Educational Professionals Awareness, Identification, and Support of Young Caregivers

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Abstract

“Young carer” (YC) is a term used to describe youth under the age of 25 who take on caregiving roles to support a family member with a disability, illness, addiction, or language barrier (Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Charles et al., 2012; Stamatopoulos, 2015). Although the Ontario Ministry of Education mandates that educators ensure student success (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), the YC role continues to negatively influence attendance and curriculum engagement at school (Lakman et al., 2017). To ensure that YCs receive the support they need to be successful in school, an educator’s role must be considered. Therefore, this study’s research questions were, “In what ways are educators aware of young caregiving?” and “What role do educators perceive they have in identifying and supporting YCs?” Through an applied research design, 8 teachers and 3 principals were individually interviewed for 90-minutes each. Inter-rater reliable thematic analysis resulted in three main themes of awareness, identification, and support. Although not all educators were aware of the YC term, all educators were aware of the caregiving role among children and youth. Consistent with OME mandate, educators reported that student success was important. Although educators felt they had a role in identifying and supporting YCs to ensure success, the majority did not perceive it was mandated. This finding was inconsistent with previous YC research that suggested YCs did not feel supported in school (Lakman et al., 2017). Therefore, the present findings encourage teacher training to ensure YCs receive the support they need.

Key Words: Young Carer, Education, Awareness, Identification, Support
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# Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Introduction

Literature review

Childhood Ideology

Education Mandate

Ontario Ministry of Education

Young Carers in School

Awareness

Identification

Support

Perspective of School Principals

Gaps in the Literature and Importance of the Study

Research Questions

Methods

Participants

Teachers

Participant 1

Participant 2

Participant 3

Participant 4
Formalized training for all educators ................................................................. 70
School Policy ........................................................................................................... 70
YC Programs/Advocacy Groups ............................................................................ 71
Limitations ............................................................................................................. 71
References ............................................................................................................. 73
Appendix A: Abbreviation/Acronym Legend .......................................................... 81
Appendix B: Certificate of Ethics Clearance .......................................................... 82
Appendix C: Recruitment Poster .......................................................................... 83
Appendix D: Teacher Interview .............................................................................. 84
Appendix E: Principal Interview .......................................................................... 90
Appendix F: Participant Demographics ................................................................... 96
Appendix G: Summary of Awareness Findings ....................................................... 97
Appendix H: Summary of Identification Findings .................................................. 99
Appendix I: Summary of Support Findings ............................................................ 101
Educational Professionals Awareness, Identification, and Support of Young Caregiving

Within families, children often have chores at home to teach responsibility, build character, and ensure successful family functioning (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). In some cases, however, children have responsibilities that are beyond what is considered typical in the Western world. Some children and youth have caregiving responsibilities and are referred to as a young carer or young caregiver (YC; see Appendix A for a full list of the study’s abbreviations). YC is a term used to describe children and youth under the age of 25 who take on caregiving roles to support a family member with a disability, illness, addiction, or language barrier (Aldridge & Becker, 1993). Their responsibilities might include domestic tasks (e.g., cooking dinner, doing laundry), household management (e.g., paying bills), personal/emotional care (e.g., giving medicine, helping family members use the washroom, providing emotional support), sibling care (e.g., helping with homework), financial care (e.g., having a part-time job), and/or language interpreting (Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Charles et al., 2012; Stamatopoulos, 2015). The intensity of care will differ depending on the individual needs of the care recipient (Aldridge & Becker, 1993).

YC s have recently become a topic of interest in research and support programs, with the UK and Australia providing the most recognition and support thus far (Leu & Becker, 2017). Aldridge and Becker (1993) were the first to publish research on YCs in the UK, which suggests that formal recognition of young caregiving is limited to the past 25 years (Leu & Becker, 2017). Canada has only recently begun its work in supporting YCs and is in need of research, policy, and supports. The first study of Canadian YCs was completed in 2005 (Chalmers, 2005) and the first YC support program began in 2007 (Stamatopoulos, 2016). A recent national study estimated that between the ages of 15 and 24, there were 1.18 million YCs in Canada, yet few
had been recognized within existing programs (Stamatopoulos, 2015; 2016). Awareness, identification, and support for YCs continues to be a challenge, particularly within a school context.

Ontario elementary and secondary students spend an average of 30-hours per week in school (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d., b); schools become an essential context in which identification and support for YCs might occur. For this reason, the role that educators perceive they have in identifying and supporting YCs is the primary focus of this thesis. The challenge in ensuring identification of and support for YCs might be a result of the various definitions of young caregiving (Aldridge & Becker, 1993) and relative agency mandates (Chalmers, 2018). Both the YC definition and education mandate will be reviewed in relation to the Western ideology of childhood, the YC role, and Ontario’s Ministry of Education. Following this, previous research considering a teacher’s awareness of student issues and how they perceive their role in identifying and supporting their students will be considered. The role principals perceive they have as leaders within their schools will also be reviewed. For the literature review, parallels between mental health and young caregiving were made because identifying and supporting YCs might look similar to identifying and supporting children and youth with mental health challenges (Moore et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2003). This was essential given the lack of educator perspective in YC research. Finally, the gaps in the current literature will be summarized and the main research questions will be presented.

**Literature Review**

**Childhood Ideology**

The challenge in identifying and supporting YCs might come from Western society’s current expectation of childhood; likewise, those in a position to identify or support YCs (e.g.,
teachers, health practitioners, service providers) might have a narrow definition of childhood roles. While studying the history of childhood, Albanese (2009) reported that Phillipe Aries argued there was no “childhood” in the middle ages. Aries studied portraits of children as miniature adults, suggesting that children were placed in a role similar to an adult, with no special protection from working life or responsibilities (Albanese, 2009). Over time, however, childhood progressed away from a harsh life, to becoming more cherished and sheltered (Wells, 2009). The child as “innocent”, first suggested by Rousseau in 1762, emphasized childhood as a time of exploration and enjoyment before being stifled by life experiences in adulthood (Albanese, 2009).

This idea of childhood innocence, still assumed by Western society today, creates a concept of childhood that the responsibilities of a YC might not fit into (e.g., administering medication, emotional support, coming home right after school to support a loved one). Likewise, while child work remains prevalent in many cultures, this Western view of protecting childhood innocence pathologizes the YC role (Charles et al., 2009; Sexton & Chalmers, in press; Woodhead, 2005). Pathologizing the role contradicts the acknowledgement that caregiving occurs along a continuum (within which the role varies in extremity). In this way, parentification may be assumed. “Parentification” or “role reversal” is a label for the extreme form of young caregiving in which a child is no longer the care recipient but instead forced into a parental role. However, while all parentified children are YCs, not all YCs are parentified (Charles et al., 2009). Regardless, this role differs from the expected nature of a child-parent relationship and, therefore, insinuates negativity (O’Dell et al., 2010; Sexton & Chalmers, in press; Smyth et al., 2011). O’Dell and colleagues found that youth reflected on a caregiving situation as being atypical, resulting in a loss of “normal” teenage life and in need of rescue (O’Dell et al., 2010;
Sexton & Chalmers, in press). This negativity, or stigma, surrounding the YC role is one reason a YC may prefer to ensure role secrecy (Sexton & Chalmers, in press; Smyth et al., 2011). Another influence of YC secrecy is fearing child protective services or judgment in asking for support for a YC because their role is viewed by others as inappropriate (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014; Moore, 2005; Moore & McArthur, 2007; Sexton & Chalmers, in press; Smyth et al., 2011). This secrecy makes identification and support of a YC, without the family’s willingness or cooperation, even more difficult. Expanding the understanding of childhood roles to include caregiving might increase awareness, identification, and support for YCs.

Expanding childhood ideology to include the roles of a YC requires an understanding of the developmental trajectories and how they might differ from other youth. It is typical that a YC will perform more tasks and spend longer on them than youth not in a formal caregiving role. In addition to instrumental tasks such as housework, YCs may be performing unique tasks such as intimate care. Likewise, normal expectations of childhood responsibility (such as housework) differ from young caregiving due to the task being essential for successful family functioning (Becker, 2007). While many children take on responsibilities, they are not often considered substantial or regular. In this way, the necessity of a YC’s role may be associated with unique negative and positive outcomes. To focus on the need for YC support, some of the negative outcomes associated with caregiving were considered. In a study of over 4000 children aged ten to eleven in the UK, participants that were caregivers reported being somewhat less happy, with lower self-reported health and overall wellbeing, than participants not in a formal caregiving role. These YCs also reported sadness, loneliness, and a struggle to find time for themselves (Lloyd, 2013). Finally, YCs in Southern Ontario experienced isolation, worry, depression, self-harm, drug use, and disordered eating (Chalmers & Lucyk, 2012). In addition to the reported
wellbeing concerns, Thomas and colleagues (2003) suggested that absenteeism, fatigue, lateness, under-achievement, and behavioural difficulties in school could also be considered indicators of caregiving responsibilities. Moore and colleagues (2009) supported this further by reporting that some YCs experienced inappropriate outbursts in the classroom due to circumstantial anger and emotion triggered by their home life. These psychosocial challenges give signs or “symptoms” that educational professionals might recognize to be a mental health or wellbeing issue; however, they can also be a sign of a young caregiving role.

YCIs believed schools should be a context in which YCs could be identified and supported; better school support would eliminate negative culture, promote diversity, and provide flexible education options to help balance school and caregiving (Moore et al., 2009). Policy makers and service workers reported that schools were not always responsive or understanding when YC groups approached them in order to raise awareness and offer YC services to students. However, when schools were receptive, it became a successful context in which young people could be educated about YC services (Smyth et al., 2011). School staff are in a favourable position to increase awareness of young caregiving and provide identification and support for a YC. A question remains, however, is this the role or mandate of the teacher?

**Education Mandate**

Canada does not have a federal department of education; therefore, each province has its own ministry in charge of elementary and secondary education (Government of Canada, 2017). The Ministry of Education is responsible for the national standards and expectations for the education of children and youth. Each province then sets provincial standards and expectations for schools and teachers. The demographic for the current study will be educators within
Southern Ontario. For this reason, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) mandate for student success will be reviewed in its indirect relation to YCs.

**Ontario Ministry of Education**

The OME governs publicly funded elementary and secondary schools by ensuring the education system meets expectations of excellence (Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d., a). Public documents outline the role of the OME to guarantee that the education system, educators included, provide an environment that ensures excellence in student achievement; excellence can be achieved through student wellbeing, safety, and flexibility. In 2013, the OME collaborated with parents, students, teachers, other education staff, and groups outside of the education system (e.g., non-profit organizations), to discuss the current and future skills and knowledge needed for student success. As a result of this feedback, four goals for education were presented in the document, *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Ontario* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

The four goals for education outlined in *Achieving Excellence* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) were achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting wellbeing, and enhancing public confidence. The first goal, “achieving excellence”, emphasized the success of every learner, regardless of their individual circumstances. Success was determined by student engagement in reading, writing, mathematics, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, effective communication, perseverance, and resiliency. A second document, *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010), also recognized student individuality. Ensuring success despite any challenge faced by a student might require individualized expectations. For example, a flexible deadline on an assignment could be critical for a YC if they were interrupted the night before by a sibling.
struggling with a behavioural difficulty (Thomas et al., 2003), or because they were providing emotional care for their mother with depression (Kaiser & Schulze, 2015). This is important for the YC’s success because responsibilities at home often give less time to complete homework (Thomas et al., 2003).

The second goal, “ensuring equity” reinforced the importance of successful learning regardless of individual circumstances (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). With this goal, educators and students were to value diversity and respect one another to ensure that there was nothing to prevent a student from reaching their full potential. As stated in this goal, “it is clear that students who feel welcome and accepted in their schools are more likely to succeed academically” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; p. 11). Further, *Well-Being in Our Schools, Strength in Our Society* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a) recognized the importance of supporting student diversity (e.g., family structure, economic circumstance, life experience, language). Previous YC research suggested that although YCs wanted to feel connected to their school, they struggled to do so (Moore et al., 2009). An inclusive environment could reduce the stigma associated with a caregiving role, giving YCs the confidence to self-identify (Smyth et al., 2011; McDougall et al., 2018).

The third goal was to “promote wellbeing” by supporting students’ cognitive, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing alongside their academic achievement. In addition, the document *Supporting Minds* outlined an educator’s supportive role in student mental health as well as in recognizing the associated signs and symptoms (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). In fact, the document *Supporting Minds* reported that teachers were in a unique position to support professionals in making a diagnosis, as they observed behaviour exclusive to the classroom environment. More specifically, educators were instructed to create a positive classroom
environment, reduce stigma by discussing mental health, notice changes in individual student behaviour, and inform and support parents. Although this guidance is helpful for all students, it is especially important for YCs as they have been found to be more withdrawn, more distracted, have more depressive symptoms, and a lower self-esteem than youth not in a formal caregiving role (Lakman & Chalmers, 2019). A successful integration of the four goals, three of which have been discussed in detail, will require commitment by educators. A student with poor cognitive, emotional, social, or physical wellbeing might be less likely to achieve academic success; likewise, failing to achieve academic success might lead to a compromised wellbeing. Educators play a pivotal role in ensuring their students excel on all accounts. Previous research on YCs experience in school does not suggest that educators recognize the need for their support.

Young Carers in School

Given the OME mandate, educators should be supporting YCs in school; however, previous research does not suggest that YCs feel supported. Research both in and outside of Ontario have found that YCs valued school, planned ahead, and hoped to one day attain higher education; nonetheless, their attendance and curriculum engagement were affected by their role at home (Lakman et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2009). Attendance can be affected by a range of factors such as social fear, fear of separating from the care recipient, or parent permission to stay home (Kaiser & Schulze, 2015). Curriculum engagement might be affected because the YC’s attention is focused on worrying about the care recipient or because of a lack of in-school support (Moore, 2005).

YCs success in school remains contingent on their ability to be present in the classroom and engage in the course material. However, research suggested that YCs were not getting the necessary educator support to achieve this. This was evident when Thomas and colleagues
(2003) found recruiting YCs in the UK through schools nearly impossible. Only three of 300 schools they contacted responded and two of these schools reported that they did not have students that were YCs. The only school that responded positively to having student caregivers was influenced by their own staff member having experience as a YC. This struggle experienced by Thomas and colleagues (2003) indicated the lack of YC awareness by professionals who were in a position to identify them. In Ontario, Lakman and colleagues (2017) found that roughly half of YC participants reported having minimal to no support from teachers, with one quarter of that population saying school staff were not aware of their caregiving situation (Lakman et al., 2017).

However, Mansell (2016) found that YCs in Southern Ontario were not inclined to share their caregiving situation with teachers in fear of being treated differently.

Whether YCs want their school to be aware of their caregiving roles for support is not conclusive; however, YCs have recognized school to be a unique space for YCs to receive support. Previous research reported that health professionals or social workers thought only of supporting the person in need of care, thereby leaving the YC without attention (Eley, 2004; Leu et al., 2018). The school can ensure YCs receive the support they might need because, in school, the YC/student is the priority (Eley, 2004). However, many YCs felt unsupported and invalidated by their teachers (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014; Moore et al., 2009) even if the teacher was aware of the YC’s parent’s illness (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014). When YCs asked for support, they often felt as though teachers were either too intrusive or did not do enough; rarely, did the teacher approach a YC situation to meet the satisfaction of the YC (Thomas et al., 2003). YCs recognized that teachers were the most important adults in their life outside of the home and they wished they had the chance to use them more for support (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014). However, YCs felt that teachers could show more
humility and general awareness of how the YC role could hinder a student’s ability to meet deadlines and attend school (Eley, 2004).

Whether the teacher is aware of the YC role, in general, will affect their ability to identify students that need extra support because of caregiving roles at home. This requires an educator to have awareness of young caregiving, know how to identify a YC, and then know how to support them. But this also demands an educator accept this to be within their mandated role. The following sections will review literature of teachers’ perspectives of their role outside of academics. Since this has not been considered with respect to YC experience, parallels were made concerning a teacher’s perceived role in supporting student mental health.

**Awareness**

To identify and support a struggling student, the teacher must first be aware of the possible existence of an issue more generally. Whether or not a teacher is aware of a student’s struggle (whether it be mental health, young caregiving, or bullying) might be contingent on their practical experience. Maynes and Mottonen (2017) found that pre-service teachers, from Ontario teaching programs, were more confident in responding to bullying in the classroom if they had taken a consecutive education degree. A consecutive degree would have allowed them a prolonged amount of time with the same students in comparison to their peers, taking a concurrent degree, who spent a limited amount of time within multiple classrooms. This suggested that with extended exposure to the same students, factors such as bullying might be easier to notice. As well, the exposure to bullying in the students’ practicum resulted in significantly greater confidence in responding to future bullying cases (Maynes & Mottonen, 2017). Although pre-service teachers learn about bullying in their university classes, their
confidence in addressing this came with hands-on experience. Therefore, a teacher’s awareness of young caregiving might only come from experience.

For a teacher to be confident in responding to issues of student mental health, they must recognize that the issue they are responding to is related to mental health. Moon and colleagues (2017) found that most teachers were aware of and understood mental health issues within their school. They found that 96% of their respondents recognized the likelihood of having a student in their class with a mental health issue. They also found that 65% of teachers had students who had experienced some type of adversity in their lifetime. This “adverse life experience” could be a father losing limbs due to diabetic complications and needing the sudden care of his child. The experience of young caregiving might not always be traumatic, but it might cause a significant amount of stress. Froese-Germain and Riel (2012) found that 79% of 3900 Canadian teachers felt concerned about their students’ stress levels. In fact, of nine mental health-related problems, teachers considered stress to be the third most prevalent, just behind ADHD and learning disabilities. Therefore, teachers were aware that students might struggle with mental health issues or stress (Froese-Germain & Riel, 2012; Moon et al., 2017).

Identification

For teachers to be able to support students within schools they must identify that there is something in the child’s life that requires support or attention. Moon and colleagues (2017) found that more than half of the educators in their study felt confident in identifying mental health issues within their school. However, administrators (superintendents or principals) and mental health professionals were significantly more likely than teachers to perceive the identification of student mental health issues to be part of the teacher’s role. This suggests a gap between educational mandate and a teacher’s perception of their role. It is evident though,
Despite their perceived role, that teachers were capable of noticing when a student was struggling and identify if necessary. Whitley and Goederham (2016) looked at mental health literacy among pre-service teachers in Ontario. They reported that teachers took an appropriate approach in addressing mental health issues. Part of this approach included speaking to the student and the family about the troubling behaviour. The teachers in this study were willing to identify the factors that could be influencing a student’s troubled behaviour (Whitley & Gooderham, 2016); however, teachers might not always consider the role of the family. A study in Australia found that only 3% of preservice teachers considered parental behaviour as an underpinning for a child’s social, emotional, or psychological difficulty (Armstrong et al., 2015). If a teacher is not considering the student’s home life, they might miss the identification of a YC. The teacher’s ability to identify an issue with a student is not the only barrier in the student receiving support; the teacher must also consider support, outside of academics, to be part of their mandated role.

Support

Andrews and colleagues (2014) examined how Ontario secondary school teachers perceived their role in dealing with student mental health issues. Most teachers (90%) reported having students who dealt with mental health issues and only 16% felt it was not within their role to address it and provide/refer support (Andrews et al., 2014). However, while over 97% of participants felt they should know what to do if a child was struggling, less than 27% felt they had the necessary skills. Therefore, it appears that most teachers are exposed to students suffering with mental health concerns, and although willing, are not prepared to support them. This lack of preparation could be a result of pre-service education. Upon completion of their degree, less than 2% of teachers felt they were prepared to address mental health issues and only 5% of teachers said their degree made mental health courses mandatory (Andrews et al., 2014).
However, this same study found that 72% of participants reported they had not taken additional training for student mental health and over 65% were not planning to take any in the future. This suggested that teachers were not taking all measures to ensure they were ready to provide their students with non-academic support, even if they were aware of the impact mental health issues had on their students. Mental health concerns have a high profile within the Ontario education system, yet pre-service education to prepare teachers to deal with students’ mental health is not mandatory. This suggests that Ontario teachers might not be prepared to address issues related to the little-known population of YCs either.

**Perspective of School Principals**

In addition to the teacher’s role, according to the OME, principals and vice-principals have a critical role in ensuring the academic achievement and mental wellbeing of their students through setting directions, establishing relationships, and improving learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). For this reason, a principal’s perceived role with respect to their students’ wellbeing was also considered. King and colleagues (2014) interviewed “expert” teachers (e.g., teachers who had been working for 10 or more years, and/or principals) and found that with expertise, school staff were more likely to have a broader and more flexible perspective when viewing their students. This broader, more flexible perspective encouraged educators to focus on children’s holistic development, considering the students’ social and emotional development alongside their academic development. Likewise, with expertise, educators began looking outside of the curriculum in an attempt to understand a student’s story; building a strong relationship with their students became more important than teaching the curriculum (King et al., 2014). An experienced teacher and/or principal viewing children holistically could increase the
likelihood of YC identification. However, job duties and responsibilities might overwhelm principals, leaving them with less time to focus on individual student success.

The demands placed on principals were evident in the study by Pollock and colleagues (2015). They examined the range of tasks, responsibilities, and practices of principals and vice-principals in Ontario. They found that principals who were spending more time ensuring student wellbeing had less time for administrative duties, yet the administrative demands of the role were increasing. For example, the *Growing Success* document as provided by the OME, affected the principal as they spent more time than usual on management and leadership. Interpersonal expectations also increased for principals, for example, the *Safe Schools Act* (Bill 212) required principals to spend more time interacting with students and parents (Pollock et al., 2015). In fact, 64% of principals felt that mental health and wellbeing was the greatest challenge they had to face at work (Pollock, 2016). Although Pollock (2016) reported principals were knowledgeable about mental health and wellbeing, they might not have the resources to help. Competing demands resulted in almost 90% of principals reporting there was not enough time to get their job done and less than 40% feeling like they were equipped with the appropriate resources to do so (Pollock et al., 2015).

With specific tasks for principals set out by the OME and a changing school environment, principals might need assistance in identifying and supporting YCs. A study in the United States suggested that principals would benefit from specialized staff (i.e., counsellors, social workers, school psychologists) and more money to support student mental health as funding was rarely available (Frabutt & Speach, 2012). As a result, principals struggled to supply what was necessary for student success because of financial and/or time constraints. Principals also reported the need for specific teacher training to better identify and attend to the
social/emotional health of their students (Frabutt & Speach, 2012). Therefore, principals recognized that students might need extra support to ensure academic success, however, providing support became complicated with a heavy workload and inadequate funding. Considering principals struggled to get their job done because of time constraints and/or insufficient resources (Frabutt & Speach, 2012; Pollock et al., 2015), it might be unlikely that they would have the resources to identify and support YCs within their school.

**Gaps in the Literature and Importance of the Study**

As discussed, a small percentage of YCs are being supported within Canada (Stamatopoulos, 2016). The identification and support of YCs might be difficult because of the ideology of protecting an innocent child and subsequent stigma or fear of protective services (Albanese, 2009; Moore & McArthur, 2007; Sexton & Chalmers, in press; Smyth et al., 2011). However, creating an opportunity for support within the school, where the child spends most of their time outside of the home, could increase the percentage of YCs receiving support. If a YC’s success in school is hindered by their academic, social, or emotional struggle, an educator is in an ideal position to identify their struggle and provide specific support (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014; Moore et al., 2009). Whether or not educators perceive this to be within their role as an educator has not yet been examined.

An educator might recognize a YC within the classroom by noticing student absenteeism, fatigue, lateness, under-achievement, and/or behavioural difficulties (Thomas et al., 2003). The OME provides multiple documents (regarding assessment, evaluation, mental health, and inclusivity) to educators and the public that mandate educators ensure student mental wellbeing, sense of belonging, and academic success. These documents suggest that educators not only have the resources, but also the obligation, to ensure that all students succeed within the classroom.
(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). However, research continuously suggested that YCs struggled in school and were not being recognized or supported (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014; Lakman et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2003). An exploration of why this is happening has yet to be explored within the Canadian context.

Based on previous research, teacher and principal confidence can directly relate to student experience (King et al., 2014; Maynes & Mottonen, 2017). With this, many teachers recognized their likelihood of being exposed to student mental health issues or students experiencing adversity (Moon et al., 2017). Teachers were aware that a student’s ability to participate fully within the classroom could be affected by experiencing daily stressors (Froese-Germain & Riel, 2012). Research suggested that teachers and principals were confident in identifying mental health issues but still needed further support and resources (Moon et al., 2017; Pollock, 2016). As YCs experience stress at home and struggle with their mental health (Lakman & Chalmers, 2019), educators might notice a YC because of their behaviour. However, if the educator is unaware that young caregiving exists, they might be unable to identify the cause of that behaviour and then unable provide them with the needed support which may differ depending on the caregiving circumstance (e.g., long-term, financial, etc.).

Finally, even with awareness of mental health issues or young caregiving and the ability to identify the associated behaviours, educators must consider student support as part of their role. Research suggested that teachers needed more training to confidently support their students (Andrews et al., 2014) and that YCs felt their schools had failed to support them (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014; Moore, 2005; Moore et al., 2009). While educators are mandated by the OME to identify student barriers to academic success and provide subsequent support, educators may lack proper training, experience, and resources. Current research does not clarify if barriers
in YC identification and support within school relates to a teacher’s awareness of the YC role or the perception of their role in identifying and supporting YCs. To implement change or introduce policy into the education system to ensure YC support, teacher perspectives need to be considered. This study focused on educators’ perspectives in hopes to explain this gap in the literature.

**Research Questions**

If YCs are interested in receiving support through identification at school, educational staff need to be willing to offer this support. YCs identified the power schools have in supporting YCs, with or without identification of the caregiving role (Kaiser & Schulze, 2015; Mansell, 2016; Moore et al., 2009). However, to the best of my knowledge, research on how educational professionals conceptualize this role had not yet been considered. Therefore, the present study addressed two research questions: “In what ways are educators aware of young caregiving?” and “What role do educators perceive they have in identifying and supporting YCs?”

**Methods**

The goal of this study was to contribute to the body of literature aimed at finding the underrepresented population of YCs the support they need; for this reason, an applied research design was utilized with an exploratory approach (Quinn Patton, 2015). This was a single-method study with one interview per participant within a constrained timeframe. Immediately following ethics approval from Brock University’s Research Ethics Board (REB) (see Appendix B for REB certificate), participants were recruited through purposeful sampling (i.e., word of mouth, recruitment posters [see Appendix C for recruitment poster]). Participants currently, or previously, working under the OME would be accepted, however, only educators from Southern Ontario were reached. Participants were asked to take part in a research study that would allow
them to discuss their awareness of, and role in identifying and supporting, students that have exceptional responsibilities at home. In this way, participants would not have been likely to prepare for the interview by searching “young caregivers”. A definition of young caregiving was provided following the exploration of the participants’ awareness of young caregiving. All participants were required to sign an informed consent form. Interview locations were agreed upon between the participant and researcher to ensure confidentiality (i.e., confidential research lab in Brock University, Skype/Facetime). All interviews lasted between 75-minutes to two hours. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the semi-structured interview allowed for specific areas to be addressed while giving the interviewee the power to shape their responses in its open-ended nature (Quinn Patton, 2015). The interview explored three themes (i.e., awareness, identification, support; see Appendix D and E for interview questions). All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Following the guide to thematic analysis presented by Braun and Clarke (2006), the first task in analysis was to become familiar with the data. To do this, the researcher read all interviews repeatedly; the first reading was to become immersed in the data, while subsequent readings involved taking notes in preparation for the formal coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Since the interviews were designed to elicit responses surrounding three themes (i.e., awareness, identification, and support), the first course of analysis was deductive in which data were organized around the three main themes. Within each theme, inductive analysis was conducted to identify patterns within the data and these were categorized into meaningful groups. These codes were then organized (using the Nvivo software) into subthemes within the deductive themes of awareness, identification, and support (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After this process was complete, the primary researcher and two research assistants reviewed the themes and
subthemes. The research assistants read the quotes that were organized into the various themes and subthemes to ensure the credibility of each quote and to determine whether the subthemes fit accurately within the deductive themes. This process was completed to ensure inter-rater reliability and research triangulation (Quinn Patton, 2015); researchers agreed 96% of the time and through discussion, quickly resolved any code not initially agreed upon. After this step, the themes and subthemes were organized to formulate a story that would answer the initial research questions. Finally, the analyzed data was reported in the Results and Discussion section.

Participants

There were 11 participants, with a total of eight teachers and three principals. Specific participant characteristics, demographics, or expertise were not required for eligibility. All participants were labelled by their sex and profession (e.g., female elementary, male secondary principal). Below is a brief summary of participant background, including one short quote to summarize how they perceived their role as an educator (see Appendix F for a summary of participant demographics). Quotes were slightly edited for readability (e.g., removed words like “um”).

Teachers

Participant 1. She graduated with her teaching degree in 2010 and has been teaching at the elementary level for nine years. Prior to this, she spent time working for the school board as an educational assistant (EA) and child and youth worker (CYW). She has experience teaching junior kindergarten to grade eight; at the time of the interview she was working as a long-term occasional teacher in a grade three class. This is a brief summary of how she sees herself as a teacher with respect to students,
I like to provide my students with a happy, healthy, and safe environment that they feel that they want to learn, [and] they feel comfortable. I like to be able to provide for [and motivate] all the students [with a wide range of abilities]. (P.1, Female Elementary)

**Participant 2.** She graduated with her teaching degree in 2017 and was in her second year of teaching. She has experience supply teaching Junior Kindergarten, Senior Kindergarten, and grades three to six. At the time of the interview she had a fulltime contract in a junior/senior kindergarten class. This is a brief summary of how she sees herself as a teacher with respect to students,

*My number one priority is always my students. [...] So, if they’re not in the headspace to learn, then they’re not gunna learn anything. [...] So, I really see myself as a supporter [...] and I really hope that, you know, [...] every one [emphasized] of my students feel valued, [...] know they’re important to me, and that I genuinely care about their wellbeing and their success in my classroom.* (P.2, Female Elementary)

**Participant 3.** She graduated with her teaching degree in approximately 1991 and has been teaching at a secondary level for about 29-years. She has experience teaching grades nine through 12 and all subjects. At the time of the interview she was working as a guidance counsellor and program chair of student services (i.e., guidance, special education, student success, co-op). This is a brief summary of how she sees her role with respect to students,

*Definitely as a leader. [...] Whether I was coaching [...] [or leading] new initiatives [...] kids know that, for me, the best leader is the best server, it’s the one that rolls up their sleeves, and I feel they know that with me. So, that’s how I lead by doing it.* (P.3, Female Secondary)
Participant 4. He graduated with his teaching degree in approximately 2007 and has been teaching at an elementary level for about 10-years. He has experience teaching kindergarten, grades one through six, and special education. At the time of the interview he had a fulltime contract in a kindergarten class. This is a brief summary of how he sees himself as a teacher with respect to students,

_We’re almost like a parent, a social worker, sometimes a babysitter, [...] you’re like a referee, you’re all these things that kids seem to be missing from outside of the school. And then – at some point in time, you have to teach the curriculum which is laid out by the Ontario Government._ (P.4, Male Elementary)

Participant 5. She graduated with her teaching degree in 2000, and then received her Master of Education in 2005. She has been teaching at a secondary level for 15-years. She has experience teaching grades nine through 12, teaching mostly science subjects. This is a brief summary of how she sees herself as a teacher with respect to students,

_As a teacher, my job is to teach, instruct. But like, not necessarily just curriculum-based stuff. Like, life based, teenage maturity-based stuff. Right? Like a good work ethic, or problem-solving skills, or critical thinking. And then the subject area is the vehicle for some of that._ (P.5, Female Secondary)

Participant 6. He graduated with his teaching degree in 1997 and has been teaching at a secondary level for approximately 22-years. He has one-year experience teaching grades seven and eight; the rest of his career has been spent teaching grades nine through 12. He has experience teaching a range of subjects but primarily French and history. This is a brief summary of how he sees himself as a teacher with respect to students,
I’ve put a lot of emphasis on understanding the learner, getting to know the students. [...] I work best with them once I get to build a relationship with them. My role is [to] make sure that they [...] learn and that they enjoy learning. [...] I want them to come to class and feel that, ya know, that was okay. That wasn’t so painful and [in] some cases even enjoyable. (P.6, Male Secondary)

**Participant 10.** She graduated with her teaching degree in 1981 and retired after approximately 38-years of teaching. At the time of the interview she was a supply teacher for elementary level French. She has approximately 10-years of experience teaching at an elementary level and approximately 20-years teaching at a secondary level. She primarily taught French and physical education. This is a brief summary of how she sees herself as a teacher with respect to students,

> [To] provide information. [...] [To] teach them how to learn. I’m not a content person. So not necessarily about the curriculum. To me, it was like, what they could learn and how they could learn and what to do with it. And [how to] be resourceful. (P.10, Female Retired Secondary)

**Participant 11.** She graduated with her teaching degree in 2010 and has been teaching at a secondary level for nine years. She has experience teaching grades nine through 12 and a range of subjects, including English as a Second Language (ESL). This is a brief summary of how she sees herself as a teacher with respect to students,

> As a parent at school. From Monday to Friday for that time as a counsellor, as an actual teacher to help them learn whatever the curriculum is that day. But I think it’s – a huge aspect of it is support in a lot of other ways outside of just the curriculum. (P.11, Female Secondary)
Principals

Participant 7. She graduated with her teaching degree in approximately 1994 and has been an elementary level vice-principal for six years. While teaching, she taught primarily grades five and six for 10-years. This is a brief summary of how she sees herself as a principal with respect to students,

Safety and wellbeing is our first [emphasized] priority and then from there it’s leading the instructional programs. [...] [Leading the instructional program in terms of] teachers delivering curriculum and the instructional strategies that they’re using to make sure that they’re reaching all of the students in their classroom. (P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

Participant 8. He graduated with his teaching degree in 1986 and retired in 2017 after approximately nine years of teaching and 22-years as principal. He has approximately 10-years of elementary level experience and approximately 20-years of secondary level experience. He has experience teaching a range of ages and subjects. This is a brief summary of how he sees himself as a principal with respect to students,

To make sure they felt comfortable in their setting [and] with how they were being treated. To make sure that [...] their teachers were available to them and well prepared for them. [...] Always had an open-door policy, so they felt they can come to me if they had any concerns with what they were being taught, how it was being taught, and with other students. Obviously, the disciplinary part of it, to make sure they were following the school rules and treating each other with respect. (P.8, Male Retired Principal)

Participant 9. He graduated with his teaching degree in 1994 and has been a principal at an elementary level for a total of eight years (including two years as vice-principal). While
teaching, he taught primarily kindergarten and grades one through seven for 15-years. This is a brief summary of how he sees himself as a principal with respect to students,

*Well one for sure you have to be a role model. [...] You’re gunna have a leadership role with regards to any students who [have] difficulty, either academically or in terms of social-emotional stuff. And it’s also the principal’s role to ensure the fidelity of the instruction. You have to make sure that [...] the teachers are doing a good job, in order that they get a good education. You’re kind of a secondary, the second layer, to ensure that the kids are getting the education they’re supposed to.* (P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

**Results and Discussion**

Prior to this study, an educator’s awareness of young caregiving and their perceived role in the identification of and support for YCs in schools had yet to be considered. This study was designed to assess educators’ awareness of the YC role, their willingness to identify the role in a student, and their perceived role in supporting YC students (see Appendix G, H, and I for a summary of findings).

**Teacher Awareness**

Of the eight teacher participants, only two were aware of the term “young carer” or “young caregiver”. These two teachers became aware of the term from professionals outside of the school (i.e., nurse, friend) rather than through their initial teacher training or later professional development. However, as stated by one of these teachers, she was aware of the YC role before learning of the term.

*I sort of wasn’t surprised [when learning about the term] because I’ve always known of situations that, you know, you had the siblings taking care of their other siblings because*
the parents weren’t able to do that. Especially as a CYW, a child and youth worker, we just didn’t have a term for [it] – like we always knew [that young caregiving] was there, we maybe [just did] not had a term for it, right? (P.1, Female Elementary)

Once the term YC was defined, all eight teachers confirmed that they were aware of the caregiving role among children and youth. This finding suggested that awareness of the role, in general, might be more common than awareness of the term, or label, “young carer”. YCs might prefer this as previous research suggested that YCs did not always identify with the YC label even when they identified with the YC role (Moore et al., 2011). In fact, the YC sometimes avoided the label because it did not reflect what they did and/or insinuated family abnormality (McDougall et al., 2018). The use of the term creates a construct for research and the creation/offerings of support services and will, therefore, be used to present the findings; however, “YC awareness” speaks to the teachers’ awareness of the role, not the label.

Teachers demonstrated their awareness of young caregiving by describing students who had this role due to family situations such as being new immigrants or refugees, having ageing grandparent(s) who were their primary caregiver(s), having a disabled sibling, having a large family and/or a large age gap among siblings, and/or parental illness, addiction, or absence (such as parent(s) who were not involved, single-parent homes, parent(s) who worked out of country, and parent(s) who were unavailable because of work). Reported responsibilities included interpreting language for parent(s), helping parent(s) who worked multiple jobs, providing care for sibling(s), completing housework, or being available to an ill or dying parent/guardian. Consistent with research, each of these examples have been historically identified as reasons for caregiving and types of caregiving tasks (Aldridge & Becker, 1993; Charles et al., 2012; Stamatopoulos, 2015). Although all eight teachers were aware that the YC role existed, multiple
factors influenced their awareness of YCs in their classrooms. Factors that might assist a teacher in recognizing a YC in their classroom included teacher experience, teachers having children of their own, the age of the teacher, and their understanding of the YC role. For instance, educators reported that knowing how to “scan” a classroom came from experience. To “scan” a classroom, a teacher might visually examine the students’ behaviour to see if it shows any differences or concerns. This would help teachers notice which students were struggling.

*Having the sense of awareness, [...] again, it comes with experience. [...] I can scan a classroom in 15 seconds, you have a birds eye view right, you’re standing up and everyone’s sitting down [laughing] and you can tell what’s – and in a real quick fashion – what’s going on.* (P.6, Male Secondary)

Further, one teacher thought student struggles were more noticeable when they had their own children to compare with, thereby making unusual behaviour more apparent. However, an educator considering a student’s struggle (or unusual behaviour) as an indicator of a caregiving role is dependent on their awareness of the role more generally. Older generations were thought to have better knowledge of this family dynamic, “you figure like our generation, they had larger families. [...] Like even my husband’s family, they were six kids. Well the older ones are always looking after the younger ones” (P.10, Female Retired Teacher). This suggested that teachers might use their existing knowledge and experience to problem solve student issues. This was consistent with Maynes and Mottonen (2017), who found that pre-service teachers were more confident as they gained experience. How teachers understood the role, however, affected their awareness of YCs more specifically.

Teachers might be more likely to recognize a YC in their classroom if they understood the role; likewise, if a teacher lacked a thorough understanding of young caregiving, they would
be less likely to recognize a multitude of young caregiving situations. Teachers understood that YCs had unique responsibilities at home. They considered young caregiving responsibilities to be unique because of the type of tasks completed and because of the emotional component attached to completing such tasks. For example, as one teacher explained, many students pick up their siblings at the end of the day, but children without a formal caregiving role might not feel stressed when they are unable to complete the task.

*If this is like going home and letting your dog out, well – my daughter’s 10, we just got a puppy…right? That’s part of it. But if it’s like, you know, ‘I gotta cook my own meals, my own food’…that [emphasized] I would […] probably […] go right to the principal and say, ‘Okay, so and so’s saying like they gotta do this, this, this and you know, their parents don’t even get home until 11 o’clock.’ […] This would definitely impact their things.* (P.4, Male Elementary)

*This is when I first really thought, ‘Okay, she [is taking on a caregiving role at home] other than her picking [her brother] up after school’, [because] a lot [of kids] do that. […] When she came [to her brother’s classroom] and she said, ‘Oh my god, oh my god, I’m late! I wanted to make sure I could come and get him and make sure he was dressed [for Halloween] and everything!’ She was stressed! Because she didn’t get there on time! That’s when it clued on to me – like I thought, ‘Okay, she, I think, is doing maybe some of the taking care at home’.* (P.1, Female Elementary).

Teachers also recognized that YCs might have different priorities than students not in a formal caregiving role.
I think that it’s incredibly important as well, if they are in a young caregiver situation, that you [...] understand that they’re trying to provide the basics for their family at home, and that academics might not be their first priority. (P.2, Female Elementary)

With these factors of caregiving understood and reflected upon by teacher participants, it was obvious that carers were not invisible; however, barriers in YC awareness were still evident. Barriers in YC awareness might result from a teacher’s narrow definition of caregiving, their opinion of the role, the visibility of the role, YC secrecy, time with the student, and access to student information. First, within a narrow definition, some teachers assumed that a student must not be a YC if the child was too young, the situation for caregiving was not extreme, the YC was not struggling, they had a supportive family, or they wanted to help.

Like I have a girl right now who’s absent quite frequently but her mom always calls in and she’s always marked absent for illness but it’s not her illness, it’s her father’s terminal illness that she’s absent for. And so, she, I think, is [...] coping with that, like I don’t think that she’s a young carer, she still has her mom around but trying to manage just being there for him and getting her schoolwork done. Like, she’s doing a great job of it, like she’s a very successful student to begin with. (P.5, Female Secondary)

I do have a student now, who does have an older sister with a disability but she’s not in a caregiver role. Like, they have a very supportive family. [...] The family is – they’re very well put together, so...I think it’s nice because I know that my student really looks up to her older sister and she’s very protective of her older sister but it’s just not in a caregiver type of role. (P.2, Female Elementary)

Assuming a caregiving situation must be extreme (i.e., the child must be struggling, without support, providing involuntary care) speaks to how the teacher understands the role. The inability
to acknowledge young caregiving occurs along a continuum leaves YCs hidden. Likewise, assuming role extremity denotes the view of parentification. However, research has shown that young caregiving can be present without that child having a parental role (Boumans & Dorant, 2018), and caregiving is not always a result of a “dysfunctional” family (Charles et al., 2009). In fact, there can be mutual willingness between child and parent for that child to be taking part in some of the family care (Chalmers & Lucyk, 2012; Charles et al., 2012).

Second, although some teachers acknowledged that the YC role might be necessary and could influence the development of unique skills and responsibilities, there was concern about the developmental appropriateness of YC tasks. This finding highlighted a bias related to the typical role and capability of a child. For example, a teacher recognized that caregiving was, at times, a product of family structure and necessary “because [...] some families [...] do what they gotta do and if [...] [they are] supporting whoever that is, in their family, then that’s okay” (P.2, Female Elementary). However, some teachers felt tasks had to be “appropriate for the age of the child” (P.2, Female Elementary) and expressed concerns of abuse and the need to call Family and Children Services (FACS) if the tasks were age inappropriate.

But I think [...] if the caregiver is being abused, that I think is the question. [...] It’s just sort of...there’s a fine line...you know? If there’s a parent that’s strung out on dope [and] that child is looking after a baby or whatever, [and] they’re not being provided with the proper care, clothing, then that’s an issue – that’s abuse. (P.1, Female Elementary)

If I suspect – I mean, well...that’s almost on the abuse side, depending on the age, right? If they’re under 18 and they’re [caregiving]...right? They have that much care, that
Alongside inappropriate roles, some teachers adopted the ideology of childhood innocence as presented in the literature review, “[In response to a YC’s role], I’d be like ‘No, you need to like just be a kid’. […] Like why – no kid should have to be burdened by taking care of a family [laughing]” (P.4, Male Elementary). The necessity for “kids to be kids” excludes YCs from current constructs of childhood. If caregiving is not included as a part of childhood, it implies a YC is not innocent or capable in their role and the stigma that a YC should be removed from the family is perpetuated. This stigma encourages families to keep young caregiving roles private (McDougall et al., 2018), which in turn makes it more difficult for YCs to be recognized.

Third, the YC role might need to be observable within the school to be recognized. Some young caregiving examples, provided by participants, involved the sibling of a teacher’s student. Teachers of younger grades would see a student’s sibling coming into the classroom to provide care. In this case, caregiving was only noticed because the role was overt. This is problematic because at least 28% of youth in Canada have a caregiving role (Stamatopulos, 2015), suggesting there could be up to eight YCs in any 30-student classroom. Having to observe the caregiving take place might leave caregivers, who only care at home, unnoticed and hidden. However, this barrier could also be a product of YCs wanting their role to be a secret.

The fourth perceived barrier in teachers becoming aware of young caregiving in their students was a result of YC secrecy.

_There are many, many kids who […] [will] fly under the radar because they’re the quiet ones, right? […] You’re not gunna notice [caregiving] unless there’s an indicator,
[laughing] right? And as a teacher who, ya know, sees maybe 90 kids a day...ya know, sometimes it takes a while. (P.10, Female Retired Teacher)

I think I miss a lot, because I think, too, students are really good at hiding things sometimes. So, they might be able to maintain their academic stuff and they’re not drawing too much attention to themselves, so they’re good at kind of blending in and just meeting expectations. (P.5, Female Secondary)

Consistent with previous research, YCs have reported that they do not draw attention to themselves because of not wanting to share their specific roles with their teachers (Mansell, 2016). To feel safe sharing their role, and to fully participate in school, YCs needed to feel comfortable in their relationship with teachers (Moore et al., 2009). However, some teachers experienced an inability to spend quality time with students to get to know them. This fifth barrier was expressed to be an issue of secondary school scheduling (only one class a day with each student) and/or supply teaching. For instance, “It goes to know – like learning about the kids. That’s why I don’t like to bounce around schools because [...] my thing is, [...] I teach all the kids” (P.4, Male Elementary). As a supply teacher (frequently teaching at different schools) it can be difficult to establish relationships with students. Secondary teachers also expressed difficulty in building relationships.

I think it’s hard as a secondary teacher [to identify student issues] because we don’t see them all day long, all year. So, I only see them for 75-minutes from Monday to Friday for one semester. So, it’s hard sometimes, [...] especially if you have a class of like 32, to really gage. Sometimes if the kids having an off day, unless you already really know them well and you’ve taught them once before or something...but if it’s the first time teaching
a kid and a kid’s acting a certain way, I don’t know if that’s just how they are or if that’s something that’s off. (P.11, Female Secondary)

Ontario secondary students are typically taught eight courses per year and each course could have a different classroom, teacher, and different students (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2018). A secondary teacher might have 40 to 90-minutes with a student each day, whereas, an elementary teacher will have the same classroom and same students all year (Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 2018). Therefore, as a secondary teacher or supply teacher, it might be necessary to gather student information from outside of the student.

It’d be great if we could know as much as possible, but we don’t unless something happens, right? And even then, we might not be privy to a lot [of student information]. [...] [Teachers are] privy to like the basic information about [any] kid. Whereas, like the office, guidance, special-education is privy to everything. [...] If there was an incident, they would make a note of it, but like [teachers are] not privy to those notes. So, [...] we have to go then seek out that information. (P.11, Female Secondary).

Teachers gathered student information from other teachers, administrators, student records, feeder schools (i.e., the elementary schools that feed students to specific secondary schools), trained staff in the school (e.g., resource teacher, CYW, social worker), and/or in-school team (a team of staff in the school who collaborate to address student issues). This suggested that there could be ways to recognize student issues without direct observation. However, teachers reported that they were not provided with enough information about individual students.

So, like, resource, guidance, student success, they’ll know [about student issues].

Principals, vice-principals, they’ll know. But ordinary classroom teachers don’t. And
like, even when my kids get suspended from class for something, I don’t know why they were suspended. (P.5, Female Secondary)

If you talk to the students, [and the] student’s not telling you anything, then it’s like, ‘Okay, [I have to] go talk to somebody that can [tell me something]’. But...yeah, there is a privacy [issue] [...] [and] people have their hands tied. (P.10, Female Retired Teacher)

Therefore, the final barrier could be a result of privacy limitations on what staff (e.g., guidance counsellor, CYW) can share with one another, limiting teacher access to student information.

Despite these limitations, teachers recognized the importance of having critical information about their students.

And so, I’ll find out things like, ya know, this girl lost her mom three months ago, and I didn’t even know about this? Why didn’t I know about this [sounds distressed]? Or this girl, ya know, attempted to commit suicide back in grade 8 and now we’re in grade 10, how come I don’t know this? [...] And you find out some of this stuff eventually, but it takes a while, as opposed to, in some instances we should know them right from the get-go. (P.6, Male Secondary)

I think there’s nothing – there’s not a worse feeling as a teacher than being frustrated with a kid about not handing in an assignment or whatever it is and then finding out their dad died of a brain tumor. Like...you just feel like the worst human being in the world.

But you didn’t know, and you just wish you knew. (P.11, Female Secondary)

Teachers thought being aware of student issues was important because it would help them to better understand how to approach the student, to decrease accidental stigmatization of the YC by the teacher, to better understand why academics were affected, and to provide the student with support. When teachers were aware of a specific YC, they reported having a better
understanding of the student, allowing them to be more sensitive and empathetic with that student.

And [...] I get [that what the student did] was wrong, but [...] had the [teacher] known [about the student’s situation], I don’t know that they would have blown up like that, and kicked him out, and called the office. [...] The office dropped the ball where they didn’t let everybody know that maybe we should have some sensitivity with this kid. (P.11, Female Secondary)

As a teacher we need to be sensitive to what’s happening in kids’ lives. [...] So, if a kid is a young caregiver, there is [...] so much potential for added stress, anxiety, not getting the work done, whatever the case may be, right? (P.6, Male Secondary)

Further, awareness changed the way a teacher would interact with a student in attempt to avoid accidental stigmatization.

Maybe even in a sociology course when they’re doing family genealogy or whatever, you know that’s a sensitive topic [for young carers]. Even group work, ‘Oh, let’s all get together on Saturday’. ‘I can’t get together, I’m a little too damn busy’ [speaking on behalf of the carer in group work]. (P.3, Female Secondary)

These findings are important because multiple studies found that YCs did not want to share their role with teachers because of a perceived lack of understanding or humility, and perceived stigma (Bolas et al., 2007; Eley, 2004; Lakman et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2009).

Teachers also expressed that YC awareness assisted them in understanding a student’s academics. “We have to always, always be aware of what these kids are going through. And to separate that from the academics just doesn’t make sense now-a-days. [...] They go hand in hand” (P.6, Male Secondary).
Well I think it’d be important [to know about specific YCs] because then when they’re, for example, not doing well in a class, it could remind that teacher, ‘You know what, this week she had to take mom to chemo[therapy], she had to do this, can we try to maybe [accommodate] that presentation?’ (P.3, Female Secondary)

Further, YC awareness helped teachers separate the students who were really struggling from the students who were not performing well for no reason.

If a kid doesn’t hand it in because they were up playing Fortnite [video games] all night, I don’t feel bad for [them]. But if [they] didn’t finish it because [they] […] didn’t sleep because [they] were [caregiving] all night and you were working all day or doing laundry – like [those are] just obviously very different situations. So, if we know, we’re gunna cut a kid way more slack and not take off late marks. Whereas, if a kid just chose not to and partied all night, [they’re] not gunna get the slack. So, I mean, we need to know to differentiate which kid genuinely needs some leniency and which kid doesn’t.

(P.11, Female Secondary)

Finally, YCs in previous research (Eley, 2004) and teachers in the current study, reported that awareness was important in providing the YC with support. YCs felt that if teachers were aware of young caregiving, they might show more respect for those who may not have a “normal” childhood and thereby assist in the identification of YCs (Mansell, 2016).

In summary, all eight teachers were aware of the YC role but not all were aware of the term ‘young carer’. Their awareness of the role may have been influenced by teacher experience, teachers having children of their own to compare behaviours, or by a teacher’s demonstrated understanding of the YC role. Teachers recognized that awareness of young caregiving was important as it would guide their approach to addressing student issues, decreasing potential
stigmatization of the YC by the teacher, assisting in understanding why a student might be struggling academically, and helping the teacher provide support. However, despite these positive findings, there were still barriers in YC awareness. Teachers narrow definition of caregiving was not inclusive of all caregiving circumstances or roles and their personal opinion of the role might influence YC secrecy, another barrier in YC awareness. Similar to YC secrecy, the YC role may need to be visible to the teacher in order to be recognized. Finally, school policy (e.g., class size) might negatively influence a teacher’s ability to spend time with students and could contribute to a deficiency in teachers’ access to student information. Although not all teachers enter the school system aware of young caregiving, their concern for students, in general, might encourage them to learn this of their students.

*I remember [I was exposed to young caregiving] pretty early. [...] Someone pointed out that one of my student’s is responsible for a lot of additional caregiving for younger siblings, so that kind of surprised me. Like until that point, I wasn’t aware that it was a thing...kind of deal. But I think, too, I think most teachers just generally care about their students enough to want to support them in whatever way they can. And trying to meet them halfway. So, I don’t know that [young carer awareness] necessarily changed how I am with my students, it just made me aware of another struggle that students bring to the classroom with them.* (P.5, Female Secondary)

It is important to note, that being aware a student might be a caregiver does not equate to subsequent support. To support the YC in the classroom, the student needs to be identified. More specifically, as one teacher stated, “*I think it would be more helpful for me to know which kids in my class are specifically responsible for those sorts of tasks at home*” (P.5, Female Secondary).
Therefore, the following section will consider the role teachers perceived they had in identifying student issues, young caregiving included.

**Teacher Identification**

As discussed in the literature review, teachers are in a unique position to identify and support YCs. The idea that teachers should be “frontline” workers regarding the identification of student issues (Eley, 2004) was further supported by this study. Teachers expressed that they would be more likely than other staff (e.g., CYW, principal) to identify issues because of the time they spent with students.

*But then in [the] case [of identifying student issues], I’m the one letting [other staff] know because they don’t – they’re not as good as flagging that as we are. Right? [...] That’s definitely our job on the frontlines [to identify student changes]. [...] I think it is always your job. [...] The social worker’s not gunna see them all day every day, like we do.* (P.11, Female Secondary)

The *Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Program Requirements, 2016* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016b) document provided by the OME stated that schools were required to identify and address barriers to student learning and development to ensure equity among all students. Caregiving can create a barrier for YCs to achieve the same success as other students because they struggle to complete homework, engage in school curriculum, and attend on a regular basis (Kaiser & Schulze, 2015; Moore, 2005; Thomas et al., 2003).

Therefore, the mandate for Ontario teachers to ensure student learning and development suggests that identifying YCs and reducing barriers to learning would be part of their role. However, there was considerable ambiguity regarding teachers’ understanding of their “role”. One teacher agreed that this was their mandate.
With just a little bit of prying, you can usually find [student issues] out, ya know, you've gotta be able to recognize all those clues for sure. And if you choose not to acknowledge them, then you’re not doing your job as a teacher. (P.6, Male Secondary)

However, most teachers felt this role was not mandated; some teachers considered this role to be a product of their moral concern for student success. “I would say that [identifying student issues] is something that I naturally do. I wouldn’t say that it is expected as a teacher [said unconfidently]” (P.2, Female Elementary).

I don’t know if it’s our ‘role’ [to identify YCs], but I think we would do it. Is it our responsibility? Probably yes, if it comes – if it affects our classroom, I think yes, we do have that responsibility, yes. Because we have that child and I think we are, it is our responsibility. (P.1, Female Elementary)

Others reported that YC identification was not a part of their role at all. “Technically no [it’s not my role to identify a YC] ...like what happens outside, ya know. [...] 3:10, 3:05, [when school ends]. [...] My job’s not to interrogate [students] about what happens at home” (P.4, Male Elementary).

Is it my role [to identify a YC]? No. If I see it, I think it should come out. But I don’t – like, I’m not going lookin’ for it. Right? If I suspect, for sure I should act on it. But I don’t think I should be lookin’ for it. Like...[laughing] ya know? [...] I’m not the social worker. (P.10, Female Retired Teacher)

Regardless of their perceived “role” or official mandate, teachers described direct and indirect strategies for identifying student issues if and when necessary. A teacher might directly identify an issue by asking the student questions, or because the student/family chose to share their story.
I’ll have to initiate conversations, like when [the student is] late, just finding out, ‘Why are you always late...why are you so often late...why are things not being handed in on time?’ And then usually that’s when they share with me that they’re caregiving for a younger sibling or their job is to make sure dinner is always ready. [...] So that’s [emphasized] when I find out. (P.5, Female Secondary)

You can, once you talk to them, I mean [an immigrated YC will] tell you about [their role]. But they don’t tell you about it to complain, they’re just sharing maybe something, and it comes out that way. But they’re not bringing it up. (P.11, Female Secondary)

For direct identification to be appropriate, some teachers reported that student trust and comfort needed to be established. If asking the student questions did not seem appropriate, teachers relied on indirect forms of identification. For example, teachers reported that they watched students daily to observe for changes in behaviour that might suggest the student needed help.

*Just even seeing [the student’s] eating lunch by themselves. You know what I mean? Or sitting alone pretending they’re on their phone but they’re not really doing anything, you know what I mean? It’s those kinds of behaviours. [...] I would use other factors [to identify student issues], too. I would look at their marks. Then I would look at their attendance record. And piece it together. Maybe [the student] doesn’t think it is [affecting them], but it is. (P.3, Female Secondary)*

*If there’s [student] issues like that [for example, changes in behaviour], I’ve – it has come up [that], ‘Oh, you know, we started a file on him, you know, if there’s behaviour you need to document it’. That’s it. You need to start documenting everything, yes. [...] Only if you think that there’s an issue with that student. (P.1, Female Elementary)*
Alongside behaviour, teachers reported observing student issues within “their writing actually – you know you do a journal – a lot of...kids are very free with their words I find” (P.1, Female Elementary). When observing students, teachers reported taking their own notes or referring to an existing file on a student. In this way, identification could be made anonymously if the teacher did not “wanna get that involved in their personal lives” (P.5, Female Secondary) or the student was not disclosing.

So, you can kinda gage [if there’s an issue] just talking to them. You can see their work ethic and what not. Then, then you go back to their files, you go see if there’s any IEP’s [Individual Education Plan] [...] [or] major concerns. (P.4, Male Elementary)

Finally, teachers reported that feeder schools, in-school teams, social workers, youth counsellors, special education teachers, other classroom teachers, administrators, and school nurses could assist in the identification process when it was not the teacher’s role.

Yeah, it – it’s always beneficial to identify but I don’t think it needs to be a singular role. It has to be an effort by everybody. So, I might pick up on this, and then I didn’t pick up on that kid but that teacher did and do you know what I mean? So, I think every teacher needs to be in that identification stage regardless. Then that’s the difference between a good teacher and one that doesn’t really care, you know? (P.3, Female Secondary)

Although there was not a unified understanding of their mandated role, teachers reflected on why identification was important. For instance, YCs might benefit from identification even if they are not struggling academically. One teacher discussed her experience with YCs who have immigrated to Canada being more difficult to identify than “Canadian YCs”, as she recognized that immigrant YCs might struggle differently.
So, it’s more obvious I find with [YC's who are born in Canada] because they’re not handing stuff in, they’re not showing up to school, they’re late, I think like, it’s easier to show. Whereas the other kids [like YCs who have immigrated], [...] they did always have their work done and showed up on time. [...] They’ll be tired [...] [and not talking but] you might assume, ‘Well that kids not talking because she has an accent and is embarrassed’ or something. So, you’re not going to assume, ‘Oh that kids really tired because she was up all night with her little brother’, or something. So, I think those kids fall through the cracks way more. The other kids are a lot easier to spot. (P.11, Female Secondary)

Teachers felt that identification could create a sense of relief for the YC because teachers would finally understand that “I’m [participant speaking on behalf of the YC] not a screw up, it’s the things around me that are screwing me up” (P.3, Female Secondary). Further, identification could give the YC a sense of security because they would know where to find support when necessary. “I [participant quoting YC] don’t know how long [my mom’s] gunna live, I just wanna know the schools got my back” (P.3, Female Secondary). These findings were consistent with YC research, which stated that YCs wanted to feel recognized and validated for their exceptional responsibilities and felt that identification could assist them in finding that support (Smyth et al., 2011).

Teachers reported several barriers they might face in trying to identify a student as a YC. One was the potential crossing of boundaries in the student-teacher relationship.

*I find it incredibly difficult to also not cross lines, or cross boundaries as a teacher, when you’re coming into that situation of a young caregiver. You also don’t want to pass judgement, that, ‘Oh well they’re, you know, they’re being neglected or abused because
they have more responsibilities than the average child’ [giving an example of judgment] because that might not be the case. (P.2, Female Elementary)

Teachers reported that this unwanted identification could cause feelings of sadness, embarrassment, betrayal, fear, and/or internalization, some of which were consistent with previous YC research (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014; Bolas et al., 2007). “I think [YC] don’t wanna talk about it because they’ll get upset, right? And […] they don’t wanna cry in front of [the teacher]” (P.11, Female Secondary). “[YC] might feel embarrassed and that they’re the only one that is doing that [role]” (P.1, Female Elementary). “So, I think [identification causes] fear of what’s gunna happen. Depending if the — if the child was old enough to know that FACS is gunna come in” (P.10, Female Retired Teacher).

I think the internalization is the biggest problem around [identification]. Like if they don’t want you to know and they know you know, then they could start using avoidant strategies, and that I think is the biggest problem. Them avoiding school because they don’t want people to know what happens when they leave school. (P.5, Female Secondary)

Teachers can use student files to anonymously identify issues and avoid crossing boundaries or causing distress. However, some secondary teachers reported that they wanted to avoid reviewing students’ “Ontario Student Record(s)” (OSR) in fear of creating bias. The OSR is a school-wide document that contains information to improve instruction for specific students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). “I wanna see my first impression of [the student] without that being clouded by other peoples’ perceptions or past history” (P.5, Female Secondary). Valuable information about a student’s family might be missed if teachers are avoiding the OSR, resulting in YCs possibly going in and out of educators’ awareness throughout their education.
This was not the only preventable barrier. Some teachers reported that large classroom sizes and insufficient classroom support contributed to barriers in identification. “So, it’s harder to get EA’s and there’s cutbacks with EA’s. So, you don’t, a lot of the teachers don’t have that support in their classrooms anymore” (P.1, Female Elementary). “I’m in charge of scheduling, okay? So, [...] for example, I have a grade 10 science class at 42 kids...so let’s say a kid’s struggling in there...how much help you think they’re really gunna get?” (P.3, Female Secondary).

Teachers reported strategies to overcome barriers in identification such as privacy and classroom inclusivity to ensure students felt comfortable with identification.

*Hopefully [the students] know that the classroom’s a safe place and the teacher’s not there to harp on them, and they’re not being judgemental. [...] I think as long as the kids feel safe, you’ll get a lot from them. If they feel comfortable and safe, they’ll open up to you quite remarkably.* (P.6, Male Secondary)

*I think too, a lot of times we have to make sure they know ahead of time that whatever they’re sharing will be accepted without judgement. [...] And so that’s, I think, where creating a diverse, inclusive environment comes into play.* (P.5, Female Secondary)

Teachers also highlighted the significance of a student self-identifying. “If [the student] can self-advocate, [they’ll] save [them]self a lot of hassles. As opposed to just not sharing.” (P.5, Female Secondary). With large class sizes and limited available support, identification might only be possible if a YC comes forward. “Unless they’re [the YC] gunna take the initiative to do something, you can’t – you can’t help everybody. [...] If they don’t come forward, there’s no way of us kind of figuring it out” (P.3, Female Secondary). Therefore, it is critical to create an inclusive space where YCs feel safe and comfortable enough to self-identify.
In summary, there was not a clear consensus regarding a teacher’s educational mandate to identify YCs. Regardless of mandate, teachers reported strategies to identify YCs directly (i.e., asking questions, YC disclosing role) and indirectly (i.e., observations, taking notes, team-approach). Teachers recognized that identification was also important for students who did not struggle academically and needed additional support, such as financial or emotional. They also recognized that identification could provide YCs with a sense of relief and security. However, despite these positive findings, there were still barriers in YC identification. Teachers worried that YC identification may cross boundaries in a teacher-student relationship. Likewise, unwanted identification may cause feelings of sadness, embarrassment, betrayal, fear, and internalization. Further, some teachers might miss an identification if they avoid the OSR, or because of large classroom sizes and insufficient available support. While there are barriers in identifying YCs, teachers reported that ensuring student privacy and classroom inclusivity, as well as encouraging self-identification, might assist in overcoming these barriers. However, as YCs reported in previous research, identification did not always ensure satisfactory support because teachers were either not doing enough or being too intrusive (Thomas et al., 2003). Therefore, identification might be necessary for teachers to support the YC.

*I wouldn’t know [the YC needed support]. Unless I asked. I would have a gut feeling and intuition maybe, but I wouldn’t know unless they told me, and I wouldn’t know unless I went to ask what’s going on with so and so.* (P.5, Female Secondary)

For this reason, the next section will review whether teachers perceive student support to be within their role as an educator.

**Teacher Support**
As discussed in the literature review, public documents provided by the OME mandate teachers support their students’ academic success and mental wellbeing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; 2016a). Some teachers agreed that supporting students, YCs included, was part of their role.

*If the kid is at risk of not succeeding it is our duties as teachers to help that kid succeed.*

*If I just sit back and watch that kid fail, then I don’t think I’m doing my job. So, I’ve got to go and pry and try to get this kid to be successful. Now same thing emotionally, if the kid doesn’t want help, I’m not going to force myself upon that child but I will – it is my obligation, my duty to do something to see that that kid gets help. So, whether it’s letting admin[istration] know [or] letting the counsellor know. [...] We all – as teachers – we have an obligation to help these kids.* (P.6, Male Secondary)

Some teachers reported that their role extended past academic fulfillment.

*Any time that a student is suffering with something, there should be an intervention.*

*Whether it’s academically, emotionally, whatever, right? I believe that’s my role. To provide it is different, right? And that will be the, yeah, when it comes to education that’s the biggest thing, right? If you could just teach, teaching would be easy. But we have all these other roles.* (P.10, Female Retired Teacher)

*I don’t think that people truly understand until you are an educator, how much it also takes out of your time. And [...] the extra effort that we put in, to make sure that our students are happy, their healthy, their supported, and that their successful.* (P.2, Female Elementary)

One teacher felt that student support should be mandated at a higher level.
[YC support is] not mandated, it’s all professional judgement. I think – I hope, no one gets into teaching cuz they don’t like kids. Ya know? So, you would think, I don’t know, I think it’s a lot of work if you don’t like them, to deal with them all the time. So, unless you’re compassionate, you wouldn’t [support]. So, I would think everyone would just naturally use their professional judgement and if a kid tells you something’s going on,
you’re not going to be as cut and dry as you would with another kid. (P.11, Female Secondary)

To ensure all teachers feel it is a requirement of their position in school, YC support must be a clear component of their legally mandated role. Further, the OME needs to clearly define what support means and how to provide support when teachers lack expertise. Finally, future research should consider the gap between students receiving support and the mandate teachers perceive they have, more generally.

Teachers reported being available to support students throughout the day (i.e., before/after school, during prep-time, during class, at lunch, at recess), and by helping them find support outside of the classroom. Support within the classroom included academic support, curriculum-based support, and emotional support. First, in terms of academic support, teachers recognized why YCs might need extra support. “I know that I have to do a lot more leg work at school because I know that he’s not going home and […] reading, he’s not practicing his alphabet, there is no further extension of learning at home” (P.2, Female Elementary).

Consistent with previous research, YCs sometimes struggled to find time at home for homework or studying because of their role (Eley, 2004). Teachers reported that academic support included teacher leniency and sensitivity, ensuring students understood day-to-day lessons, and providing accommodations such as deadline extensions, offering alternative projects (e.g., oral vs. written), omitting assignments, or dropping low test marks during times of heavy stress.

You wanna make sure you’re not adding to the [YC’s] burden. That kids got enough going on. […] I don’t wanna add deadlines, […] like I don’t care when you hand in the essay. That’s not – I’m not gunna lose sleep over it. I need to keep deadlines for other kids cuz they need to learn responsibility. But for this kid, [that’s a YC], is that gunna...
make or break their life? No, they know responsibility. So, that’s not a worry for me.

They just need to do it at some point so I give them the credit. (P.11, Female High School)

However, as YCs do not want to be treated differently than other students (Mansell, 2016; Moore et al., 2009), educators must ensure the YC has the same expectations (with accommodations if needed) as youth not in a formal caregiving role.

Second, teachers supported YCs through the curriculum. This gave an opportunity to teach YCs practical skills to assist them in their caregiving role. Supporting the YC with their role was consistent with research by Moore (2005), who discussed a YC’s ability to participate fully in school required the curriculum include practical skills to assist the student in their day to day life.

I [might] actually change the course, like if [the lesson is] [...] about fractions and what not, well, okay, let’s learn how to cook. You’d do it as a whole thing so you wouldn’t center [the YC] out. Whatever you can tie into the curriculum. [...] [Or] I had them build structures, like I got a donation from the local hardware store and I made them build things. Just those kinda life skills, which are good in general, let alone [...] for a [young] carer. (P.4, Male Elementary)

I’m trying to think, like in phys[ical]-educ[ation] classes and stuff, right? During health, [...] I might even do a whole thing on [young caregiving], right? Just so, again, it becomes generic, a general conversation. But it’s for one particular person. And who knows, there might be other people in the classroom that you’re not even aware of, right? (P.10, Female Retired Teacher)
Third, teachers reported feeling they had a role in being available to students for emotional support. Teachers could support students emotionally by being someone the student could speak to when distressed, by helping the student identify their emotions, or by being the person within the school that cares for them. “I always felt like I wanted to take care of [young carers] more. Because they don’t have someone to take care of them, cuz they’re always taking care of everyone else” (P.11, Female Secondary). Finally, teachers felt they could provide emotional support by simply getting the student through the day. “Maybe there’s a lot of things going on in their life, and the fact that you’re there every day, you’re consistent, and you’re positive, might just be the little push they need to get through one more day” (P.2, Female Elementary).

Aside from academic, curriculum, and emotional support within the classroom, teachers also had ideas on how they could support outside of the classroom. For instance, in some cases teachers offered support after school hours. “I take them to go set up their apartment or get them stuff for their apartment, go to get groceries, take them to Port Cares to do their resume, stuff like that” (P.3, Female Secondary). One participant also discussed his ability to donate old material items to YCs; “like if I have something that I don’t need anymore, I definitely give it to them, [...] just to make their day” (P.4, Male Elementary). These were initiatives that individual teachers took on to ensure students felt supported.

Support from only one teacher might not be sufficient, especially in secondary school where a student might have four teachers a day. For this reason, one teacher acknowledged the importance of ensuring schoolwide support.

[Support looks like telling] other people about [the caregiving] to try to make sure that kid has more support from all of their classes. Maybe that the VP’s [Vice-Principal] keep
an eye, in case there is like an issue behaviourally or something, that they have a heads up. [...] Just making sure everyone who needs to be aware [of the situation] is aware so we can do whatever we can, so that kid has less on their plate. (P.11, Female Secondary)

Teachers also recognized that some students might not want their teacher to be the person in which they disclose information. In these cases, teachers would offer to help by finding YC's other support(s). For instance, “[letting students] know that if they don’t want to talk to me, I’m not offended and [I can] direct them to other supports within the school or the community that they could go to” (P.2, Female Elementary). Or, “sometimes I have to support them in figuring out maybe resources for outside support, depending on what they – what the issue is” (P.10, Female Retired Teacher).

Teachers indicated that when a student issue was identified, multiple people within the school and community should become resources to ensure that student is fully supported. Teachers thought support within the school could come from administrators, a CYW or social worker, the school Chaplin, coaches, student services, guidance counsellors, the school nurse, staff with applied suicide intervention skills training, police liaisons, in-school teams, learning resource teachers, teaching assistants, school clubs, peer tutors, and language translators. The type of support provided by the school could be financial (i.e., school uniform, food, clothing, Christmas packages, exempts for school trips), emotional (i.e., someone to talk to, counselling), academic (i.e., homework club), and/or future planning (i.e., career planning, post-secondary education planning). Community support could be programs (e.g., mental health services, Big Brother Big Sister, YMCA) where students could be referred. A team approach would not only offer more support options to the student but also inform teachers of additional supports they were unaware existed.
Because I might not know that there are programs out there to support them because I’m not a social worker, but I’m pretty sure there have to be [programs], so I would put [students] in touch with the people in the building that I know could point them in the right direction, if they’re not already accessing those services. (P.5, Female Secondary)

And the [immigrant YCs], because the support isn’t academic support, it’s harder for a teacher because that [support is] outside of our reach sometimes, too, right? Like that support is financial support, that support is housing support. [...] I have to then talk to the Chaplin, the office, the SWIS [settlement workers in schools] worker. Like you have to get other people involved. Those aren’t things I can just fix on my own. So, that’s a big difference, too. (P.11, Female Secondary)

Therefore, the teacher’s ability to identify multiple sources of support suggests a holistic support system is possible.

In summary, support for YCs came from teachers (e.g., academic, curriculum, emotional), or a team-approach of support from the school and community. The support that teachers identified as useful for YCs was consistent with YC research. YCs reported that teachers ensuring accommodations and flexibility in their delivery of the curriculum was essential (Moore, 2005; Moore et al., 2009). Moreover, YCs reported emotional support (i.e., having someone to talk to within the school) was important. The person YCs talked to did not have to be a teacher, but rather, any staff within the school that the YC felt comfortable with (Moore et al., 2009). Validating the importance of school wide support, YCs felt that if one teacher knew of the caregiver’s role, they should take the initiative to ensure all school-staff were also aware (Moore et al., 2009). Finally, community financial support was important because research suggested that YCs could struggle with poverty which made it difficult for YCs to find
transportation and food services, and to be able to afford school uniforms and school outings (Moore, 2005; Moore et al., 2009).

Despite teachers recognizing the importance of YC support, much like becoming aware of and identifying young caregiving, there were barriers. In some cases, the support was simply out of the teacher’s capabilities; in other cases, school policies made support difficult. “My role would be to best support the [YC] emotionally and academically within the school. Outside of school, unfortunately, I don’t have any control” (P.2, Female Elementary). Likewise, “the sad thing is it becomes – [support is] short lived to a certain extent, right? Because it’s within that building” (P.3, Female Secondary). Further, teachers felt that they could not change things for the student (e.g., the teacher could not eliminate the YC’s stress at home). Lastly, teachers struggled with being able to support while still maintaining their role to educate.

I can support as much as I want, I can be as nice as I want, but at the end of the day, my job is to get you that credit. And if I can’t get you that credit, I failed in my – like that’s my main role. Everything else I should do – and it’s inevitable and it’s gunna happen, but my actual job is to get you that credit and to teach you this curriculum to get you to the next step. So, if I can’t get you to the next step, that’s a problem. [...] And it’s just different because we’re like a counsellor but we’re also a counsellor who needs you to do this job. You know, we’re like your boss. So, you can talk to [us], but at the end of the day, I need you to do this job by two months from now. So, it’s – there’s that added like, side to it. (P.11, Female Secondary)

Teachers criticized that some school policies and regulations made it difficult for them to efficiently do their job. Similar to barriers in identification, teachers reported that large classroom sizes and a lack of support staff left teachers with less time and resources. “Even a
CYW we don’t have every day of the week. So, I think she wasn’t there on Thursdays, and we were like, what if a kid has a problem on a Thursday?” (P.11, Female Secondary).

In summary, there was not a clear understanding of a teacher’s educational mandate to support YCs. Regardless of mandate, teachers reported various supports available to YCs. Supports included academic, curriculum-based, emotional, financial, and future-planning. Teachers reported that they would support YCs after hours, through donations, by ensuring school-wide support, and by directing YCs to community programs. However, despite these positive findings, there were still barriers in YC support. Teachers reported that required support may be out of a teacher’s capabilities, difficult to ensure while teaching, and difficult because of large classroom sizes and insufficient supports.

**Principal Awareness**

Principals are leaders within their school and are responsible for implementing provincial policy and ensuring support for their students. The principals interviewed perceived they had a role to communicate with students, teachers, and parents. Student interaction involved building relationships, recognizing student issues, managing and/or disciplining behaviour, and ensuring success and wellbeing. Teacher interaction involved talking to, supporting, and guiding teachers, as well as ensuring they were made aware of and appropriately addressing student issues. Finally, principals felt they had a role in communicating with students’ parents, especially if an issue was present. Principals reported that building relationships with students eliminated challenges associated with at-risk students before they surfaced. Principals reported interacting with students in their offices (whether the student was struggling or not), in the classroom, in hallways, in the library, outside at recess, and during extracurriculars (e.g., coaching). Principals felt they had a distinct role to enter classrooms to support the teacher in curriculum delivery and
to ensure student learning. “I think that’s part of the role of principals [to go into the classrooms]. [...] So, I try to make an effort at least to get in every class 4 times a day” (P.9, Male Elementary Principal). Finally, principals felt they were “responsible for the performance of all students” (P.8, Male Retired Principal) and ensuring that students could focus and succeed in school. Therefore, there were many opportunities to get to know students and potentially recognize YCs.

Only one of three principals were aware of the YC term. The principal who was aware of the term had a local YC program, Powerhouse Project (Young Caregivers Association), enter her school to discuss caregiving. While there was limited awareness of the YC term, all principals were aware of the YC role. All three principals became aware of the YC role through experience (either as an educator or from their personal lives). This finding was consistent with teachers’ knowledge of the YC role being more prominent than the term.

But like I said, I think most administrators would know [of the YC role] but they wouldn’t [know] the definition [of] young carer – when you explain they go ‘Oh yeah! We have kids like that, I know kids like that! This is what I do for kids like that.’ (P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

To recognize student issues, such as young caregiving, principals utilized indicators (i.e., attendance, academic, behavioural, social) and/or other tools (i.e., student data, other staff, teachers, parents, in-school team).

Not that we have any training at all – but you kinda can see kids that are heading towards [...] depression – I can’t identify it, but you can kinda see the signs. They’re withdrawn, they’re sitting on the wall by themselves, they’re not playing with anyone, the biggest indicator is attendance, they stop comin’ to school. And that’s the biggest one.
[...] But you can usually see that there’s a change in their behaviour in terms of, they’re by themselves, not coming to school, they just look less happy than the other kids. (P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

Using these resources, principals reflected on what they knew of caregiving roles. Unlike teachers, principals only identified specific caregiving examples surrounding parental issues (i.e., divorce, absence, addiction, illness), and socio-economic status. This could be because there were only three principals and, therefore, fewer examples. However, it could also speak to how principals understood the caregiving role. The principals in this study understood that the role might be necessary and a product of family dynamics. For instance, “a mother that was in an abusive relationship, that had to get out but has to work [...] will need to lean on the older children a little bit more” (P.8, Male Retired Principal). In considering family dynamics, one principal reported that the oldest sibling (often daughter) in the family would be most likely to take on a caregiving role.

I find a lot of it is, to be honest, single moms, the oldest sibling is responsible for childcare. So, tons of examples of kids, three or four kids in the family, the oldest, usually daughter, is responsible. [...] So, because mom’s working or may have two jobs, they’re doing a lot of the homecare, in terms of laundry, food, getting the kids ready for bed.

(P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

Consistent with YC research, Stamatopoulos (2015) found that in Canada, females were more likely than males to be in a caregiving role. However, to my knowledge, there is no Canadian research to suggest that the oldest sibling is most likely to be a caregiver. This could be a limitation in the awareness a principal has of caregiving, if they fail to consider younger siblings
having a caregiving role. Furthermore, principals only discussed caregiving due to parental issues, which means they might not recognize YCs who care for an ill or disabled sibling.

Additional barriers in YC awareness might come from a principal’s perception of parentification and their expectation of childhood innocence.

*We’ve had kids who were in that [role], who were like unbelievable athletes but weren’t – they weren’t allowed to participate because they were providing that role. So, they’re missing out on things they should be participating in because they’re in the parental role.*

(P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

As discussed in Teacher Awareness, assuming childhood innocence implies a YC does not fit into the construct of childhood (Sexton & Chalmers, in press). This perpetuates the stigma that encourages YCs and their families to remain quiet and hidden. Principals identified additional barriers in YC awareness; for instance, principals reported it was hard to recognize a caregiver who was not struggling. Principals felt there was no way to know the student was a caregiver if there were no warning signs that something was occurring outside of the school. “*I think if they’re not struggling, they may go years and years before you even realize that they’re providing that care. You would never know. Some kids, to be honest, have it together*” (P.9, Male Elementary Principal). Principals also reported that it was difficult to recognize YCs if school staff were not educated or were inexperienced in YC situations. “*The teacher doesn’t always have the time, or the resources, or the educational background. […] Some teachers lack experience because they’ve just been hired, and they haven’t necessarily seen that*” (P.8, Male Retired Principal). This suggests that principals need the support of frontline workers (i.e., teachers) to recognize student issues. In scenarios where the frontline worker recognized young caregiving, it was the principal’s role “to make sure that we guide the teachers towards the
people in the school that can help” (P.8, Male Retired Principal). Finally, principals felt it was difficult to be aware of all YC situations because of the number of students under their supervision.

It’s sort of like, you need to come and be in a school then because we have hundreds of kids and how will we know [there is an issue]? We can’t be everywhere at once. Even in a classroom we can’t be monitoring every conversation or what happens that we don’t know. If we don’t know, then we can’t address it. (P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

Despite these barriers in YC awareness, principals demonstrated an accurate conceptualization of the YC role. Principals understood how caregiving might affect YCs, both positively and negatively. For instance, principals recognized that YCs might be more mature, well-adjusted, and responsible. They were also aware that YCs might struggle with attendance (e.g., miss school in fear of leaving behind parent with a drug addiction), academics, behaviour (e.g., outbursts), social situations, and basic necessities (e.g., clean clothes, food). They recognized that caregiving could cause students to feel overwhelmed, unhappy, stressed, and unsafe at home. Principals reported negative consequences of caregiving could result in the student needing an escape or extra support from the school. Further, principals were aware that YCs would likely be dealing with more issues than just caregiving (i.e., adult issues).

In my opinion, it’d be hard for a student to focus on education and building peer relationships if they’re dealing with the necessities of life at home, providing food, clothing, all that stuff. […] The [YCs] that are struggling actually gravitate towards their teachers because they’re not getting that relationship at home, I find. […] But they – most of them – they were great kids, but they were much more mature than the other kids
cuz they were, in my opinion, they were dealing with adult issues as kids. (P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

These reports of possible YC issues were consistent with YC research. YCs struggle with attendance (Moore, 2005; Thomas et al., 2003), academics (Eley, 2004; Thomas et al., 2003), behavioural issues (Moore et al., 2009; Thomas et al., 2003), social situations (Moore et al., 2009), basic needs (Moore, 2005; Moore et al., 2009), and struggle with being unhappy (Lloyd, 2013), overwhelmed, and stressed (Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014). Principals felt that being aware of young caregiving was important because it provided clarity for the principal, guided their approach to student issues, and helped them ensure success and lessen student stress. Knowing of the caregiving role allowed principals to problem solve reasons a student might be struggling.

[Knowing of the caregiver role puts] students’ personal lives in perspective in terms of how it – how they function at school. [...] And once I sort of new that piece, it really helped me because we could put some things in place. Like ya know, she – the [young carer] – she didn’t do homework! Well, now I know why she didn’t do homework!

[Principals being aware of the YC role is important because] it can be a huge piece to the puzzle. [...] If we don’t know that they’re a young carer and why are they a young carer, [...] perhaps mom has an addiction or something. If we don’t know that piece, and kids are talking about other stuff, we can’t address it, we can’t help unless we know. (P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

Further, being aware of the caregiving role might make a principal “much more sympathetic when [they] know the full story about students. [...] [Principals are] much more sympathetic that the cause of the student’s behaviour might have nothing to do with what’s going on at
school” (P.9, Male Elementary Principal). Finally, having YC awareness and understanding YC issues might guide the approach principals take to ensure student success while attempting to minimize unnecessary stress.

In summary, all three principals were aware of the YC role yet, like teachers, most were unfamiliar with the ‘young carer’ term. Their awareness of the role may have been influenced by the utilization of multiple strategies in recognizing student issues (i.e., student indicators, student data, other staff, parents), or by their overall understanding of the YC role. Principals recognized that being aware of young caregiving was important as it would provide clarity or explanation of a student issue and guide their approach to that issue. Additionally, principals thought that awareness would assist them in ensuring student success (i.e., academic, social) and lessen students stress by ensuring accommodations. However, despite these positive findings, there were still barriers in YC awareness. Similar to teachers, principals’ narrow definition of caregiving was not inclusive of all caregiving circumstances or roles and their personal opinion of the role might influence YC secrecy. In addition, principals reported it was difficult to recognize YCs who did not struggle academically or behaviourally, and because of the number of students under their supervision. Principals also reported it was difficult to become aware of YCs without educated or experienced frontline staff. Finally, consistent with teacher findings, ensuring support was a challenge if the YC had not been identified.

**Principal Identification**

Principals reported similar strategies for YC identification as teachers. For example, if a principal suspected something might be wrong, they might ask questions to identify/clarify the issue.
I don’t think there’s like a – there isn’t a formula [for identification], it’s really – a lot is experience. Like a lot is like your gut, your internal radar, like something is not right, we need to, ya know, probe a little deeper. ‘Have you called home?’ [...] Try and have conversations. (P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

Further, principals supported the notion that teachers were more likely to identify because of their “frontline” position. “Okay, so myself as a principal, my main resource [to identify a struggling student] was the teacher – classroom teacher” (P.8, Male Retired Principal).

Alongside relying on frontline workers, principals relied heavily on a team approach to identification.

[It is] everybody’s [role to identify changes]. Yeah, so we have from the EA’s, CYW’s, teachers, everybody. It’s everyone’s job. Secretary has a huge role with that to be honest, cuz they’re the first ones who notice changes in attendance. Which is one of the big indicators for [young caregiving], right? (P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

Relying on other staff to identify student issues might suggest that principals struggle to observe changes in individual students. This was consistent with previous research which demonstrated principals struggled to complete all necessary duties while balancing student interaction and administrative tasks (Pollock et al., 2015; Pollock, 2016).

Although all three principals reported they had some capacity to identify YCs, their statements were followed by qualifications. For example, “it’s part of our role [to identify changes in student behaviour] but I would say, hopefully, primarily that would come first from the teacher because they’re with them more often” (P.7, Female Elementary Principal). Similar to teachers, principals were ambiguous about their specific role in identifying YCs.
Is it our role [to identify a YC]? [Thinking] yeah, I guess it comes with the territory. Is it a specific task that we’re supposed to do? No. But we are to understand all our students, yes, we should pick up on stuff like that. But [is it] our task to do it purposefully and to go and interview each child and see if that’s the situation? No. (P.8, Male Retired Principal)

Educators uncertainty of their official mandate create boundaries in identifying and supporting YCs. If teachers rely on principals and principals rely on teachers, then identification will never occur. An increase in YC identification could result from an educator mandate that includes specific roles school staff must take on as a team to identify YCs. In this way, identification would be less likely overlooked because an educator expected another staff to identify.

Nevertheless, principals recognized the importance of identification for YCs. Similar to teachers, principals reported that identification would ensure YC success and support(s) in school. They also felt identification would assist educators in appropriately approaching YCs.

If I look at a doctor’s duty, they eliminate certain symptoms. So [if] you’re treating the ailment, [young caregiving] is not necessarily an ailment, but [...] you’re treating the situation. So, [identification] orients what we’re treating and how we’re gunna do it and how we’re gunna approach it. So, it guides our approach for sure. (P.8, Male Retired Principal)

Finally, principals reflected on the relief a YC might feel if identified. However, principals also recognized that identification might not be positive for a YC. Similar to teachers, principals reported that identification could influence feelings of shame or fear, and/or might break the trust between the principal and the student.

Yeah [I’ve had situations where my relationship with the YC was spoiled by identification]. Especially if it ends up with a FACS call. And they feel like you’ve broken
their trust. And because, typically, no matter what the disaster of the parent is, the kids typically wanna be with their parents. And they are very loyal to their parents. So, we have had that on several occasions where the kids – they usually come around, the older they are the more they understand. But younger kids especially, you can – they will lose their trust in you. But for the most part, even at a young age, they realize you’re trying to help. So, it’s not spoiled forever. It typically comes from feedback from the parents when they get home, that the secrets out, that the parents, ya know, aren’t fulfilling their role and they get very defensive about it, that accusation. (P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

An additional barrier in identification for principals was YC secrecy. Principals felt that YCs wanted to keep their role a secret because they feared being removed from their family or because they did not know their role was different from other children. Alongside this, principals placed blame on the parent’s role; not only were parents thought to influence the YC’s secrecy, but parents were not helpful in identifying the issue. “The problem is, unless parents are willing to talk to us, or unless we can get our social worker working with the family who can then share with us, sort of that piece, sometimes we can’t get the information” (P.7, Female Elementary Principal). It is unclear why principals identified this parental barrier when teachers did not, but it could suggest that principals could be more likely to contact students’ parents when an issue is present. Either way, it reinforces the need for parents and YCs to be open to sharing for identification to occur.

Principals reported that building a relationship with the student, and/or parents, before making an identification would help overcome barriers. “It’s about [having] a relationship with the kid. [...] If they trust you, they’ll disclose that. Most kids, if you have a good relationship with them, will talk to you about what’s going on at home” (P.9, Male Elementary Principal).
“But in other situations, the parents, ya know, overtime after we’ve built sort of that trusting relationship, then they become more receptive to suggestions we have” (P.7, Female Elementary Principal). Finally, like teachers, principals reported the importance of self-advocacy and self-identification to ensure YC support.

_Cuz if they’re a home carer and you don’t know, it’s hard to support them, other than what we do at school for kids that are struggling in terms of extra help academically._

[…]

_If they’re not – if you don’t know – it’s hard to fix what you don’t know about. [...] Like that’s a very difficult one. Especially if you can’t see it. If they’re not coming like, disheveled to school or whatever, that’s a hard one to help. Cuz it’s hard to intervene what you – something you don’t know about._ (P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

In summary, there was not a clear consensus regarding a principal’s educational mandate to identify YCs. Regardless of mandate, principals reported identification may occur by asking questions or utilizing frontline workers and a team-approach. Principals recognized that identification was important to help ensure academic, social success, and support, provide YC with a sense of relief, and assist educators in their approach to addressing student issues. However, despite these positive findings, there were still barriers in YC identification. Principals reported that unwanted identification could result in feelings of shame or fear, and that identifying the YC could break the trust between the student and principal. Finally, principals reported that YC secrecy, and parents encouraging YCs to stay hidden, made identification difficult. While there are still barriers in identifying YCs, principals reported that building relationships with students and parents, and encouraging self-identification, might assist in overcoming these barriers.

Principal Support
All three principals felt they had a role in supporting YCs. Like teachers, principals identified types of support to be provided within the school included academic (i.e., accommodations), emotional (i.e., someone to talk to, building a relationship), and financial (i.e., basic necessities, extracurriculars). However, it was unclear whether principals saw their role to support to be “mandated” or just something that educators did. Regardless of mandate, principals felt that their specific role in offering support meant creating a safe space for students. Alongside this, principals ensured that offered support was extended to the YC’s family.

"Other things that I have done specifically for [YC]s...is eventually creating a better dialogue with the parents, so the parents can better intervene also. And equipping the parents a lot [of] times. A lot of times the parents are just overwhelmed and that's why [their children are caregivers] – so giving them resources, [and] putting them in touch with community groups that can help them out."

(P.8, Male Retired Principal)

When support included parents, however, for one principal it involved an attempt to eliminate the caregiving role; this could be unique to this principal’s experience as he mentioned multiple YC cases related to parental addiction.

"Well, we would attempt [...] to support [the YC] so they don’t have to do [that role]. Either with a conversation with the – first identifying with the parents, like a conversation with the parents in terms of, ‘That’s not really – that’s a parental role and it’s affecting your child’s education.’"

(P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

 Principals also reported that part of their role was to ensure teachers were supporting students.

"If they're in that young carer role, absolutely it would be [acceptable to receive academic accommodation]. And that’s where I sort of said having to be the go-between if, if with the teacher, if they weren’t quite getting that, to make sure they did understand..."
that that was legitimate. That [caregiving is] a viable reason, absolutely, yeah. [...] I would say some teachers perhaps don’t see that bigger picture. They just see the academics and then, fair is not always equal. But sometimes teachers have a hard time with that. [...] So, trying to educate them in terms of that piece of that puzzle. [...] I would say, ya know, majority are pretty good [at] understanding or having empathy once they realize that puzzle piece. (P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

[It is] definitely [my role to educate teachers about YCs]. And it’s not necessarily because of a lack of wanting to help their students, sometimes it was just something that [teachers] hadn’t come across in the past. And having overviewed a lot of students and a lot of staff members, I had the experience to say, ‘Listen this is why this child might be reacting, this is what you can do’. (P.8, Male Retired Principal)

Finally, principals utilized a team approach to support. Principals recognized that students might require multiple venues of support and that some staff were more trained to handle specific issues than others. “I’ll go get the people that have the expertise, better expertise, to put in contact. [...] [I have] some very special people working for me [...] that I would lean on” (P.8, Male Retired Principal).

I guess, really, my main role [in supporting YCs] would be trying to hook them up with programs or supports depending on why they’re a [young] carer and what type of caregiving they’re doing, [and] how we can help that. (P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

Therefore, the findings indicate that both principals and teachers relied on a team-approach to support students, suggesting that support should not be any one person’s role within the school.
Principals reported that supporting YCs might lighten YC responsibilities and, therefore, lessen their stress. “If [the YC role is] negatively affecting them academically or socially, emotionally, then you have to help them out, like they’re in need” (P.9, Male Elementary Principal). Principals noted, however, that regardless of student issue, all students needed to be supported.

That seems like a silly question... [YCs should receive support] because they need it! Of course! Like any, any child who needs support should get support, right? So, if that’s – if that’s the reason why they need support, then they – it shouldn’t be – they don’t get it because they’re a young carer? I think the only reason they wouldn’t get it is because nobody knew. [...] Our goal is to support every student in every [emphasized] way possible to help them achieve their potential or be successful. Ya know? We’ll stand on our head if we have to, kind of thing, [...] like literally we will do absolutely anything.”

(P.7, Female Elementary Principal)

The quote above also illuminates a barrier identified by teachers, YC support without awareness/identification remains a challenge.

YC awareness/identification was not the only reported barrier in providing YCs with support. One principal reported that before giving the YC support within the school, their home life needed to be examined more critically. “Well, first – the primary thing [is] you’d have to make sure [the home] was a safe environment [for the young carer]. [...] If it is an addiction, and you feel the student [is unsafe] – we’re obligated by law to call FACS” (P.9, Male Elementary Principal). Therefore, in some cases, support for principals required intervention. All professionals working with children and youth have an obligation to call Children’s Aid Society (CAS) if they have concern of abuse or neglect. Professionals can be fined up to $5000 if
abuse/neglect is ignored (Ontario College of Teachers, 2018). Certain signs of abuse or neglect, as provided by Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), might relate to situations of young caregiving. For example, educators are to report if “a parent or caregiver does not adequately care for or protect the child or protect the child from others” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2018; p. 3). In addition, an educator must report if they sense caregiver incapacity, including “substance abuse or mental health concerns that have an impact on a child’s safety or well-being” (Ontario College of Teachers, 2018; p. 5). Therefore, educators might feel pressured to involve FACS/CAS in a young caregiving situation, especially if they are unsure of the family dynamics. However, fear of being reported to FACS/CAS is a main contributor toYC secrecy (Moore, 2005; Moore & McArthur, 2007; Bjorgvinsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2014).

It’s very difficult to go that route [of intervention] because it does, it does damage the relationship with the parents for sure. You have to – we’re obligated to do it, but it is very – that call is very difficult. The other stuff, [like] helping with lunches and clothes and stuff like that is easy, but the actual formal FACS call puts a lot of stress on principals and teachers, for sure. (P.9, Male Elementary Principal)

In reviewing documents provided by the Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies (OACAS), Trocme (2017) discussed why the word “neglect” is problematic. He suggested that assuming neglect attributed blame to the parent only. He thought viewing neglect more holistically would be beneficial. For example, the school would be at fault, alongside the parent, for sending a child to an empty home instead of developing an after-school program. Trocme suggested that the needs of the child needed to be addressed before determining if those needs were a product of neglectful parenting (Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Society, 2017). In this way, the school and parent would work together to ensure that the child was supported
within their environment. As Harlick (2015) mentioned, 97% of calls to CAS resulted in supporting the family so that the child was not removed (Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Society, 2015). If CAS involvement resulted in families getting better support, then calling CAS might be less detrimental. However, the fear of intervention by CAS/FACS will continue to keep YCs and their families quiet, until the stigma surrounding young caregiving has been eliminated. Future research should consider whether OACAS/CAS are aware of young caregiving situations and are prepared to support families accordingly.

In summary, there was not a clear understanding of a principal’s educational mandate to support YCs. Regardless of mandate, principals reported various available supports for YCs. Supports included academic, emotional, and financial. Principals reported that they would ensure school-wide support, create a safe space for students, and ensure support was available to families. However, despite these positive findings, there were still barriers in YCs receiving support. Principals reported that it was difficult to support without including CAS/FACS because of reporting requirements. Finally, principals felt that YC support was difficult without first establishing YC awareness and identification.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study considered educators’ awareness of young caregiving and their perceived role in identifying and supporting YCs. Contrary to previous research demonstrating the lack of educators’ YC awareness (Thomas et al., 2003), all participants in this study were aware of the YC role. Educators reported the importance of and barriers associated with YC awareness, identification, and support. Although a specific mandate to identify or support YCs was not perceived, educators did have consistent views with the OME mandate in that they expressed supporting students and ensuring success was important. The results yielded various
Recommendations which rely on specific educator mandate and YC cooperation. It is hoped that with this study and further future research, YCs vulnerability will be lessened by the education systems implementation of YC awareness, identification, and support.

**Recommendations**

Given the study’s findings, there are several recommendations for YCs and their families, educators, school policy, and YC advocacy/support groups. The recommendations focus largely on encouraging YCs to self-identify, raising awareness within schools, and ensuring teachers have appropriate training to support YC students.

**YC’s and Families**

The findings suggest that YCs and their families have a role in ensuring YCs are identified and supported within schools. Parents and their child must cooperate with an educator trying to identify and understand the reason the student needs support.

**Educator Recommendations**

In order for a YC and their family to feel comfortable sharing caregiving situations with school staff, they must feel they will be accepted by school staff without judgement. The recommendations to follow might assist in creating an inclusive climate, a necessary component of YC identification. Further, these recommendations could easily be implemented in schools as many were generated on the basis of systems already in place.

**Raising Awareness**

**Raise Awareness Through YC Assemblies.** Educators reported school assemblies were effective in raising awareness of other stigmatized topics (i.e., autism) as well as young caregiving. Assemblies would not only educate school staff on the role but would also educate the students.
**Build YC Awareness into the Curriculum.** Raising awareness can also be achieved within classroom discussions. Educators could utilize in-class activities that allow students to share something that is important to them. These types of activities could create a safe space for students to actively discuss their unique caregiving roles and for fellow classmates to expand their awareness and understanding of YCs.

**Discussions of, and Files for, At-Risk Students Should Include YCs**

Once awareness is raised among school staff, YCs should be included in all in-school team discussions about, and files for, at-risk students. As both teachers and principals favoured a team approach, schoolwide discussion will influence awareness of young caregiving and ensure identification and support. Furthermore, as part of the teacher’s role in a team approach, student files must be reviewed to increase the likelihood of becoming aware of young caregiving situations and understanding student needs.

**Formalized Training for all Educators**

Although it was clear that implementing procedures to ensure YC awareness, identification, and support was possible, educators need guidance on how to effectively achieve this. The findings suggest that training and/or education of young caregiving needs to be formalized for all educators. This could be done through professional development and initial teacher training. Training should include reasons for caring, prevalence, tasks involved in caring, impacts on YCs’ development, identification, and how to support a YC.

**School Policy**

At a policy level, educators need to have a clearly mandated role in identifying and supporting YCs. Educators in this study undertook these roles by choice, therefore, not all
teachers will take on this role. Further, policies should ensure YC support is available in schools (e.g., CYWs, EAs, support programs).

**YC Programs/Advocacy Groups**

YC programs and/or advocacy groups are a resource to build awareness, educate students and staff, and support YCs within the schools. YC programs/advocacy groups could participate in assemblies and/or offer teacher training regarding young caregiving. Finally, YC programs could be offered within the school to ensure YCs can access the support they might not otherwise be able to access due to their caregiving responsibilities.

**Limitations**

Despite the importance of the study, there were a few limitations. Typical of qualitative design, the study had a small sample size of only 11 participants from one area of Southern Ontario. This was an exploratory study of Ontario educators’ perspectives regarding YC awareness, identification, and support and, therefore, was not meant to generalize to the wider population of educators. Future research should consider examining this topic on a larger scale to determine if these findings were unique to this geographical area and to those educators interviewed.

Demographic differences (i.e., age, experience, grade/subject) were not considered in the analysis. Future research could consider the effect these demographic differences might have on educator perspective. Similarly, the willingness to participate in this study without reward might speak to the personality of the participant. Therefore, a “moral obligation” to identify and support YCs might be the same reason they were interested in taking part in the study. It is possible that some teachers would not take on the role to identify or support YCs, especially if it was not perceived to be mandated. Future research should consider this limitation.
Finally, according to the Ontario government's published plans and annual reports, the Ministry of Education changed its vision for education. Many new initiatives from the new 2019-2020 vision were to be implemented after the completion of data collection; therefore, for the purpose of this paper, *Achieving Excellence* was used to outline an educator’s mandate. Future research should consider the new vision, *Education that Works for You*, when reviewing the Ontario teacher mandate (Ontario, 2018; Ontario, 2019).
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### Appendix A: Abbreviation/Acronym Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation/Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Children’s Aid Society</td>
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<tr>
<td>CYW</td>
<td>Child and Youth Worker</td>
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<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>Educational Assistant</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
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<tr>
<td>FACS</td>
<td>Family and Children’s Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>OME</td>
<td>Ontario Ministry of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSR</td>
<td>Ontario Student Record</td>
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<tr>
<td>YC</td>
<td>Young Carer or Young Caregiver</td>
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Appendix B: Certificate of Ethics Clearance

Brock University
Research Ethics Office
Tel: 905-688-5550 ext. 3035
Email: reb@brocku.ca

Social Science Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Ethics Clearance for Human Participant Research

DATE: 3/8/2019

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CHALMERS, Heather - Child and Youth Studies

FILE: 18-211 - CHALMERS

TYPE: Masters Thesis/Project

STUDENT: Nicole Mansell

SUPERVISOR: Heather Chalmers

TITLE: Educational Professionals Awareness, Identification, and Support of Young Caregiving

ETHICS CLEARANCE GRANTED

Type of Clearance: NEW

Expiry Date: 3/1/2020

The Brock University Social Science Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above named research proposal and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University's ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement. Clearance granted from 3/8/2019 to 3/1/2020.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored by, at a minimum, an annual report. Should your project extend beyond the expiry date, you are required to submit a Renewal form before 3/1/2020. Continued clearance is contingent on timely submission of reports.

To comply with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, you must also submit a final report upon completion of your project. All report forms can be found on the Research Ethics web page at http://www.brocku.ca/research/policies-and-forms/research-forms.

In addition, throughout your research, you must report promptly to the REB:

a) Changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;

b) All adverse and/or unanticipated experiences or events that may have real or potential unfavourable implications for participants;

c) New information that may adversely affect the safety of the participants or the conduct of the study;

d) Any changes in your source of funding or new funding to a previously unfunded project.

We wish you success with your research.

Approved:

Lynn Dempsey, Chair
Social Science Research Ethics Board

Robert Steinbauer, Chair
Social Science Research Ethics Board

Note: Brock University is accountable for the research carried out in its own jurisdiction or under its auspices and may refuse certain research even though the REB has found it ethically acceptable.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of research at that site.
CALLING ALL EDUCATORS

Looking for Elementary or Secondary school Teachers and Principals.

Help contribute to a research project voicing your idea of what it means to be a teacher or principal.

If interested, CONTACT ME
Nicole Mansell
Brock University
Student Researcher
chalmerslab@brocku.ca
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Heather Chalmers

We want to know what your role is in identifying and supporting students that have exceptional responsibilities at home!

All interviews are expected to take 90 minutes and can be done within a confidential space convenient for you.

This study has been reviewed by and received clearance from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at Brock University (File # 18-211). For answers to questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035 or reb@brocku.ca.
Appendix D: Teacher Interview Questions

To begin, I’d like to get to know you a bit and ask you a few questions about your teaching career to date.

1. What school board do work for? (e.g., public, catholic, private)

2. What course of post-secondary education did you take?
   a. What year did you graduate with your teaching degree?
   b. What were your teachables? (e.g., primary junior)

3. How many years have you been teaching?

4. What grade(s) or subject(s) have you taught?

5. Have you taken any further courses or qualifications since completing your degree?
   a. (Probe): Teacher training or workshops?
   b. (Probe): If yes, what kind of content was discussed?
   c. (Probe): What prompted you to take these courses/training?

6. Can you describe to me how you see your role as a teacher?
   a. (Probe): With respect to students?
   b. (Probe): With respect to parents (keeping them informed, identifying challenges, keeping involved)?
   c. (Probe): In relation to the school board, other teachers, your principal?

Awareness

I want to begin by asking you a few questions about your role in being aware of factors that might affect your students.

1. Can you tell me about the strategies you use to identify when a student is struggling?
a. (Probes): Behavioural cues, academics (e.g., absenteeism, fatigue, lateness, under-achievement, or behavioural difficulties).

2. In what ways might you know if one of your students might be susceptible to struggling?
   a. (Probe): Do you talk to other teachers about specific students?
   b. (Probe): What kind, if any, of information about students do you get before they enter your classroom?

3. Have you heard the term “young carer”?
   a. (Probe: if participant says yes): what does the term mean to you?
      i. How did you learn about the term?
   b. (Probe: if participant says no): “Young carer” (YC) is a term used to describe children or youth under the age of 25 who take on caregiving roles to support a family member with a disability, illness, addiction, or language barrier. Their responsibilities might include domestic tasks, household management, personal/emotional care, sibling care, financial care and/or language interpreting. These at home responsibilities differ from regular, expected chores as it is often a vital role that they must withhold for successful family functioning. For instance, a child might not do their chore of laundry and it would get done later that day by someone else in the family. However, if a YC does not do this chore, it does not get done and will not get done until they find the time. Their responsibilities in the home become necessary for a family’s survival.
4. Have you ever encountered a student(s) in your years of teaching that might fit this description?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“YES”</th>
<th>“NO”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Can you tell me more about this interaction?</td>
<td>a. Can you recall a student who had a sibling or parent with a disability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Now thinking back to this student, were there any indicators to suggest that they were struggling and perhaps in a caregiving role?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Why might it be important for teachers to be aware of the YC role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If participant was already aware:</th>
<th>If participant is just learning of YCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. In what ways has your knowledge of YCs changed the way you approach your students?</td>
<td>a. How might this awareness of YCs change the way you approach students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Can you describe to me how you would respond to a child telling you they have this additional role in their home?

   a. (Probe): If they are struggling…

   b. (Probe): If they are not struggling…
Identification

We will now consider your role in the identification of a YC. Questions will focus both on YCs and students that might struggle with the same struggles as a student that is a YC.

1. Is it part of your role as a teacher to identify changes in individual student behaviour, such as socially, academically, or behaviourally?
   a. (Probe): Would you recognize this only when disruptive to the class or also when disruptive to a single child’s success?
   b. (Probe if not): Is it anyone’s role in the school (principal, counsellor)?

2. In what ways do you make your classroom inclusive to various diversities?
   a. (Probe): Are diversities such as disability or illness respected by the students in your classroom?

3. Can you tell me about a time when a student was stigmatized or bullied for mental illness, addiction, or disability?
   a. (Probe if not): In what ways might this be occurring without your awareness?

4. Why would it be important to identify the reason a student is being bullied?

5. Would you say that is within your role as an educator to identify a student as a young carer?

6. Why might it be beneficial to identify a child that fits the description of a young carer?

7. What might it mean to a young carer if you approach them about their role and they do not want you knowing?
Support

Finally, we will consider your role in supporting students that are YCs. Considering the possibility of stigma, bullying, and young caring, think about the following questions in regard to support.

1. In what ways are you available to your students?
   a. (Probe): Emotionally, academically, etc.
   b. (Probe): Does this support extend outside of the student’s academic success?

2. What kind of resources are available to students within your school outside of the classroom?

3. We have talked a bit about supporting but I want to explore this a bit more; what role would you say you have in supporting YCs?

4. For what reasons, if any, should a YC receive extra support within the school?
   a. (Probe): What if an assignment or class was missed because they had to stay home to care for their sibling or parent at home?
   b. (Probe): What if they did not have time to complete the assignment because of their caring responsibilities?

5. What reasons can you think of for why they shouldn’t receive extra support?

6. How might it help you in supporting a child if you knew about their role?

7. How would you know if the child wanted this support?

8. Hypothetically, if supporting the child is your role, what might you do?

9. If the child did not want to be identified as a YC, how might you support them?
a. (Probe): Are there ways to support the YC without identifying them? For example, if you know they might have this role but never speak to the child about this.

10. How does the Ontario Ministry of Education support you in teacher training?

11. Would you be interested in a training session on YCs that might educate you further on supporting students with these exceptional roles at home?

Is there anything that you’d like to add about your role as a teacher and supporting students that we hadn’t had the chance to talk about?
Appendix E: Principal Interview Questions

To begin, I’d like to get to know you a bit and ask you a few questions about your teaching career to date.

1. What school board do you work for (public, catholic, etc.)?

2. What course of post-secondary education did you take?
   a. What year did you graduate with your teaching degree?
   b. What were your teachables and/or training? (e.g., primary junior)

3. How many years were you a classroom teacher?

4. What grade(s) or subject(s) did you teach?

5. How many years have you been a principal?

6. Did you go back to school between teaching and becoming a principal?

7. Have you taken any further courses or qualifications since becoming a principal?
   a. (Probe): Training or workshops?
   b. (Probe): If yes, what kind of content was discussed?
   c. (Probe): What prompted you to take these courses/training?

8. Can you describe to me how you see your role as a principal?
   a. (Probe): With respect to students?
   b. (Probe): With respect to parents (keeping them informed, identifying challenges, keeping involved)?
   c. (Probe): In relation to the school board or your teachers?

Awareness

I want to begin by asking you a few questions about your role in being aware of factors that might affect the students at your school.
1. In what situations are you able to interact with the students?
   a. (Probe): If the child is never sent to the office, how might you make connections with the student?

2. Can you tell me about the strategies you use to identify when a student is struggling?
   a. (Probes): Behavioural cues, academics (e.g., absenteeism, fatigue, lateness, under-achievement, or behavioural difficulties).

3. Have you heard the term “young carer”?
   a. (Probe: if participant says yes): what does the term mean to you?
      i. How did you learn about this term?
   b. (Probe: if participant says no): “Young carer” (YC) is a term used to describe children or youth under the age of 25 who take on caregiving roles to support a family member with a disability, illness, addiction, or language barrier. Their responsibilities might include domestic tasks, household management, personal/emotional care, sibling care, financial care and/or language interpreting. These at home responsibilities differ from regular, expected chores as it is often a vital role that they must withhold for successful family functioning. For instance, a child might not do their chore of laundry and it would get done later that day by someone else in the family. However, if a YC does not do this chore, it does not get done and will not get done until they find the time. Their responsibilities in the home become necessary for a family’s survival.
4. Have you ever encountered a student(s) in your years teaching, or as a principal, that might fit this description?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“YES”</th>
<th>“NO”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Can you tell me more about this interaction?</td>
<td>a. Can you recall a student who had a sibling or parent with a disability?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Now thinking back to this student, were there any indicators to suggest that they were struggling and perhaps in a caregiving role?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Why might it be important for principals to be aware of the YC role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If participant was already aware</th>
<th>If participant is just learning of YCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. In what ways has your knowledge of YCs changed the way you approach your students?</td>
<td>a. How might this awareness of YCs change the way you approach students?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Can you describe to me how you would respond to a child that tells you they have this additional role at home?

   a. (Probe): If they are struggling…

   b. (Probe): If they are not struggling…
Identification

We will now consider your role in the identification of a YC. Questions will focus both on YCs and students that might struggle with the same struggles as a student that is a YC.

1. Is it part of your role as a principal to identify changes in individual student behaviour, such as socially, academically, or behaviourally?
   a. (Probe if not): Is it anyone’s role in the school (teacher, counsellor)?

2. In what ways do you make your school inclusive to various diversities?
   a. (Probe): Are diversities such as disability or illness respected by the students in your school?
   b. (Probe): Should classrooms, school hallways, libraries, and other meeting places be inclusive to diversity?

3. Can you tell me about a time when a student was stigmatized or bullied for mental illness, addiction, or disability?
   a. (Probe if not): In what ways might this be occurring without your awareness?

4. Why would it be important to identify the reason a student is being bullied?

Shifting from broad student issues back to young carers…

5. Would you say that is within your role as a principal to identify a student as a young carer?

6. Why might it be beneficial to identify a child that fits the description of a young carer?

7. What might it mean to a young carer if you approach them about their role and they do not want you knowing?
Support

Finally, we will consider your role in supporting students that are YCs. Considering the possibility of stigma, bullying, and young caring, think about the following questions in regard to support.

12. In what ways, if any, are you available to support students?
   a. (Probe): emotionally, academically, etc.
   b. (Probe): Does this support extend outside of the student’s academic success?

13. What kind of resources are available to students within your school outside of the classroom?

14. We have talked a bit about supporting already but I want to explore this a bit more; what role would you say you have in supporting YCs?

15. For what reasons, if any, should a YC receive extra support within the school?
   a. (Probe): What if an assignment or class was missed because they had to stay home to care for their sibling or parent at home?
   b. (Probe): What if they did not have time to complete the assignment because of their caring responsibilities?

16. What reasons can you think of for why they shouldn’t receive extra support?

17. How might it help you in supporting a child if you knew about their role?

18. How would you know if the child wanted this support?

19. Hypothetically, if supporting the child is your role, what might you do?

20. If the child did not want to be identified as a YC, how might you support them?
a. (Probe): Are there ways to support the YC without identifying them? For example, if you know they might have this role but never speak to the child about this.

21. How does the Ontario Ministry of Education support your professional development?

22. Would you be interested in a training session on YCs that might educate you further on supporting students with these exceptional roles at home?

Is there anything that you’d like to add about your role as a teacher and supporting students that we hadn’t had the chance to talk about?
Appendix F: Participant Demographics

**Teacher Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Year Graduated</th>
<th># of Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P.1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>~2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>~1991</td>
<td>~29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>~2007</td>
<td>~10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>~38 (now retired and taking supply work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.11</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Principal Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Year Graduated</th>
<th># of Years Teaching</th>
<th>Grades Taught</th>
<th># of years as principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P.7</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>~1994</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Mostly Gr. 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>K – Gr. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>K – Gr. 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G: Summary of Awareness Findings

Teacher Awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YC Awareness</th>
<th>Factors Assisting YC Awareness</th>
<th>Barriers in YC Awareness</th>
<th>Importance of Awareness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- One quarter (2/8) of teachers were aware of young carer term</td>
<td>- Teacher experience increased the likelihood of recognizing student issues (e.g., experienced teachers were better able to ‘scan’ a classroom for behavioural changes, or were more familiar with this family dynamic)</td>
<td>- Narrow definition of caregiving was not inclusive of all caregiving circumstances or roles (e.g., assuming role has to be extreme)</td>
<td>- Guides teachers’ approach to student issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All (8/8) teachers were aware a caregiver of role among children and youth</td>
<td>- Teachers who have children of their own can compare behaviours</td>
<td>- Opinion of the role (e.g., age inappropriate) which might influence YC secrecy</td>
<td>- Decreases potential stigmatization of YC by a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teachers’ understanding of YC role (e.g., how YC roles differ from regular chores)</td>
<td>- Visibility of the role (e.g., might not recognize YC who only cares at home)</td>
<td>- Helps teachers understand why academics might be affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- YC secrecy (hiding their role from educators and friends)</td>
<td>- Helps teachers provide support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Not enough time spent with students because of secondary school scheduling or supply teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Principal Awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YC Awareness</th>
<th>Factors Assisting YC Awareness</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - One third (1/3) of principals were aware of young carer term | - Multiple strategies for recognizing student issues  
- Indicators (i.e., attendance, academic, behavioural)  
- Student data  
- Other staff (i.e., teachers, in-school team; alerting principal of behavioural concerns or family circumstances)  
- Parents disclosing the caregiving role  
- Overall understanding of the YC role (e.g., how YCs differ from youth not in a formal caregiving role) | - Narrow definition of caregiving was not inclusive of all caregiving circumstances or roles (e.g., assuming oldest sibling will be the YC)  
- Opinion of the role (e.g., assuming childhood innocence) which might influence YC secrecy  
- Difficult to recognize YC who does not struggle (because there is no indicator/warning sign)  
- Uneducated/inexperienced staff who are unable to support principals in recognizing student issues  
- Number of students under principal’s supervision (difficult to see all student issues) | - Provides clarity/explanation for student issue  
- Guides principal approach to student issues  
- Helps the principal ensure students succeed within school (i.e., academically, socially)  
- Helps the principal lessen student’s stress by providing accommodations |
### Appendix H: Summary of Identification Findings

#### Teacher Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role to Identify</th>
<th>Strategies to Identify</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Strategies to Overcome Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unclear mandate (i.e., mandated, natural moral response, or unmandated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Direct</td>
<td>- Important for YCs who do not show academic struggle (e.g., YC might not be struggling academically but in need of financial or emotional support)</td>
<td>- Teachers worry they might cross boundaries in the student-teacher relationship</td>
<td>- Ensure student privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Ask the student questions</td>
<td>- Provides YC with sense of relief</td>
<td>- Ensure classroom inclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The family shares role voluntarily</td>
<td>- Provides YC with sense of security</td>
<td>- Encourage self-identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Indirect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Observe student behaviour and/or student writing</td>
<td>- Unwanted identification could cause the YC feelings of sadness, embarrassment, betrayal, fear, and internalization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Take notes/refer to notes on student (i.e., in the OSR)</td>
<td>- Teachers avoided the OSR in order to eliminate student bias (which may result in missing notes regarding young caregiving)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Utilize other staff to assist in the identification process</td>
<td>- Large classroom size and insufficient support (e.g. CYWs) made it difficult to find time to identify student issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Principal Identification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role to Identify</th>
<th>Strategies to Identify</th>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Strategies to Overcome Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unclear (e.g., principals felt it was their role but followed this with a clarification that teachers are primary identifiers or that it is not a specific job)</td>
<td>- Ask questions</td>
<td>- Helps principals ensure YC succeeds academically and socially</td>
<td>- Unwanted identification could cause YC feelings of shame or fear</td>
<td>- Build relationships with student and parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teachers are frontline workers and essential for identification</td>
<td>- Helps principals ensure support for YCs</td>
<td>- Identification could break the trust between student and principal</td>
<td>- Encourage self-identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Team-approach (relying on all staff to ensure identification)</td>
<td>- Assists educators’ approach to student issues</td>
<td>- YC secrecy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Provides YC with sense of relief</td>
<td>- Parents encouraging secrecy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix I: Summary of Support Findings

### Teacher Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Support Available</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unclear (i.e., mandated, support extends past academic fulfillment, support should be mandated at a higher level, support was out of teachers’ expertise, not mandated)</td>
<td>- Academic (e.g., teacher leniency/sensitivity, ensure students understood lesson, accommodations)</td>
<td>- Outside of teachers’ capabilities (e.g., cannot support YC outside of the school, cannot eliminate YC’s stress at home)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Curriculum-based (e.g., teach YCs practical skills within lessons)</td>
<td>- Teacher might struggle to support while ensuring the student is still learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Emotional (e.g., someone to talk to, assist YC identify emotions, caring for student, counselling)</td>
<td>- Classroom size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- After-hours (e.g., help after class/outside of the school)</td>
<td>- Insufficient support within the school (i.e., EAs, CYWs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Donations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Schoolwide support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Financial (e.g., school uniform, food, clothing, Christmas packages, exempts for school trips)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Future planning (e.g., career/post-secondary education planning)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Community programs (e.g., mental health services, Big Brother Big Sister, YMCA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Principal Support**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Support Available</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Unclear (all principals perceived they had a role to support YCs, but it was unclear if this was due to mandate)</td>
<td>- Academic (e.g., accommodations)</td>
<td>- Unaware of/unidentified YC (e.g., hard to support what you do not know about)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Emotional (e.g., someone to talk to, building a relationship)</td>
<td>- Reporting requirements (making it difficult to support without including CAS/FACS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Financial (e.g., basic necessities, extracurriculars)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- For family (e.g., ensuring support within the home as well as at school, eliminating the caregiving role)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Creating a safe space for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Team approach to ensure school-wide support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>