p. 25). In the following segment I examine anti-racism education as an extension of Banks’ more robustly inclusive vision of multicultural education.

Anti-racism education. In outlining four key aspects of anti-racism education I detail how anti-racism education: (1) is rooted in critical theory, (2) is complex and multi-dimensional, and (3) requires systemic change.

First, anti-racism education is rooted in critical theory. Drawing from the work of Ladson-Billings and Henry (1990) and Estrada and McLaren (1993), Dei (1996) pointed out that learning/teaching becomes culturally relevant when it allows students to draw from their home ethno-cultures in critically interrogating school knowledge. In an atmosphere of inquiry, critical educators assist students to delve into multiple, alternative, and – at times – oppositional forms of knowledge linked to various histories, experiences, and viewpoints (Dei, 1996). Equipping, encouraging, and empowering students to interrogate the world within which they live in turn: “renders the school a site of social and political struggle” (Dei, 1996, p. 94). Ultimately, the critical foundation of anti-racism education leads to a view of the world that is multi-faceted.

Second, anti-racism education is complex and multi-dimensional. In questioning power relations in school and society and both recognizing and responding to personal experiences and lived realities as a form of knowledge (Dei, 1993a), anti-racist education: “problematizes the marginalization of certain voices in society and the delegitimation of the knowledge and experience of subordinate groups in the educational system” (Dei, 1993b, p. 49). However, the challenge of recognizing and respecting a variety of viewpoints is: “complicated by the fact that terms and conceptualizations, such as race, ethnicity and gender, are themselves subjected to different interpretations” (Dei, 1993a, p. 37). The inter-relational nature of multiple perceptions and overlapping systems of power return us to the following foundational equity questions: (1) How are differences perceived and constructed in social settings? (2) How do perceived differences shape the ways in which individuals and communities are identified and treated? (3) What are the implications of these perceived differences and identities in relation to freedom and power? Ultimately, these three questions have led anti-racism educators to rethink – and call for systemic changes to – wider social structures.

Third, anti-racism education requires systemic change. Because critical theory – which lies at the heart of anti-racism – interrogates inequitable social power systems, anti-racism education beckons people to call for systemic change. Dei (2008) argues that in challenging traditional practices and unfair social structures, there must be spaces for community voices to question – and co-construct new forms of – curricula content and delivery. As illustrated in this paper, the Ramadan Music Accommodation exhibits a failure to implement substantive anti-racist systemic change.
SITUATING THE TEACHER-RESEARCHER
Perceived differences, identification processes, and privileges/barriers are shaped and reshaped by various overlapping social forces, including beliefs, values, and socio-political events (Klinger, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006). In Canadian society, as in other societies, one’s access to privileges interlocks with the way that person is socially identified, according to such constructs as spiritual beliefs, ethno-race, ethno-culture, economic status, education status, perceived dis/ability, sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Anderson (2005) described this power system as a matrix of domination. Bourdieu (1985) applied a lens of social capital to outline unjust social phenomena of privilege/disadvantage, and his “definition makes clear that social capital is decomposable into two elements: first, the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates, and second, the amount and quality of those resources” (Portes, 1998, p. 3-4). A variety of researchers have drawn from Bourdieu’s vision in their interrogation of systemic inequities in schooling in Canada and the United States (see, for example, Dei, 1996; Lai & Ishiyama, 2004; Ong-Dean, 2009; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Trainor, 2008; 2010; Zoints, Zoints, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003). Attempting to foster a robust form of inclusion through the Ramadan Music Accommodation – although a failed goal – drew from an equity-oriented vision of education and human relations.

THROWING OUT THE CULTURALLY UNRESPONSIVE COOKIE CUTTER
In order to detail the Ramadan Music Accommodation, as well as the context within which it emerged, I have divided this data segment into the following three subsections: (1) Abbey Road Public School, (2) Ramadan, and (3) the Ramadan Music Accommodation.

Abbey Road Community School. In my 11 years with the TDSB I taught at two elementary schools, one of which I refer to as Abbey Road Public School in this paper. Situated in Toronto, Abbey Road had, at the time of the Ramadan Music Accommodation, over 500 students (in order to maintain confidentiality I use a pseudonym for the school and do not identify the year in which the Ramadan Music Accommodation was implemented). According to the school profile on the TDSB website (citation withheld for privacy purposes) Abbey Road included a diverse range of languages and cultures with over 60% of the student body being English Language Learners at the time the Ramadan Music Accommodation was implemented. Nearly 20% of the students at Abbey Road had moved to Canada in the five years preceding the Ramadan Music Accommodation.

Ramadan. During my time at Abbey Road Public School I did not observe a common policy or practice – whether formal or informal – of supporting students during Ramadan, although the school community included a sizable Muslim population. Before detailing the why, how, and what of the Ramadan Music Accommodation I will provide some general information about Ramadan itself.

Ramadan is viewed as “a continued period of enhanced commitment to self-restraint, and a time to focus on moral conduct” (Durham District School Board, 2010, p. 31-32). “The month of Ramadan lasts for 29 or 30 days, depending on the lunar calendar. During Ramadan, Muslims do not eat or drink from the break of dawn to sunset” (p. 31). This
period of fasting, which marks one of the Five Pillars of Islam (p. 29), “is required when children reach the age of puberty” (p. 32). While children participate in fasting at their own discretion, as well as the discretion of their parents/guardians, they are “encouraged by their parents/guardians to participate in the fast so they may become accustomed to the practice” (p. 32). Individuals and families observe Ramadan in different ways, and over the years I have become aware of this in different children I have taught and families I have known. One year, two boys in my Grade 6 class observed Ramadan by fasting for the first few days while four girls observed Ramadan for the entire month. The girls fasted, prayed, and did not listen to secular music during Ramadan. As the following personal reflection indicates, the parameters of Ramadan create a need for a unique approach to creative and collaborative program delivery if schools are to foster an inclusive atmosphere of robust cultural responsiveness.

**Ramadan music accommodation.** While working with the TDSB I spent two teaching Grade 6. Early in my second year of teaching Grade 6, four students approached me after class one October afternoon, and asked if they could speak with me privately. In our conversation the four girls explained to me that although they did not observe Ramadan strictly in the past, they intended to follow it more closely that year. More specifically, in the month leading up to Eid-al-Fitr – which was approaching – the girls hoped to be exempted from music, a class they took as a rotary subject. The students reasoned that music classes involved listening to and participating in secular music, an activity that conflicted with the way they intended to observe Ramadan. I told the girls that I would speak with their parents to discuss the situation, and then converse with their music teacher as well as school administration on their behalf.

Over the next few days I contacted the parents of the four students and learned that they were aware, and in support of, the possibility of developing some sort of accommodation. While the parents did not insist on establishing a temporary music exemption they informed me that they would appreciate it.

At the same time, I dialogued with colleagues about my students' request in the hope of learning about a school or board policy. In these informal conversations, I encountered some opposition to the idea of exempting students from music, a subject that educators are required to report on. One skeptical teacher expressed doubt as to whether the girls would successfully observe Ramadan in this manner during the entire month. A second staff member speculated that the girls could not possibly eliminate secular music from their lives during Ramadan because they could easily be exposed to it in a variety of their daily activities, such as walking home from school, or watching television. I countered that the point of devising a music accommodation would be to support the way these four students hoped to observe Ramadan within the school day. Another staff member wondered about scheduling, as the school would be required to arrange for the supervision of the girls during the exempted music periods. The above-mentioned examples tend to focus on logistical complications and demonstrate how “institutionalized logics keep us rooted in problematic practices” (Larson & Ovando, 2001, p. 170).
In addition to conversing with teachers, I spoke with two school administrators about TDSB policy and the logistical aspects of establishing a Ramadan Music Accommodation. However, because neither teachers nor administrators were able to provide specific guidance regarding TDSB policy I examined a variety of TDSB documents.

The TDSB identifies one of its mission statements as follows, “The TDSB values the uniqueness and diversity of our students and our community” (TDSB, 2000, p. i). This is reflected in the Guidelines and Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, Practices, and Observations, a document published in 2000 to guide TDSB staff in understanding and supporting various faiths in a school community. Regarding Islamic faith, the document outlines general information relating to fasting practices, dietary restraints, and prayer (TDSB, 2000, p. 23-28). The Guidelines document devotes one paragraph to Ramadan (TDSB, 2000, p. 27). Much of the paragraph focuses on the purpose of Ramadan. In a separate segment, the document examines Islamic views of music and lists a number of accommodations for teaching music to Muslim students. It offers the following information regarding school accommodation: “There are some Muslims who find music incompatible with their Islamic orientation. These parents may wish their children to be exempted from any participation in the music curriculum” (TDSB, 2000, p. 33).

While Guidelines and Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, Practices, and Observations specifically states that Muslim students have the right to be exempted from music class, it does not address scenarios where a Muslim child, or family, wishes to be exempted from music class on a temporary basis, such as the month of Ramadan. While I was disappointed that the Guidelines document did not specifically address the situation at hand, I was confident that Abbey Road Public School could interpret the document in a way that would enable my four students to receive the accommodation they desired.

In dialoguing with different teachers and administrators I expressed my hope that we could establish a temporary accommodation for the four girls based on the language of the above-quoted Guidelines document. I rationalized we had a responsibility to find a creative way to support the four girls who wanted to participate in school but did not want to participate in secular music during Ramadan. I envisioned a Ramadan Music Accommodation – whether it involved alternative programming for the entire class or strictly for the four girls (preferably the former) – as a way of responding to the perspectives of students/parents in a fair and equitable manner.

Ultimately, the school music teacher agreed that the girls could miss music classes during Ramadan. It was agreed that the music teacher and I would co-program for the students during these exempted music periods. More specifically, in these alternative music lessons the girls would work on a music history project, predominantly conducting research and writing to further develop learning outcomes drawn from the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Music and Language curriculum documents. While the girls chose their topics and resources, they were not involved in the design of the project. Alternative music
lessons were held in a conference room adjoined to a vice-principal’s office. During these lessons, which totaled two 40-minute classes per week, the four girls were supervised by the vice-principal or the school guidance counselor. I dropped in on the girls numerous times during their alternative music classes and the four were always on task during these visits. In the following section I reflect on my experience of setting up the Ramadan Music Accommodation and outline a series of connecting recommendations.

**DISCUSSION**

For all parties involved – educators, parents, and students alike – the Ramadan Music Accommodation proved to be a learning experience. In this section I articulate four thematically organized reflections on supports, challenges and concessions made, followed by a series of related recommendations for enhanced culturally responsive practice. The themes I speak to are: curriculum, policy, dialogue, and inclusion.

**Curriculum.** Curriculum marks the first dimension of the Ramadan Music Accommodation. The four girls who participated in the accommodation, along with their parents, viewed Ontario’s curriculum in a flexible way. The parents hoped that their daughters’ music lessons would be delivered in a way that could recognize and support their spiritual practices. A flexible view of curriculum was held by the music teacher who – after some dialogue and negotiation – allowed the Ramadan Music Accommodation to unfold, and modified the way in which he delivered programming, conducted assessment, and ultimately reported on the four girls (as reflected in their first semester report cards). I too held a flexible view of curriculum and reworked my language program during Ramadan so that I could support the cross-curricular aspect of the girls’ alternative music classes. Further, the accommodation itself became a curriculum in and of itself, one that educated students, parents, teachers, and administrators not only about Ramadan but also about equity-oriented collaboration. As detailed in the recommendations sections of this paper, the restructuring of the girls’ music program exhibits a limited and problematic implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy.

**Curriculum recommendations.** The curricular aspect of equity-oriented pedagogy could be enhanced through expanded parental involvement and a deepened awareness of diverse perspectives of curriculum, and of the world itself.

Cultural responsiveness needs to push beyond recognizing diversity and delve into transformative critical thought and social action. To make initiatives, such as the Ramadan Music Accommodation, more robustly inclusive, critical discussions about perspective need to be fostered and followed with collaborative action. Students, parents, and school professionals could engage one another in conversations to exchange knowledge (i.e. about convergent and divergent views of spirituality) and interactively make school-based decisions. These conversations could unfold in classrooms and staff rooms, as well as other spaces in the school and community. Classroom conversations, role-playing activities, co-operative research, and other such shared learning experiences, could enable curriculum to deepen one’s critical awareness of the complex nature of spiritual diversity. Highlighting the need for diversity awareness, Peck and Sears (2005) note: “We are left wondering how
we (educators and curriculum developers) can expect students who have little or no understanding of ethnic diversity to progress on a continuum that moves from recognition of diversity to advocacy for accommodation and rights” (p. 117-118). When dialogue is ongoing and reciprocal, diversity awareness and respect of differences – as well as transformative critical social action – may be deepened within a school community.

**Policy.** In setting up the Ramadan Music Accommodation I consulted and drew from the TDSB’s mission statement as well as its *Guidelines and Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, Practices, and Observations* (TDSB, 2000). While I was able to locate a range of suggestions about religious accommodations in the latter document, it outlined no specific parameters regarding situations where students wished to be exempted from a class on a temporary basis. Consequently, the *Guidelines* document required liberal interpretation in order to establish and foster a music accommodation that was contextually based and culturally responsive. Interpreting policy in a liberal way could not have unfolded without dialogue between, and support from, students, parents, and colleagues. The policy aspect of culturally responsive practices would be enriched by transparently articulating the need for equity-oriented interpretation along with supports that enhance such practice.

**Policy recommendations.** As I discovered with the Ramadan Music Policy, TDSB’s religious accommodation *Guidelines* document is very specific in some respects and somewhat vague in other respects. Developing a more prescriptive set of parameters around religious accommodation policy, however, would not necessarily alleviate this challenge because there will inevitably be contextual situations that do not fall under the specific outlines of a given policy. Consequently, the wording of religious accommodation policy needs to focus on two aspects. First, it should explicitly state that there *would* be circumstances where educators are required to interpret broad policy guidelines in order to foster an equitable approach to a complex situation. Second, equity-oriented policy documents should offer advice to educators (or direct educators to appropriate resources) so they might foster equitable and democratic approaches to contexts that require collaborative cultural responsiveness.

**Dialogue.** The process of developing the Ramadan Music Accommodation led me to dialogue with students, parents and colleagues. As previously mentioned, the four students initially informed me of their desire to be excused from music class on a temporary basis. Parents explained to me that although they supported their daughters’ wishes they did not insist that their children be exempted from music lessons during Ramadan. While the four students, along with their parents, informed my choices in working to set up the Ramadan Music Accommodation, they were not closely involved in the logistical design of the accommodation nor were they closely involved in the actual content of the exempted classes. Thus, while parents were partly included in the pre-implementation decision-making process they did not participate in the accommodation design and implementation nor were they involved in any sort of post-accommodation debriefing. Although the Ramadan Music Accommodation might have led parents and school professionals to
discuss the subjective nature of knowledge and curriculum construction, as Banks (1993) and Dei (1996) call for, such dialogues did not arise.

Abbey Road staff members, who were involved in creating the Ramadan Music Accommodation, apart from myself, included two school administrators, the music teacher, and the school guidance counselor. The administrators and guidance counselor were integral to setting up the logistics of ensuring that the girls would have a space to work under the supervision of a school professional. After discussions and negotiations, the music teacher allowed the accommodation to occur and it was with this teacher that I co-developed the cross-curricular aspects accommodation. As previously mentioned, I sought advice from numerous colleagues when the accommodation was in its earliest stage of development.

**Recommendations for dialogue.** To enrich dialogue within equity-based accommodations, school professionals need to seek out and support relationships of collaboration with members of school communities.

Earlier, I identified curriculum-oriented ways in which dialogue could be enhanced to deepen parental involvement in co-developing an interactive alternative curriculum. To encourage dialogue itself, educators and administrators need to create multiple and varied opportunities and venues for conversations to take place. More specifically, school professionals could set up discussions between educators, parents, and students to arise in both formal and informal settings, such as classroom discussions between/among teachers and students, parent-teacher interviews and conversations, and school council meetings. To push dialogue beyond surface interactions and into deeper matters of perspective and collaborative decision-making in school communities, three general practices need to be applied. First, educators need to recognize that there are diverging perspectives of the world as well as of how schooling – and curriculum – could/should unfold. Second, school professionals need to both understand and accept their responsibility of providing a safe venue for students and parents to voice their perspectives. Third, educators must respond to a multiplicity of perspectives when interpreting and delivering curriculum. On a larger scale, educators need to be made aware of these responsibilities and supported in their practice through equity-oriented pre-service teacher education as well as ongoing professional development (see, for instance, Trent, Kea, & Oh, 2008).

**Inclusion.** A number of different school professionals were included – in varying degrees – in setting up and/or implementing the Ramadan Music Accommodation. When devising the logistical aspects of the accommodation, students were involved in choosing content (i.e. project topic and research materials) but were not involved in larger design-oriented aspects of the accommodation (i.e. project parameters). Parents, who approved of the accommodation and provided consent for their daughters’ participation, were included in a limited way. When devising logistical aspects of the accommodation (such as project timelines), parents were not consulted nor were they included in devising the curricular dimensions of the accommodation (such as learning outcomes). While it is certainly possible that the four sets of parents wanted to actively support the learning of their
daughters through the music accommodation (such as through classroom presentations and visits), this avenue was never explored. Ultimately, in terms of learning outcomes, the music teacher and I mapped out the cross-curricular approach to the accommodation on our own. While the Ramadan Music Accommodation led to some discussions about spirituality and the interpretation of different religious customs in my Grade 6 classroom, the accommodation was not designed to delve into the complex nature of spiritual perspectives within a community that is at once respectful and diverse. Consequently, the multi-dimensional nature of anti-racism was limited within the Ramadan Music Accommodation.

Inclusion-oriented limitations of the Ramadan Music Accommodation also connected to the accommodation’s delivery model. Rather than adjusting the music lessons themselves, the four girls received their alternative classes in a separate room. Separating the girls from their peers was an unfortunate concession I made in order for the Ramadan Music Accommodation to become a reality. The accommodation was something I strongly advocated for and co-developed for a rotary subject that I did not teach, and as such, I did not have final say as to how the accommodation would ultimately unfold. Developing the Ramadan Music Accommodation required the cooperation of numerous people with differing – and sometimes conflicting – perspectives. While I was satisfied with the accommodation being implemented, having the four girls receive their alternative music classes in an exclusionary environment was an undesired outcome. In this sense, I would describe the accommodation as the failure of successfully achieving a robust form of inclusion. Rather than using the music lessons to delve into music as a complex aspect of spiritual faith and interpretation of faith systems, the faith of the four girls was, in a sense, mystified by a lack of open and transparent dialogue.

**Recommendations for inclusion.** To enhance the inclusive dimension of culturally responsive pedagogy, students need to encounter multiple and varied opportunities to critically and collaboratively explore the perspectives and interpretations of different faiths.

Because the four girls in my Grade 6 class received their alternative music lessons in a space that was removed from their peers, the format of the Ramadan Music Accommodation was exclusionary. As previously mentioned, the alternative I had hoped for would have involved the entire class exploring music in a culturally responsive way during Ramadan. Such an arrangement could have led the class to explore topics of music and spirituality through research and dialogue in a communal dynamic. Students and parents could have conducted research, given presentations, and led discussions. Parents could have further participated in this process by dialoguing with educators in the programming process. In considering the matter of fostering spiritual awareness and respect in public schools, D'Souza (2000) reflects: “The modern multicultural and pluralist state may be sitting on the horns of a dilemma: while it cannot officially support any one religious or theological position, it should not ignore the transcendental aspirations of the citizen as a person” (p. 236).
For spirituality – an aspect of one’s self-identity – to become a dimension of robust inclusion, individuals need to understand and respect one another’s spiritual perspectives. As previously mentioned, the limited nature of spiritual-oriented dialogue during the Ramadan Music Accommodation contributed, I believe, to the mystification of the spiritual views of the four girls who did not wish to engage in secular music during Ramadan. A number of non-Muslim students in my class wondered about Ramadan and were confused by the fact that the Muslim students in the class chose to observe Ramadan different ways. To raise awareness of the faith perspectives of the four girls, I led some informal discussions with my Grade 6 class about the subject of Ramadan. While these discussions opened spaces for the four girls to share their some of their views of Ramadan, these discussions were reactive rather than proactive. Spirituality, as Campbell-Stephens indicates, is an integral dimension of critical and inclusive pedagogy: “Students should be encouraged to see education as being something that frees people to develop spiritually as well as intellectually and specifically so they can live at the highest possible level of human existence” (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009, p. 17).

CONCLUSION
When standardized curricula and culturally responsive practices are flexible – enough to allow for meaningful collaboration between and among educators, students, parents, and school administrators – then robust forms of inclusion may become a reality. While it is important that curricula and policies are malleable it is also crucial that educators (especially those in positions of institutional authority), who are interpreting those curricula and policies, do so in a manner that respects and empowers the voices of CLD families. Standardization, with a false sense of universality, would impede such practices (Portelli & Campbell-Stephens, 2009). As previously indicated, the Ramadan Music Accommodation is not an example of culturally responsive practice in its fullest sense.

In this paper, I tell the story of attempting – and ultimately failing – to achieve robust inclusion. In the Ramadan Music Accommodation, Ontario’s curriculum, along with the TDSB’s religious accommodation document, was interpreted in a way that enabled four Grade 6 girls to observe Ramadan in the manner they preferred but did so in an exclusionary way. While I outline what a limited form of cultural responsiveness might look like, I also detail challenges and concessions that can arise when one attempts to engage in such practices. Some of the challenges I encountered were logistical in nature while others, such as the opposition voiced by some of my colleagues, were more attitudinal. If I were to co-develop a Ramadan Music Accommodation in the future, I would do things differently, as my recommendations indicate. Two key aspects I would change would be: (1) to rethink the content and delivery of the music curriculum itself so the entire class would learn together – and about one another – during Ramadan, and (2) enhance the involvement of CLD parents and children in the development and implementation of the accommodation. It is my hope that this paper will provide a theoretical and tangible example of the why, how, and what behind the challenges of – and need for – robust inclusion.
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